


FAIRFAX COUNTY POLICE DEPARTMENT  GENERAL ORDER	SUBJECT: MEDIA RELATIONS BUREAU		NUMBER: 401
	EFFECTIVE DATE: December 10, 2018	REVIEW: December 2022	
	TOPIC: PURPOSE AND POLICY		
RESPONSIBLE ENTITY: MEDIA RELATIONS BUREAU			
ACCREDITATION STANDARDS	CALEA: 54.1.1, 82.1.7	<input type="checkbox"/> New Directive <input type="checkbox"/> Replaces: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Revised	
	VLEPSC: ADM.22.01		


I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this General Order is to establish the policies of the Media Relations Bureau (MRB).

II. POLICY


It is the policy of the Fairfax County Police Department to embrace openness and transparency by keeping the community informed about crimes, traffic, public safety, and public interest events. The MRB will be responsible for ensuring the timely release of information, records and documents (in accordance with [General Order 402, Release of Information, Records and Documents](#)) while embracing a culture of maximum disclosure with minimum delay. The MRB is committed to keeping the community informed.

News and social media serve as important conduits of information to the public. Consistent with our policy of embracing openness and transparency, the Department will make information on crimes and other incidents generally available to the public unless the information may jeopardize the investigation and/or tactics, is legally privileged or prohibited by state or federal law, would violate the constitutional rights of those involved, or is otherwise specifically prohibited in this or any other Departmental directive.

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	EFFECTIVE DATE: December 10, 2018	REVIEW: December 2022	
	TOPIC: DEFINITIONS		
RESPONSIBLE ENTITY: MEDIA RELATIONS BUREAU			
ACCREDITATION STANDARDS	CALEA: 54.1.1, 82.1.7	<input type="checkbox"/> New Directive <input type="checkbox"/> Replaces: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Revised	
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III. DEFINITIONS

- A. Duty Officer: The Duty Officer (DO) has full operational command authority for the Police Department.
- B. Information: Specific content contained within Fairfax County Police Department's records and documents, subject to public release.
- C. Information Releasing Authority: Personnel authorized by the Chief of Police to release official departmental information to the community without prior approval. The Director of the Media Relations Bureau, Chief of Police or their designees, are the primary information releasing authorities.
- D. MPSTOC: The McConnell Public Safety and Transportation Operations Center
- E. Media Relations Bureau: (MRB) The entity primarily responsible for the release of information to the general public via news conferences, social media platforms, and news releases.
- F. Personnel Information: Internal or otherwise private information regarding an employee of the Fairfax County Police Department, such as home address, telephone number, disciplinary actions, performance, age, date of birth, and other information not releasable under Department regulations or established law.
- G. Police-Affiliated Critical Incident (PACI): Any sudden, powerful and often traumatic event in which a person suffers a serious injury or death during their contact with an officer and the officer's actions may be subject to criminal liability or a criminal investigation. This can include, but is not limited to, the deployment of deadly force, less-lethal force, Precision Immobilization

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Technique, vehicle pursuits, cruiser crashes, in-custody deaths or any other intentional or unintentional action that results in serious injury or death of a person.


- H. Public Information Officer (PIO): Any authorized MRB employee representing the Chief of Police for public information releases.
- I. Police Liaison Commander: The Police Liaison Commander (PLC) provides operational oversight, direction, and technical expertise to the dispatching of emergency and non-emergency incidents.
- J. Public Interest Event: Any event the public might have an interest in ranging from human interest stories to a Police-Affiliated Critical Incident (PACI).
- K. Records and Documents: All writings and recordings that consist of letters, words or numbers, or their equivalent, set down by handwriting, typewriting, printing, photostatting, photography, magnetic impulse, optical or magneto-optical form, mechanical or electronic recording or other form of data compilation, however stored, and regardless of physical form or characteristics, prepared or owned by, or in the possession of the Fairfax County Police Department or its officers, employees or agents in the transaction of public business. Records that are not prepared for or used in the transaction of public business are not public records.
- L. Recording: The actual images, audio, and/or video of events that have been captured on a recording device
- M. Social Media: Websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking.
- N. Virginia Freedom of Information Act: The Virginia state code sections found at [Va. Code Ann. § 2.2-3700](#), *et seq*, that governs the rights of citizens of the Commonwealth of Virginia, and the representatives of media that circulate or broadcast into the Commonwealth, the right to access public records and documents in the custody of the Fairfax County Police Department or its officers and employees, unless those records or documents are exempt from mandatory disclosure.

