



# GENERAL ORDER

Loudoun County Sheriff's Office

**Chapter:** Administration

**Section:** 207.2

**Subject:** Social Media

**Topic:** Use of PIO Social Media

**Enacted:** 01/30/2023

**Last Review:** 07/05/2023

**Review:** 01/01/2025

## I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this General Order is to provide guidance for the use, moderation, and management of official Sheriff's Office public information social media accounts.

## II. POLICY

The use of social media by the Sheriff's Office is an important part of providing public communication, transparency, and ease of connecting with the citizens of Loudoun County and interested others. The creation, use, and management of Sheriff's Office public information social media accounts shall only occur with the approval of the Sheriff or his/her designee. Employees authorized to use Sheriff's Office's public information social media accounts shall comply with this General Order and follow all Loudoun County Department of Information Technology (DIT) protocols to ensure appropriate record keeping under the regulations of the Library of Virginia and the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

## III. PROCEDURES

### A. Permitted Uses

1. The purpose of Sheriff's Office public information social media accounts is to provide a platform for the Sheriff's Office to inform and share information with the public. Information may include, but is not limited to, incidents, initiatives, safety, partnerships, commemorations, achievements, and recruitment.

### B. Authorized Users and Moderators

1. Members of the Sheriff's Office Media Relations and Communications Section and the Employment Services Section are authorized by the Sheriff to be users of public information social media accounts. The Sheriff may also designate other members of the Sheriff's Office to use these accounts as may be necessary.
2. Members of the Media Relations and Communications Section are authorized to be moderators of the content and comments posted on public information social media accounts, pursuant to the guidelines included in this General Order. The Sheriff may also designate other members of the Sheriff's Office for such purposes.

**C. Authorized Platforms**

1. In determining whether the Sheriff's Office should maintain a public information social media account on a particular platform, consideration shall be given to the reputation and relevance of the platform, the number and relevance of its users, the ability to monitor and manage activity, and the ability to access and retain official records.
2. All requests for the addition or deletion of a public information social media account shall be approved by the Sheriff.

**D. Moderation of Content**

1. A key consideration with social media is how to enable users to post comments as a means of responding to a post. This form of community engagement is important for the Sheriff's Office, and guidelines and moderation are necessary to ensure that each platform is a safe and respectful environment for those who read content as well as those who may choose to comment.
2. The public information social media accounts are a limited public forum intended only for communication with and on behalf of the community, and not an open public forum for individuals or organizations to communicate with each other or on matters not relevant to the Sheriff's Office or its posts.
3. Moderators are responsible for monitoring Sheriff's Office public information social media platforms and have the right to hide or remove content, or temporarily block a user, as provided for in this General Order, if any comment contains:
  - a. Content that constitutes or promotes illegal activity;
  - b. Content that jeopardizes ongoing investigations or prosecutions;
  - c. Content that may compromise the safety or security of the public;
  - d. Content that negatively impacts the Sheriff's Office's ability to provide law enforcement services to the community;
  - e. Content that includes profane, obscene, abusive, or threatening language;

- f. Content that promotes, fosters, or perpetuates discrimination against protected classes;
  - g. Content that is sexually harassing;
  - h. Content that constitutes libel or slander;
  - i. Content that includes personal attacks;
  - j. Content that is provably false;
  - k. Content that violates the legal ownership interests of any other party, including copyright or trademark infringement;
  - l. Content that is not relevant to the original post or is otherwise off-topic;
  - m. Content that includes one or more links to another internet site;
  - n. Content that constitutes advertisement for or promotion of services, products, or political candidates or organizations; or
  - o. Spam, as defined in this General Order.
- 4. Hiding or removing content shall be based solely on the criteria above, and a decision may only be made by an authorized moderator.
  - 5. There is no requirement that a moderator notify the user that content has been hidden or removed, except that notice to the user shall be provided for any instance of four (4) or more hidden or removed comments on the same social media platform in a 24-hour period.

**E. Spam Content**

- 1. Spam is defined as repetitive posting of identical or similar comments on a particular social media platform over a particular period, such that it is disruptive to the platform, post, and/or the participation of others.
- 2. Repetitive is defined to include any of the following:
  - a. Two (2) or more identical or similar comments on the same social media

post;

- b. Four (4) or more identical or similar comments on the same social media platform in a 24-hour period;
- c. Eight (8) or more identical or similar comments on the same social media platform.

**F. Challenging Hidden or Removed Content, or a Block**

- 1. A challenge to any content that is hidden or removed, or the blocking of an individual who posted it, may only be initiated by the individual who posted the content or who was blocked.
- 2. The individual initiating the challenge shall specify the reason(s) for the challenge, and the requested remedy.
- 3. A challenge must be submitted by an individual with a verifiable name and contact information as provided through the Sheriff's Office website where this General Order is posted.
- 4. Upon receiving a challenge, the Sheriff's Office shall verify that it is complete and in compliance with this General Order, inform the individual of its receipt, then promptly provide it to a public information official within Loudoun County government for review and adjudication. That individual shall be designated by the Sheriff's Office with concurrence of the County Attorney.
- 5. The public information official reviewing the challenge shall not be a member of the Loudoun County Sheriff's Office and shall issue a written adjudication within 72 hours of receiving the challenge.
- 6. The Sheriff's Office shall promptly advise the individual making the challenge of the results of the review and any actions that may be taken consistent with the adjudication.

**G. Blocking a User**

- 1. Any user who violates this General Order after having been notified, or whose challenge to hidden or removed content has been denied but continues to violate this General Order, shall be subject to being blocked by a moderator.

2. Blocking a user is intended to preserve the individual's opportunity to comment on a Sheriff's Office social media platform in the future in accordance with this General Order.
3. Blocking shall be implemented in progressive durations, as follows:
  - a. First instance of a block in a one-year period: 30 days;
  - b. Second instance of a block in a one-year period: 90 days; and
  - c. Third instance of a block in a one-year period: one (1) year
4. A moderator shall consult with a designated public information official with the Loudoun County government before any block is initiated, although the consent of such official is not required.
5. A moderator shall notify the user of the intent to block before it is initiated, along with notice of this General Order and the challenge process.
6. A challenge to a block shall follow the same procedure as described above for a comment that is hidden or removed.
7. A user who seeks to evade a block by creating one or more new identities and engaging in conduct in violation of this General Order shall be subject to inclusion in the same block.