



Atlanta Police Department – Standard Operating Procedure			
	APD.SOP.3300 – Social Media and Online Conduct Effective Date: August 26th, 2025		
Chief Darin Schierbaum	Signature by: DS	Date Signed: 8/26/2025	Expires:2029

New Policy

APD Staff,

The Atlanta Police Department recognizes that employees have the right to engage in personal expression, including through social media and personal web platforms. However, this right must be balanced with the Department’s duty to preserve public trust, maintain operational security, and uphold the professionalism of its workforce.

This policy establishes clear standards for employees’ personal use of social media and online platforms, especially when such activity directly or indirectly references the Department, its personnel, or official duties. It outlines the expectations, limitations, and potential consequences associated with online conduct—on or off duty—particularly where APD affiliation is visible, implied, or perceived by the public.

The policy also provides guidance regarding the use of Department uniforms, equipment, or insignia in social media content; the boundaries of First Amendment protections as they apply to employees; and the circumstances under which the Department may intervene or impose oversight.

Ultimately, this policy aims to ensure that employees can engage in personal expression without compromising the Department’s reputation, safety, or effectiveness.

Thank you and stay informed!

Policy and Standards Section
Planning, Research, and Accreditation Unit



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1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to establish standards regarding the personal use of social media and personal web platforms by employees of the Atlanta Police Department (APD).

2. POLICY

It is the policy of the Department to acknowledge that employees have a right to maintain personal web pages or sites and to encourage employees to exercise that right to the extent possible without causing a decline in public confidence and respect for the Department or the employee as a member of the Department. As such, the APD may impose reasonable restrictions and oversight when employees' personal social media content includes direct or indirect references to the Department or its personnel.

For the purposes of this directive, the term "social media outlets" means any electronic communication (such as personal websites, social media, video platforms, and microblogging) through which participants utilize online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content through an electronic format. These formats include, but are not limited to, text, video, photographs, audio, digital documents, etc.

3. RESPONSIBILITIES

3.1 All employees will adhere to the procedures and guidelines outlined in this policy.

3.2 The Public Affairs Unit (PAU) is responsible for serving as the liaison between the Department and the public to promote positive public relations, ensuring that material and information released is accurate, and reflects a positive and professional image while effectively serving the interest of the community, coordinating publicity for special events, and maintaining files of daily news clippings and news-related audio and video tapes to include generating and posting content and comments on official department social media pages.

4. ACTION

4.1 CONSIDERATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS

4.1.1 Members of the Atlanta Police Department have a constitutional right to express their views under the First Amendment. However, any posting on social media as part of their official role, (i.e. issuing public safety messages, commenting on Department operations, or speaking in a way that represents APD), **is not protected** by the First Amendment and employees may be subject to disciplinary action for violating the provisions within this directive.

4.1.2 With respect to personal external communications, such as social media, the Atlanta Police Department does not seek to control purely personal content posted by Department employees on non-City-maintained social media profiles when that content is posted during non-working time and by the Department employee's own equipment and is unrelated to and does not identify the Department employee's position with the APD.

4.1.3 Employees are expected to conduct themselves online in a manner which does not bring discredit or provide doubt to their credibility as an impartial police officer or employee of the Atlanta Police Department. Employees' communication should reflect Department values, policy standards, and the Law Enforcement Code of Ethics.



- 4.1.4 Employees should assume all content posted to social media can become public, regardless of privacy settings and consider the possible adverse consequences of internet postings with regards to future employment and cross-examination in criminal cases.
- 4.1.5 For member safety, it is recommended that sworn members do not disclose their status as an APD employee on social media due to the likelihood that material posted to a social media site will be permanently archived. The disclosure of any information that identifies a member as an APD employee can endanger member safety and/or limit an officer's ability to serve in certain undercover or sensitive assignments in the future.
- 4.1.6 Employees are personally responsible for any content they react to, publish, forward or post to the internet and/or social media site. This includes reactions (e.g., likes, shares, reposts) that may imply endorsement.