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	TOPIC: RESPONSIBILITIES		
RESPONSIBLE ENTITY: MEDIA RELATIONS BUREAU			
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IV. RESPONSIBILITIES

A. The MRB is responsible for:

1. Informing the public on a variety of public interests events which can include human interest stories, criminal events, crashes, traffic, statistics, department news (like accreditation, awards, etc.), use-of-force incidents, officer-involved shootings, and PACI.
2. Processing all Virginia Freedom of Information Act requests (see [General Order 402](#), Release of Information).
3. Publically releasing any records and documents to aid in informing the public.
4. Maintaining the Department's social media accounts which enables the Department to provide timely information on multiple platforms and receive feedback for improvement of police services, programs, policies and practices.
5. Coordinating news conferences as well as facilitating access to Department personnel for interviews. Additionally, the MRB staff will provide guidance to Department personnel and those requesting an interview regarding interview guidelines that conform to Department policy.
6. Internal communication such as the Daily News Links.
7. Being the primary point of contact for media outlets.

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	TOPIC: PROCEDURES		
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V. PROCEDURES

- A. Authority to publicly release official, departmental information, records and documents shall be limited to the information releasing authorities.
- B. The Director of the MRB, or their designee, must approve any request for a Departmental employee to be interviewed by any media outlet.
- C. At the scene of police activity where the Department has primary jurisdiction, only an information releasing authority or a supplemental public information officer may provide incident information (in accordance with General Order 402, Release of Information) regarding the police activity.

When an incident involves another County, City/Town, State, or Federal Agency, the MRB will work to coordinate the release of any information with the agency or the Fairfax County Director of Public Affairs, as appropriate.

- D. When the Fairfax County Police Department has primary jurisdiction, it shall retain responsibility for release of all police related information, unless otherwise directed by the Chief of Police.
- E. In all death investigations, employees of the Department will ensure that the next of kin has been notified pursuant to [FCPD SOP 16-052](#) and the release of any information about the death or the incident (to include the release of the decedent's name) will be in accordance with [General Order 402](#), Release of Information.

In instances where the decedent victim of any crime is a minor, written consent is statutorily required under [Virginia State Code § 19.2-11.2](#), before any information is publicly disclosed that directly or indirectly discloses or identifies the decedent minor victim unless the information released is of the

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site of the crime, required by law, necessary for law enforcement purposes, or permitted by court order.

In instances where public disclosure of a decedent minor victim's identity is sought, either by the next of kin, or the Police Department, the Media Relations Bureau will first make certain that an Authorization for Public Release of Information Form has been signed by the next of kin. The signed form shall be made part of the criminal case file.

F. In the instances when the Department investigates a deadly force deployment, in-custody death, or any other criminal matters involving law enforcement personnel from another agency, the Department will coordinate with the chief law enforcement officer of the affected agency for press releases in accordance with [General Order 402](#), Release of Information. MRB will not be responsible for releasing:

1. Any names (unless the individual was arrested);
2. Any video and/or audio recordings relating to the incident;
3. The status of any internal administrative investigations; and
4. Any information regarding personnel actions relating to the case.


The public will be informed that the Department's only role in these matters is to conduct a complete, thorough, and comprehensive criminal investigation. The completed criminal investigation will be presented to the Office of the Commonwealth's Attorney in the jurisdiction where the deadly force deployment, in-custody death, or other criminal matter occurred. Exceptions to this are at the discretion of the Chief of Police or their designee.

