PURPOSE: The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines for release and dissemination of public information to the general public and news media.

POLICY: The Police Department will cooperate fully and impartially with authorized news media representatives in their efforts to gather factual, public information pertaining to the activities of the Department. It is also the legal duty of the Police Department not to disclose certain information when disclosure would be harmful to the private interests of an individual and would not serve a legitimate public interest.

2.39.01 DEFINITIONS

Public Information Officer (PIO): Serves as a central source of Police Department information that may be released to the news media and the community.

Public Information: The information that may be of interest to the general public regarding policy, procedures or events involving the Police Department; or, other newsworthy information that is not legally protected, does not unduly interfere with the mission of the Police Department, infringe upon the rights of a defendant or compromise the legitimate safety and privacy interests of officers, victims, witness, and others.

News Media Representative: An individual who is directly employed by an agency of the electronic or print media such as radio, television and newspapers. Freelance workers in this field are regarded as other members of the general public unless otherwise designated by the Chief of Police.

2.39.02 MEDIA RELATIONS OFFICE (Also known as the Public Information Office)

I. Duties of the Public Information Officer (PIO).

a. Assist media personnel in covering news stories, at scenes of incidents, and as needed.
b. Prepare and distribute press releases.
c. Arrange and assist at news conferences and Police Department special events.
d. Coordinate and authorize the release of information about victims, witnesses and suspects.
e. Assist in crisis situations and critical events, as needed.
f. Collect and catalog news stories featuring the Police Department.
g. Collect and catalog press releases.
h. Keep an Outlook calendar-up-to date regarding Departmental events.
i. Coordinate and write press releases regarding Police Department incidents and activities.
j. Provide on-air interviews with television, radio and social media sites.

k. Serve as co-editor, contributing writer, and photographer for all Police Department publications and events, including an employee newsletter, annual report, brochures, pamphlets, etc.

l. Coordinate all Police Department graphic arts, publications and literature.

m. Monitor, respond and communicate via official Police Department social media platforms regarding all issues that affect and influence Departmental functions, image and perception.

n. Serve as the public information contact for citizens and media inquiries.

o. Complete writing assignments for corporate communications, journals, publications, magazines, and special projects as directed by the Chief of Police.

p. Actively promote and engage in marketing of the Police Department’s programs through traditional and non-traditional media outlets and forums to enhance citizen’s awareness, responsibility, and participation.

2.39.03 RELEASE OF INFORMATION

I. The PIO at an active crime or incident scene may release information of a factual nature to the media since it may, at times, aid in the investigation to have a personal interview with members of the news media.

2.39.04 NEWS MEDIA PERSONNEL AT CRIME SCENES

I. The Watch Commander or his/her designee at an active crime or incident scene may establish a news media staging area where all information will be disseminated. Once the PIO arrives, they will be responsible for the contact and control of the media at a crime scene.

2.39.05 INFORMING THE PIO OR ON DUTY SUPERVISOR

I. When warranted, the Watch Commander shall contact the PIO as soon as practical to impart necessary information for news releases after major incidents. No officer will terminate nor interrupt the investigation to comply, but will do so without undue delay.

2.39.06 CRIME INFORMATION AVAILABLE FOR PUBLICATION

I. From the initial stage of a criminal investigation until the completion of the trial or disposition without trial, Department personnel must refer all requests for information to the Administrative Services Manager, or the Public Information Officer. The information listed below may be made available for publication:

A. Information that may be released in connection with an investigation:

1. The type or nature of an event.
2. The location, date and time, injuries sustained, damages and a general description of how the incident occurred.
3. Type and quantity of property taken.
4. The identity and approximate address of an adult victim with the exception of sex crime victims, and in other cases where reprisals or intimidation may be employed.
5. Requests for aid in locating evidence, a complainant or a suspect.
6. Number of officers or people involved in an event or investigation, the length of the investigation.
7. The name of the officer in charge of a case, his supervisor and division or unit assignment (exception: the name of any undercover officer will not be released).