4.2 ON-DUTY CONDUCT

- 4.2.1 Employees will not share, stream, comment, or post information relating to any calls-for-service, unless they receive consent from the Public Affairs unit, or their designee.
- 4.2.2 Employees of the Atlanta Police Department, regardless of rank or sworn or civilian status, will not create any posts, comments, or content reflecting the Department, or their job duties for their personal social media while signed on for duty unless:
 - 1. They are assigned to the Public Affairs Unit or have received permission from the Chief of Police or the Director of the Public Affairs Unit, or their designee.
 - 2. They are attending a department sanctioned, sponsored, or approved community event.
 - 3. They are sharing previously released Public Service Announcements or content released by the department or City's official social media pages or on official department or City websites.
- 4.2.3 Employees who wish to establish a public-facing social media presence as a law enforcement 'personality' or influencer must receive prior approval from the Public Affairs Unit. If the content reflects law enforcement, the account and all associated posts must be reviewed to ensure alignment with the Department's mission and values.

4.3 RESTRICTIONS

- 4.3.1 Use of Department logos, insignia, uniforms, equipment, or imagery in a damaging, offensive, or unprofessional manner is prohibited. This includes posting videos while in uniform that feature music or language containing profanity, slurs, or derogatory content.
- 4.3.2 No pictures, video, artwork, comments or other content may be posted or shared that is disparaging to a person or group based on race, color, sex, gender identity, age, religion, disability, national origin, ancestry, sexual orientation, or that is culturally demeaning or ethnically derogatory.
- 4.3.3 Confidential information related to Department training, policies, events, or on-going investigations is prohibited from being shared.
- 4.3.4 Employees will not make, share, or comment in support of any posting that promotes criminal conduct, threats of violence or otherwise violates any law, regardless of their geographical location.



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- 4.3.5 Employees will not knowingly engage, follow, or “friend” any type of social media contact that would hamper, interfere with, or otherwise presume prejudice on an open or ongoing investigation, case, or court action.
- 4.3.6 Department computer/phones to access, download, upload, or contribute to any social media content is prohibited unless he or she is lawfully doing so as a part of their regular duties or as a part of an investigation requiring access to a social networking site.
- 4.3.7 Photographs of equipment and vehicles which would reveal or compromise the investigative capabilities of the department are prohibited.
- 4.3.8 Employees of the Atlanta Police Department, while on or off duty, will not harass, belittle, criticize, or share demeaning content regarding another employee openly on any social media platforms.
- 4.3.9 Employees will not appear in identifiable department uniforms, badges, patches, or insignia in any social media content—whether posts, videos, or live streams—on accounts or platforms that are monetized or used for personal financial gain. This includes, but is not limited to, sponsored content, advertisements, affiliate links, or subscription-based services (e.g., YouTube, Patreon, OnlyFans, TikTok, etc.)

4.4 PRIVACY AND DISCIPLINARY ACTION

- 4.4.1 Department employees should be aware that they may be jeopardizing their personal privacy and/or that of other employees by posting photographs or personal information about themselves or other members of the City of Atlanta and/or the Atlanta Police Department. In addition, the Department employee(s) may be jeopardizing their safety, the safety of their family, their co-workers, and on-going or future investigations.
- 4.4.2 Sworn Personnel are advised that in the event information has been posted on a social networking site identifying themselves as a police officer, the posting could make them ineligible for specialized assignments where anonymity is required.
- 4.4.3 Department employees found to be in violation of any restrictions of this directive will be subject to disciplinary action ranging from Category A – D in accordance with APD.SOP.2020 Disciplinary Process depending on the egregiousness of the material in question posted on any Social Networking site, Blog, or any other type of web platform, any opinions, articles, post, pictures, or audio.
- 4.4.4 The department reserves the right to monitor public content to ensure compliance with this policy.