G. It is important to work cooperatively to ensure MRB is prepared for inquiries on any given police matter. All efforts will be made to ensure investigative integrity and respect to victims.

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	TOPIC: RECORDING ACCESS		
RESPONSIBLE ENTITY: MEDIA RELATIONS BUREAU			
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VI. RECORDING ACCESS


- A. Members of the press and the general public have the same rights in any area in the public domain. No individual is required to have or display “press credentials” in order to exercise their right to observe, photograph or record police activity in an area accessible to, or within view of, the general public.
- B. All employees of this department shall extend every courtesy to any individual recording police activity, including an incident scene, a crash scene, etc. Therefore, all employees shall adhere to [General Order 603.1, Individuals Recording Police Activity](#).
- C. Officers may offer a designated staging area for those recording police activity that does not interfere with police operations or affect the general flow of traffic, if applicable.
- D. Precautions should be taken to preserve the crime scene and protect the integrity of the criminal investigation. For example, evidence may be covered or removed; witnesses removed from the scene; or partitions used to protect a crime scene per General Order 603.1, Individuals Recording Police Activity.
- E. For safety reasons, individuals recording police activity and any associated equipment (including vehicles) should not be allowed in a hot or warm zone.
- F. For scenes where the Department assumes primary jurisdiction, such as a homicide, the Department may impose more stringent restrictions (expand crime scene to protect its integrity) for recording access than was previous implemented.
- G. No individual in police custody shall be permitted to be interviewed by an individual outside law enforcement, except for as provided by law.

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	TOPIC: DUTY OFFICER AND POLICE LIAISON COMMANDER RESPONSIBILITIES		
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VII. DUTY OFFICER AND POLICE LIAISON COMMANDER RESPONSIBILITIES

- A. The Police Liaison Commander (PLC) may provide information on traffic conditions to any individual inquiring through the MPSTOC.

- B. In the instances where individuals call the PLC wanting information on in-progress police activity, the PLC will obtain the individual's contact information, a brief synopsis of the information requested and will then relay this to the on-call MRB personnel. The MRB will then have the discretion as to immediately return the phone call or wait until normal business hours.

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	TOPIC: CALL-OUT PROCEDURES		
RESPONSIBLE ENTITY: MEDIA RELATIONS BUREAU			
ACCREDITATION STANDARDS	CALEA: 54.1.1, 82.1.7	<input type="checkbox"/> New Directive <input type="checkbox"/> Replaces: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Revised	
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VIII. CALL-OUT PROCEDURES


- A. Afterhours and on weekends, a PIO and a MRB supervisor are always on call for emergencies and for significant breaking news events.

The following are some examples that may require a PIO call-out:

- Homicide
- Unusual vehicle crash
- Officer-involved shooting (OIS)
- Shootings with life threatening injuries and/or public safety threat
- Barricade
- Sex assaults involving a stranger
- Violent crimes
- Multiple media inquiries of breaking news or public threat
- As directed by an MRB Commander or Duty Officer

