

# GENERAL ORDER

G.O. 6-541

**SUBJECT: PUBLIC INFORMATION**



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## **I. PURPOSE AND RESPONSIBILITY:**

- A. Purpose: To set the policy and establish the procedures concerning media relations and the release of public information at the Monroe Police Department.
- B. Responsibility:
  - 1. It will be the responsibility of the Chief of Police to designate employees of this Department who are authorized to communicate with the media in an official capacity.
  - 2. It will be the responsibility of Department employees authorized to release information to the media to have a knowledge and understanding of the nature and categories of information that are not to be released to the public.

## **II. DISCUSSION:**

- A. This general order deals with the relationship between this Department and the media concerning the release of information to the media. The development of open, cooperative relationships with all segments of the media can have positive results for public service agencies. Much of the support this Department attempts to obtain from the community results directly from the day to day contacts with the citizens of this community. The remaining area in which the support is established

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is how this Department is perceived by the public based on what they hear or read. Critical to the development of good relations is the equal treatment and honesty in dealing with media organizations and personnel. Additionally, the manner in which news releases to the media are handled is of great importance. The release of inaccurate or conflicting information casts an undesirable shadow on the organization. There may be serious ramifications resulting from the release of protected information or the premature release of certain information. In order to establish control of media releases, such disclosures are to be made by the Chief of Police or an officer designated by the Chief of Police. The intent of this directive is to establish guidelines addressing the release of police information to the media and the development of good relations with the media.

### III. DEFINITIONS:

- A. COMMAND LEVEL OFFICER: An officer of the rank of lieutenant or higher.
- B. MEDIA: Those organizations or persons whose primary function is to receive and disseminate to the community information of public interest. Media as used in this directive includes television, radio and the various publications, including newspapers, magazines and journals.
- C. PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER (PIO): The Chief of Police will designate an officer to be a public information officer. The PIO shall be responsible for the dissemination of information that is legal and justifiable to be released to the public through the news media.
- D. RANKING OFFICER: An officer of the rank of sergeant or higher.

### IV. POLICY:

- A. It will be the policy of the Monroe Police Department to closely observe the right of the community to be informed of the events occurring within the community that are handled by or involve this Department.
- B. It will be the policy of the Monroe Police Department to maintain cooperative relationships with the various media organizations and their personnel, assuring equal access to information that may be released.

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- C. It will be the policy of the Monroe Police Department to release only that information which may be disclosed legally and would not interfere with the operations of this Department.
- D. It will be the policy of the Monroe Police Department not to release information that would jeopardize an individual's rights or the prosecution of an individual, or which would tend to impair or impede the law enforcement process.

### **V. PROCEDURES:**

- A. **PUBLIC INFORMATION FUNCTION:** The Chief of Police, or the officer designated as public information officer shall:
  - 1. Assist news personnel in covering routine news stories and at the scenes of incidents;
  - 2. Be available for on-call response to the news media;
  - 3. Prepare and distribute Department news releases;
  - 4. Arrange for, and assist at, news conferences;
  - 5. Coordinate and authorize the release of information about victims, witnesses, and suspects;
  - 6. Assist in crisis situations within the Department;
  - 7. Coordinate and authorize the release of information concerning confidential agency investigations and operations; and
  - 8. Help develop procedures for releasing information when other public service agencies are involved in a mutual effort.
- B. **MEDIA POLICY CHANGES:** When changes in policy pertaining to the release of information or media relations take place, representatives of the news media may be invited to participate in the process of developing these changes. Those media organizations that this Department has regular contact with will be advised of the pending changes. Representatives of these media agencies will be requested to

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submit suggestions. The media suggestions will be reviewed by the Chief of Police and may be incorporated into the policy change.

- C. MEDIA ACCESSIBILITY: Recognized news media representatives, including photographers, will be afforded no less access than the general public. All persons will be restricted to an identifiable perimeter to avoid interference with rescue operations or destruction of evidence or exposure to injury or death. News personnel will be allowed to be at the front of the general public at the perimeter of the following:
1. At the scenes of major fires, natural disasters, or other catastrophic events;  
and
  2. Scenes of serious or major crimes.