



Policy 604

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SOCIAL MEDIA	
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By Order of the Police Commissioner

POLICY

The purpose of this policy is to guide all members of the Baltimore Police Department (BPD) in the professional use of social media, and personal use of social media, only to the extent that personal use of social media sites or platforms may bear on a member's official duties.

1. **Ethical Conduct.** Members have a duty to adhere at all times to BPD's existing standards of conduct, ethics and professionalism. Misconduct of any kind, regardless of whether it occurs on social media, is governed by Policy 301, *Code of Ethics* and Policy 302, *Rules and Regulations*.
2. **Prohibited Uses.** As explained more fully below, members shall not:
 - 2.1. Post privileged or confidential information they have obtained from their employment with BPD.
 - 2.2. Unless authorized, make representations on behalf of the BPD, or give the impression of making a representation on behalf of BPD, on any social media platform.
3. **Importance of Social Media.** BPD recognizes that members have a right to use social media and the significant role that social media can play in members' personal lives. This policy is intended to address only such social media activity that bears on a member's official duties or suggests that the BPD authorizes the posting, or that the member is posting on behalf of the BPD. This policy does not prohibit a member from engaging any social media activity protected by the First Amendment.

DEFINITIONS

Departmental Spokesperson – Any member of the BPD, who has been authorized by the Police Commissioner, his/her designee, or the Director of the Media Relations Section (MRS), to communicate with and/or deliver information to the general public and social/news media on behalf of the BPD.

Member – For the purposes of this policy, the term “member” shall include ALL employees of the BPD, whether sworn, civilian or contractual.

Post – For the purposes of this policy, the term “post” shall be 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 particular application, website or platform that allows social networking,

“blogging,” photograph or video sharing, and similar online activities. (Including but not limited to Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Reddit, Tumblr, etc.)

MEMBERS’ PERSONAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

1. Members have a right to express themselves as private citizens on social media sites, however, members should not:
 - 1.1. Make, share, or comment in support of any posting that includes criminal conduct, threats of violence or otherwise violates any law.
 - 1.2. Make, share, or comment in support of any posting disparaging of any race, religion, sex, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, or any other protected class of individuals.
 - 1.3. Post, transmit or otherwise disseminate any information, videos or images, in any format that violates Policy 601, *Member Confidentiality Obligations and Media Releases*, which governs every BPD employee’s confidentiality obligations.
 - 1.4. Unless authorized, make any representations on behalf of the BPD.
 - 1.5. Post, transmit or otherwise disseminate any information on personal social media sites while on duty, without permission from a supervisor.
2. For member safety, it is recommended that sworn members do not disclose or allude to their status as BPD members on social media.
 - 2.1. Because of the likelihood that material posted to a social media site will be permanently archived, the disclosure of any information that identifies a member as a BPD employee can endanger member safety and/or limit an officer’s ability to serve in certain undercover or sensitive assignments.
3. Members are cautioned that they should not assume any expectation of privacy when posting information to the Internet or a social media site, regardless of user privacy settings or other access controls.
4. If a member reveals (intentionally or otherwise) his/her employment/position with the BPD, when posting personal comments or material on a social media site:
 - 4.1. The member shall not represent himself/herself as a BPD spokesperson; and
 - 4.2. The member shall make clear that his/her opinions, material and/or comments are not an official statement from the BPD.

NOTE: See Policy 1729, *Whistleblower Protection* for protected member speech.

5. Members should refrain from revealing, in any manner or for any reason, that any other member (e.g., a supervisor, partner, co-worker, etc.) is an employee of the BPD without the express written consent of that other member.
6. Members are personally responsible for any content they “like,” publish, forward or post to the Internet and/or a social media site.

7. Members shall not create or maintain a BPD social media site, unless directly authorized to do so by the Police Commissioner.
8. Members shall not knowingly engage in any type of social media contact (e.g., “friending,” “following,” etc.) that would hamper, interfere with or otherwise prejudice an open or ongoing investigation, case, or court action.
9. Members shall not use a BPD email address to register with or join a social media site.

