


**The Pennsylvania State University  
Police and Public Safety Department**

**POLICY AND PROCEDURAL ORDER**

SUBJECT 5.66 Procedural Justice			
CALEA REF.		EFFECTIVE DATE 12/1/20	REVISED DATE 8/30/25
PLEAC Ref:	1.3.11		
APPROVED BY Chief of Police and Public Safety, Wesley Sheets 			ASSIGNED TO GROUP(S): 6

**I. PURPOSE**

The purpose of this policy is to direct employees of the Pennsylvania State University Police and Public Safety Department (UPPS) in policing in a manner consistent with the principles of Procedural Justice.

**II. POLICY**

Procedural Justice is essential to building police legitimacy and public trust, which are critical to protecting and serving the public effectively. Therefore, it is the policy of UPPS to police in a Procedurally Just manner that recognizes the dignity of all persons with whom officers interact.

**III. PRINCIPLES OF PROCEDURAL JUSTICE**

- A. Procedural Justice refers to the perception of fairness in an encounter with police, achieved by treating all persons with dignity and respect, giving persons a voice during encounters, being impartial in decision making, and conveying trustworthy motives. Conduct that conforms to these principles has the potential to build community trust and confidence in the police and foster the community's willingness to cooperate with police to advance shared public safety goals.
- B. Procedural Justice is central to how the Department envisions encounters with the public and is consistent with the UPPS community policing philosophy, which establishes a framework for improving police-community relations and in implementing Procedurally-Just interactions with the public.
- C. Throughout encounters with the public, employees will demonstrate the principles of Procedural Justice whenever possible to increase the likelihood of a positive interaction and build Police Legitimacy.
  1. **Fairness:** Procedural Justice is ultimately about fairness and consistency in both the process and outcomes of policing interactions. When the public perceives interactions as fair, these interactions contribute to public trust and Police Legitimacy.
  2. **Impartiality:** Make transparent, neutral decisions based only on relevant information.
  3. **Respect:** Be professional and courteous throughout the interaction and treat people with dignity and concern for their rights.
  4. **Transparency:** Ensure people know why and how decisions are being made to foster understanding and cooperation with the decision-making process and outcome.
  5. **Trustworthiness:** Convey trustworthiness throughout your interactions by acting with professionalism, understanding, and transparency.
  6. **Voice:** Provide people the opportunity to explain their actions and ask questions before making a final decision. Listening to a person's perspective is important to conducting a fair decision-making process. Engaging and listening to community members prior to reaching a conclusion leads to more informed decision-making and increases community members' acceptance of the resolution.

#### IV. DEFINITIONS

- A. **Police Legitimacy:** The public's belief that the police can be trusted to act properly and in the public interest.
- B. **Procedural Justice:** Treatment of a person by law enforcement officers in such a way that the person feels they were treated fairly and with consistency, with dignity and respect, they were given voice, the officer was neutral and transparent, and the officer conveyed trustworthy motives.

#### V. PROCEDURES

- A. UPPS employees can take specific actions and practice certain behaviors that communicate to a person that the employee is treating them in a Procedurally Just manner.
- B. All employees will treat all persons with the courtesy and dignity that is deserving of every person as a human being.
- C. All employees will act, speak, and conduct themselves in a professional manner, recognizing their obligation to safeguard life and property, and maintain a courteous, professional attitude in all contacts with the public.
- D. Employees will conduct law enforcement encounters and actions, including voluntary contacts, field interviews, investigative stops, weapons pat-downs, vehicle stops, searches, interrogations, citation issuance, and arrests, among others, in strict accordance with UPPS policy in order to demonstrate neutral decision-making and fair treatment, and avoid accusations or perceptions of discriminatory policing or bias.
- E. All employees will use the following measures whenever reasonably possible while conducting law enforcement actions:
  - 1. Be professional and polite.
  - 2. Introduce yourself.
  - 3. Explain to the person, as soon as possible, the reason for the contact unless providing this information will compromise the investigation or the safety of employees or other persons.
  - 4. Answer any questions the person may have.
  - 5. Explain your actions throughout the encounter.
  - 6. Never allow the length of an investigative stop or vehicle stop to be longer than reasonably necessary to take appropriate action for the known or suspected offense, as well as any offense that is legitimately discovered during the investigation.
  - 7. If a delay must occur, always explain to the person stopped why the reasonable delay is occurring and keep the person updated on the timeline.
  - 8. In addition to your initial introduction, always provide your name when requested, verbally, in writing, or on a business card.
  - 9. If the reasonable suspicion for the stop is dispelled or the stop was made in error, the employee should:
    - a. Immediately release the person,
    - b. Explain the reason for the stop and the release,
    - c. Thank the individual for their patience,
    - d. Ask if they have any questions related to the interaction,
    - e. And apologize for any inconvenience if an error was made.
  - 10. Employees should express appreciation for the person's cooperation during the encounter.

- F. Employees will employ de-escalation tools like treating the individual respectfully and slowing down the encounter whenever possible. Not only does this decrease the chances of the use of force or a violent outcome, but it also allows the employee to listen to and communicate productively with the person. De-escalation tools that will be helpful to support a non-violent outcome and to advance Procedural Justice include, but are not limited to (1.3.11):
1. Effective communication and verbal tools, such as listening to the person so that they have a voice, then explaining what the employee is doing, what the person can do, and what will happen; explaining why the employee is taking action and demonstrating why the reason for that action is fair while treating the person with dignity throughout the entire interaction.
  2. Physical tools, such as moving to a safer position, communicating from a safer position, diminishing potential threat by using distance or cover or calling for assistance – such as CIT trained officers for persons in crisis.
  3. In instances where a use of force is in progress, the level of force must be adjusted as the situation stabilizes, as the resistance of the subject subsides, or as the achievement of positive control of the subject permits.
- G. Unless the employee or any other person is in imminent danger of harm, the employee will consider whether any lack of compliance may be due to the person's inability to comply. Someone who is unable to comply may be experiencing a:
1. Medical condition,
  2. Mental impairment,
  3. Developmental disability,
  4. Physical limitation,
  5. Language or cultural barrier, or
  6. Drug or alcohol impairment.
- H. Employees will ensure the safety of all individuals in arrest processing, searches, placement in custody, and transports.

Updates:

- 9/28/23: Title changes made
- 8/20/25: PLEAC Reference added, Section V.F updated.