



SOCIAL MEDIA

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I. PURPOSE

The Anne Arundel County Police Department endorses the secure use of social media to enhance communication, collaboration, and information exchange; streamline processes; and foster productivity. This policy establishes the Department's position on the utility and management of social media and provides guidance on its management, administration, and oversight. This policy is not meant to address one particular form of social media, rather social media in general, as advances in technology will occur and new tools will emerge. (Also see Index Code 505)

II. POLICY

Social media provides a potentially valuable means of assisting the department and its personnel in meeting community outreach, problem-solving, investigative, crime prevention, and related objectives. This policy identifies potential uses that may be explored or expanded upon as deemed reasonable by administrative and supervisory personnel. The department also recognizes the role that these tools play in the personal lives of some department personnel. The personal use of social media can have bearing on departmental personnel in their official capacity. As such, this policy provides information of a precautionary nature as well as prohibitions on the use of social media by department personnel.

III. DEFINITIONS

A. Blog

A self-published diary or commentary on a particular topic that may allow visitors to post responses, reactions, or comments. The term is short for "Web log."

B. Page

The specific portion of a social media website where content is displayed, and managed by an individual or individuals with administrator rights.

C. Profile

Information that a user provides about himself or herself on a social networking site.

D. Social Media

A category of Internet-based resources that integrate user-generated content and user participation. This includes, but not limited to, social networking sites (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc), photo- and video-sharing sites (Flickr, Youtube, etc), wiki's (Wikipedia), blogs, and news sites.

E. Social Networks

Online platforms where users can create profiles, share information, and socialize with others using a range of technologies.

F. Speech

Expression or communication of thoughts or opinions in spoken words, in writing, by expressive conduct, symbolism, photographs, videotape, or related forms of communication.

IV. PROCEDURE

A. On-The- Job Use

1. Department-Sanctioned Presence

- a. All department social media sites or pages shall be approved by the Chief of Police.
- b. Where possible, social media pages shall clearly indicate they are maintained by the department and shall have department contact information prominently displayed.
- c. Social media content shall adhere to applicable laws, regulations, and policies, including all information technology and records management policies.
 1. Content is subject to public records laws. Relevant records retention schedules apply to social media content.
 2. Content must be managed, stored, and retrieved to comply with open records laws and e-discovery laws and policies.
- d. Where possible, social media pages should state that the opinions expressed by visitors to the page(s) do not reflect the opinions of the department.
 1. Pages shall clearly indicate that posted comments will be monitored and that the department reserves the right to remove obscenities, off-topic comments, and personal attacks.
 2. Pages shall clearly indicate that any content posted or submitted for posting is subject to public disclosure.

2. Department-Sanctioned Use

- a. Department personnel representing the department via social media outlets shall do the following:
 1. Conduct themselves at all times as representatives of the department and, accordingly, shall adhere to all department standards of conduct and observe conventionally accepted protocols and proper decorum.
 2. Identify themselves as a member of the department.
 3. Not make statements about the guilt or innocence of any suspect or arrestee, or comments concerning pending prosecutions, nor past, transmit, or otherwise disseminate confidential information, including photographs or videos, related to department training, activities, or work-related assignments without express written permission.
 4. Not conduct political activities or private business.
 5. Observe and abide by all copyright, trademark, and service mark restrictions in posting materials to electronic media.
- b. Social media is a valuable investigative tool when seeking evidence or information about:
 1. Missing Persons;
 2. Wanted Persons;
 3. Gang Participation;
 4. Crimes perpetrated online (i.e., cyberbullying, cyberstalking);
 5. Photos or videos of a crime posted by a participant or observer.

- c. Social media can be used for community outreach and engagement by:
 - 1. Providing crime prevention tips;
 - 2. Offering online-reporting opportunities;
 - 3. Sharing crime maps data;
 - 4. Soliciting tips about unsolved crimes
- d. Social media can be used to make time-sensitive notifications related to road closures, special events, weather emergencies and missing/endangered persons.

B. Personal Use

Department personnel shall abide by the following when using social media.

- 1. Department personnel are free to express themselves as private citizens on social media sites to the degree that their speech does not impair working relationships of this department for which loyalty and confidentiality are important, impede the performance of duties, impair discipline and harmony among co-workers, or negatively affect the public perception of the department.
- 2. As public employees, department personnel are cautioned that speech on- or off-duty, made pursuant to their official duties (owes its existence to the employee's professional duties and responsibilities), is not protected speech under the First Amendment and may form the basis for discipline if deemed detrimental to the department. Department personnel should assume that their speech and related activity on social media sites will reflect upon their office and this department.
- 3. Department personnel shall not post, transmit, or otherwise disseminate any information to which they have access as a result of their employment without written permission from the Chief of Police or his/her designee.
- 4. For safety and security reasons, department personnel are cautioned not to disclose their employment with this department nor shall post information pertaining to any other member of the department without their permission. As such, department personnel are cautioned not to do the following:
 - a. Display department logos, uniforms, or similar identifying items on personal web pages.
 - b. Post personal photographs or provide similar means of personal recognition that may cause them to be identified as police officer/civilian employee of this department. Officers who are, or who may reasonably be expected to work in undercover operations, shall not post any form of visual or personal identification.
- 5. When using social media, department personnel should be mindful that their speech becomes part of the worldwide electronic domain. Therefore, adherence to the department's standards of conduct is required in the personal use of social media. In particular, department personnel are prohibited from the following:
 - a. Speech containing obscene or sexually explicit language, images, or acts and statements or other form of speech that ridicule, malign, disparage, or otherwise express bias against any race, any religion, or any protected class of individuals.
 - b. Speech involving themselves or other department personnel reflecting behavior that would reasonably be considered reckless or irresponsible.
- 6. Engaging in prohibited speech noted herein, may provide grounds for undermining or impeaching an officer's testimony in criminal proceedings. Department personnel thus sanctioned are subject to discipline up to and including termination.
- 7. Department personnel may not divulge information gained by reason of their authority; make any statements, speeches, appearances, and endorsements; or publish materials that could reasonably be considered to represent the views or positions of this department without express authorization.

8. Department personnel should be aware that they may be subject to civil litigation for:
 - a. Publishing or posting false information that harms the reputation of another person, group or organization (defamation).
 - b. Publishing or posting private facts and personnel information about someone without their permission that has not been previously revealed to the public, is not of legitimate public concern, and would be offensive to a reasonable person.
 - c. Using someone else's name, likeness, or other attributes without that person's permission for an exploitative purpose.
 - d. Publishing the creative work of another, trademarks, or certain confidential business information without the permission of the owner.
9. Department personnel should be aware that privacy settings and social media sites are constantly in flux, and they should never assume that personal information posted on such sites is protected.

V. PROPONENT UNIT: Office of Professional Standards.

VI. CANCELLATION: None.