BPD SOCIAL MEDIA

1. Only the Police Commissioner, his/her designee, the MRS Director, or a designated departmental spokesperson may post, comment or reply on a social media site on behalf of the Baltimore Police Department.
2. BPD will clearly identify its official social media accounts. Where possible, BPD social media accounts shall prominently display the following information and/or statements:
 - 2.1. BPD contact information and a link to the BPD website.
 - 2.2. That pages are maintained by BPD.
 - 2.3. That the opinions expressed by visitors to BPD pages do not reflect the opinions of the BPD.
 - 2.4. That posted comments will be monitored and that BPD reserves the right to remove comments at its discretion such as obscenities, off-topic comments, personal attacks, any comments that jeopardize an ongoing investigation or prosecution, or that otherwise impair BPD’s ability to provide effective law enforcement services to the community.
 - 2.5. That any content posted or submitted for posting is subject to public disclosure.
3. Departmental spokespersons shall not comment on subject matters:
 - 3.1. Beyond their area of professional expertise; or
 - 3.2. On which they are not authorized to represent the BPD.
4. When authorized members – the Police Commissioner, his/her designee, the MRS Director, or a designated departmental spokesperson – represent the BPD on a social media site, they will:
 - 4.1. Use only an approved/official account or user name.
 - 4.2. Adhere to the “Terms of Use Agreement” that governs users’ activity on the site.
 - 4.3. Ensure their status as a representative of the BPD is clearly evident.
 - 4.4. Limit interaction and comments to information within the public domain.
 - 4.5. Not release any information that may in any way be considered confidential.
 - 4.6. Ensure that all content, posted to a social media site on behalf of the BPD, is accurate

and in compliance with BPD policy.

5. The MRS Director shall review and approve all activity involving the BPD's official Internet website(s).
6. If an official BPD social media site or Internet website hosts a public discussion "forum," messaging board, or other interactive commenting feature, the MRS Director shall ensure that:
 - 6.1. A site moderation policy is clearly stated;
 - 6.2. Comments posted by the general public are monitored by a member of the MRS for inappropriate or offensive content; and
 - 6.3. Comments, deemed to be inappropriate or offensive, are removed/deleted from the site.
7. The MRS Director shall coordinate any release of suspect, witness or person-of-interest information with the Chief, Criminal Investigation Division, or his/her designee.
8. The Chief of the Criminal Investigation Division shall consult with the Director of the MRS when there is a belief that an ongoing investigation or intelligence collection effort would benefit from the use of social media. It may be appropriate for members to use non-official BPD social media accounts in the course of a legitimate criminal investigation, or in the course of intelligence collection efforts, related to public safety or potential criminal activity.
 - 8.1. Investigative units may use non-official BPD social media accounts for investigative purposes with written permission of the Police Commissioner.
 - 8.2. These investigative units will maintain a log of all social media postings to non-official BPD accounts.
 - 8.3. Acceptable uses of non-official BPD social media accounts for legitimate law enforcement purposes includes a member creating and/or using a fictitious social media account, user profile, avatar or similar form of online identification.

ASSOCIATED POLICIES

Policy 301,	<i>Code of Ethics</i>
Policy 302,	<i>Rules and Regulations</i>
Policy 305,	<i>Department Values, Vision and Mission</i>
Policy 308,	<i>General Disciplinary Process</i>
Policy 601,	<i>Member Confidentiality Obligations and Media Releases</i>
Policy 602,	<i>Public Speech</i>
Policy 1306,	<i>BPDnet and Internet Usage Policy</i>
Policy 1307,	<i>Personal Communications Devices</i>

RESCISSION

Remove and destroy/recycle Policy 604, *Social Media Policy* dated 12 November 2015.

COMMUNICATION OF POLICY

This policy is effective on the date listed herein. Commanders are responsible for informing their subordinates of this policy and ensuring compliance.