4.5 SOCIAL MEDIA FOR INVESTIGATIONS

- 4.5.1 Investigative social media accounts are permitted by the Department and require the unit commander to maintain a file of all registered accounts and passwords for investigative social media accounts.
- 4.5.2 The investigator/officer creating the account is responsible for maintaining the profile, as well as all content posted online under said profile, until, or unless, the account is no longer needed, or responsibility is transferred to another officer/investigator.
- 4.5.3 When a social media profile used for investigation purposes is no longer needed it will be deactivated or deleted from the social media platform, and the Unit Commander notified to update the Social Media file.



4.5.4 APD Personnel will not post any information through an investigatory social media profile that promotes violence or criminal activity.

4.6 DEPARTMENT AUTHORIZED SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNT

4.6.1 Social media presence is an effective and useful form of media to reach an audience. Any Unit that wishes to create their own social media content must receive written consent from the Chief of Police, the Public Affairs Director, or their designee.

4.6.2 Where possible, each social media page will include an introductory statement that clearly specifies the purpose and scope of the unit's presence on the platform.

4.6.3 Department/Unit Official social media pages must clearly indicate they are maintained by the department and have department contact information prominently displayed and be linked to the department's official website.

4.6.4 All Social media content must adhere to applicable laws, regulations, and policies and understand that:

1. Content is subject to public and open 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.
3. 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.
4. Pages will clearly indicate that any content posted or submitted for posting is subject to public disclosure.

4.6.5 Department personnel posting and upkeeping department social media content will:

1. Conduct themselves at all times as representatives of the department and, accordingly, adhere to all department standards of conduct and observe conventionally accepted protocols.
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 post, transmit, or otherwise disseminate confidential information.
4. No show or post any political biases or endorsements.

4.6.6 Employees wanting to post on a department specific page (i.e. Bolos, BWC footage, Zone/Call specific commendations), will forward the content request to the Public Affairs Unit (PAU) for review, and if approved, the message, photo, and/or video will be posted by the unit's designated staff.

4.6.7 The Public Affairs, or the Unit Commander/Content Creator responsible for posting content to social media or websites must obtain the officer's consent before using any image or video in which the officer is clearly identifiable, or the officers name is being used on the public platform.



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5. DEFINITIONS

Employee: For the purposes of this policy, the term “member” includes ALL employees of the APD, whether sworn, civilian or contractual.

Disparaging Content: Any written, visual, or audio content that insults, demeans, belittles, mocks, or otherwise expresses contempt toward a person or group, particularly on the basis of race, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, or national origin. This also includes comments that undermine public trust in law enforcement or the credibility of APD personnel.

Influencer or “Personality”: An employee who maintains a public social media presence with content that focuses on or is informed by their identity as a law enforcement officer, and who regularly engages a following or audience. Influencers must receive prior approval from the Public Affairs Unit if their content references law enforcement, the Department, or is intended to generate financial gain.

Investigative Social Media Account: A social media profile or account created and used by Department personnel specifically for investigative purposes.

Monetized Account: Any social media account or platform where content generates revenue for the employee, including but not limited to advertisements, affiliate marketing, product placements, subscription services, or paid sponsorships.

Official Department Account: Any social media account created, approved, or maintained by the Department or its authorized personnel for the purpose of public communication, community outreach, or departmental representation.

Personal Social Media Account: A non-departmental, privately maintained account belonging to an individual employee, used for personal expression and not officially affiliated with the Atlanta Police Department.

Post: For the purposes of this policy, the term “post” is defined, in context, as either: (1) the action of submitting information to the Internet or a social media site; or (2) a collective name for all or part of any information already displayed on the Internet or a social media site.

Social Media: A collective term referring to various online platforms, applications or technologies enabling the “sharing” of electronic, user-generated text, audio, photographic, video or multimedia files.

Social Media Site – A collective term referring to various online platforms, applications, or technologies that enable users to create, share, and interact with electronic content such as text, photos, video, audio, or multimedia files. Examples include but are not limited to Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, Reddit, and YouTube

6. CANCELLATION

This is a new policy in effect August 26, 2025.

7. REFERENCES

N/A