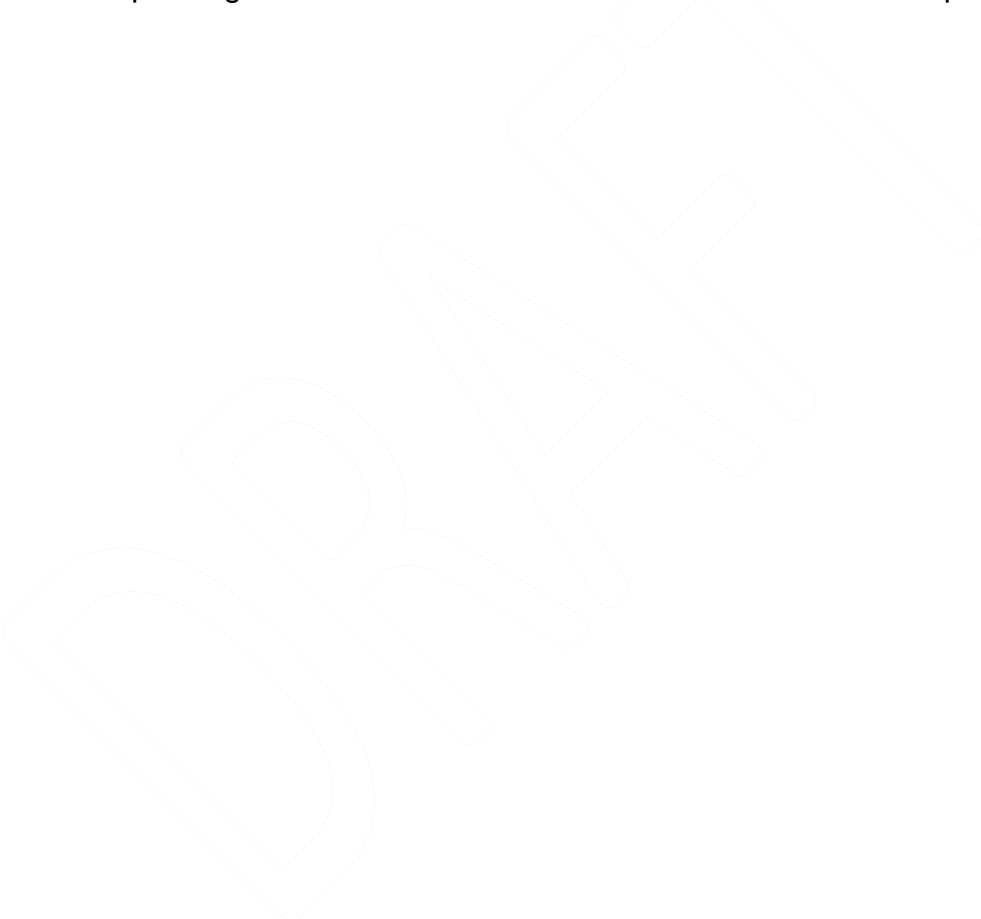
The on-call PIO member will generally not respond to non-fatal car crashes, routine arrests, crimes not resulting in death or critical injury or cases being investigated by other agencies with the Department's assistance.


An on-call PIO, Supplemental PIO or the MRB Commander will gather pertinent information related to active news worthy events such as details of the event, photos and what information may be released to the public without jeopardizing a police investigation or violating the law. This information must be collected expeditiously and validated by the investigative entity's commander or the Duty Officer. When information has been vetted, it shall be sent to the public via the appropriate social media platforms in accordance with [General Order 402](#), Release of Information.

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The on-call PIO should be contacted for the instances described above. As on-call personnel change on a weekly basis, news media should be directed to call the after-hours media line at 703-877-3702 or MPSTOC at 703-691-2131 and speak with the PLC or the MPSTOC Bridge supervisor.

In instances where the PLC receives inquiries from traditional media outlets, the PLC is encouraged to speak broadly and not provide specific facts about an on-going incident. Any inquiries for more detailed incident information or requesting interviews shall be forwarded to the on-call MRB personnel.



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	TOPIC: LEGAL REFERENCES		
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IX. LEGAL REFERENCES

- A. [Va. Code Ann. § 2.2-3704](#) - Public records to be open to inspection; procedure for requesting records and responding to request; charges; transfer of records for storage
- B. [Va. Code Ann. § 2.2-3705.1](#) - Exclusions to application of chapter; exclusions of general application to public bodies
- C. [Va. Code Ann. § 2.2-3706](#) - Disclosure of criminal records; limitations
- D. [Va. Code Ann. § 19.2-389](#) - Dissemination of criminal history record information
- E. [Va. Code Ann. § 19.2-11.2](#) – Crime victim’s right to nondisclosure of certain information; exceptions; testimonial privilege
- F. [Code of the County of Fairfax 82-8-7](#) - Use of accident reports made by investigating officers

General Order 401 becomes effective on December 10, 2018 and rescinds all previous rules and regulations pertaining to the subjects.

ISSUED BY:



 Chief of Police

APPROVED BY:



 County Executive