2.39.07 CRIME INFORMATION NOT AVAILABLE FOR PUBLICATION

I. From the initial stage of a criminal investigation until the completion of the trial or disposition without trial, Police Department personnel must refer all requests for information to the Administrative Services Manager or the Public Information Officer. The information listed below may not be made available for publication:

A. Information that may NOT be released in connection with an investigation of an event or crime, unless authorized by the Chief of Police or his designee, includes:

1. The identity of a suspect prior to arrest unless such information would aid in apprehending the suspect or serve to warn the public of potential danger.
2. The identity of any victim of a sex crime or any related information which, if divulged, could lead to the victim’s identity.
3. The identity of victims or witnesses if such disclosure would prejudice an investigation to any significant degree, or if it would place the victim or witness in personal danger.
4. The identity of any juvenile who is a suspect or defendant in a case subject to the jurisdiction of the juvenile court.
5. The identity of any critically injured or deceased person prior to notification of next of kin.
6. The results of any investigative procedure such as lineups, polygraph tests, fingerprint comparison, ballistics test or other procedures (the fact that these tests have been performed may be released without further comment).
7. Information which, if prematurely released, may interfere with the investigation or apprehension such as the nature of leads, specifically “MO,” details of the crime known only to the perpetrator and the police, or information that may cause the suspect to flee or more effectively avoid apprehension.
8. Information that may be of evidentiary value in criminal proceedings.
9. Specific cause of death unless officially determined by the medical examiner.
10. Home address or telephone number of any member of the Police Department.

2.39.08 ARREST (SUSPECT) INFORMATION AVAILABLE FOR PUBLICATION

I. After a suspect is arrested, the following information may be made available for publication without diminishing the individual’s rights to a fair trial or violation and privacy interests:

A. Information that may be released following an arrest.

1. The accused name (unless juvenile), age, address, occupation, and family status.
2. The time and place of arrest, whether pursuit or resistance was encountered.
3. The substance or text of the charge, whether by complaint indictment, or information.
4. The identity of the investigating and arresting agency or agencies, and the length of the investigations.
5. The amount of bond, and place of the suspect’s detention.
6. Circumstances immediately surrounding the arrest, including time, and place of arrest, and possession and use of weapons; however, information which contains highly embarrassing or intimate facts about a victim or a witness will not be disclosed especially if it would endanger a witness or be injurious to an informer-police officer relationship.

B. Following arrest and formal charging of a suspect, but prior to adjudication, the following types of information shall not be released:

1. Prior criminal conviction record, character or reputation of a defendant.
2. Existence or contents of a confession, admission or statement of a defendant, or his failure or unwillingness to make a statement.
3. Performance or results of any tests, or a defendant’s refusal or failure to submit to tests such as a polygraph.
4. Identity, statement or expected testimony of any witness or victim.
5. Any opinion about the guilt or innocence of a defendant or the merits of the case.
6. Any opinion or knowledge of the potential for a plea bargain or other pretrial action.

2.39.09 INFORMATION ON JUVENILE SUSPECTS

I. Records of juvenile offenders must be maintained separately from adult arrest records and may not be open for public inspection.

II. The Police Department will not release a name, photograph, video/DVD or fingerprint of an individual under the age of seventeen (17) years, unless the individual has been certified as an adult through the court system.

2.39.10 MANAGEMENT OF PHOTOGRAPHY, TELEVISION AND TAPE RECORDERS

I. In public places; photographs, television and tape recordings shall not be restricted except:

A. When danger to life or property exists.
B. When it interferes with the lawful rights of others.
C. It significantly interferes with an official function, such as, the disruption of a crime scene.
D. When it would involve the release of information, which is prohibited from disclosure by these guidelines.

II. In the public safety building; photographs, television and tape recordings shall not be restricted except:

A. The news media will be restricted and shall not enter into restricted areas for any reason during an investigation unless escorted by police personnel.
B. The accused will not be posed or paraded inside the public safety building for the news media.
C. The accused shall not be permitted to hold interviews with the news media in restricted area of the public safety building.
D. Enter into any part of the building, other than the lobby, for news media personnel will be at the direction of the Public Information Officer or a designee.