

**TOPEKA POLICE DEPARTMENT POLICY AND PROCEDURE MANUAL  
4.22 PUBLIC INFORMATION AND MEDIA RELATIONS**

<b>SUBJECT: Public Information and Media Relations</b>		
<b>4.22</b>	<b>EFFECTIVE:</b> 11-22-2022	<i>Bryan Wheelles</i> Bryan Wheelles, Chief of Police
	<b>REVISED:</b> 11-15-2022	
	<b>TOTAL PAGES:</b> 6	

**4.22.1 PURPOSE**

This policy outlines media relation rules for members of the Department who act in the capacity of Public Information Officer (PIO).

**4.22.2 POLICY**

Employees shall provide media representatives with news items of public interest and concern as fairly and efficiently as possible, without jeopardizing active investigations, prejudicing the accused's right to a fair trial, or violating the law or other policy standards.

**4.22.3 PUBLIC INFORMATION ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

A. Media Relations

1. Although the Chief of Police and designated Public Information Officer (PIO) are the principal spokespersons, all officers are authorized to furnish timely, factual information to the media upon request. When possible a commander will be consulted prior to the employee speaking to the media in relation to City of Topeka or department matters.
2. The Department has a duty to the community to provide transparency through accurate information sharing with media partners.
3. All employees will maintain a professional relationship with the media.
4. At the scene of any event of public interest, representatives of the media will be permitted to conduct interviews, take photographs, and otherwise perform their assigned tasks provided their activity is not in violation of the guidelines established in this policy, and provided such activity does not violate law or interfere with law enforcement operations.
5. News releases concerning incidents involving Department policy, the official interpretation of Department policy or investigations of an internal nature will be made by the Chief of Police or his or her designee.

B. Public Information Function

1. The PIO shall ensure the public information function includes, at a minimum:

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- a. Assisting media personnel in covering news stories at the scenes of incidents;
  - b. Preparing and distributing media releases;
  - c. Arranging for, and assisting at media conferences;
  - d. Coordinating and authorizing the release of information about victims, witnesses, and suspects;
  - e. Coordinating the release of information concerning confidential investigations and operations; and
  - f. Developing procedures for releasing information when other public services agencies are involved in a mutual effort.
2. The PIO shall be the primary contact for media inquiries involving police matters. The PIO shall, during normal office hours, attempt to comply with media requests for information by notifying the appropriate person to supply the information, be it the Chief of Police, an investigator in charge of the investigation, or a Bureau Commander. The PIO shall notify the City PIO of matters of importance to the City Manager or governing body.
  3. Supervisors may request the PIO respond to a scene where media is present.
  4. When a PIO is unavailable, the Chief of Police or designee, or the on-scene commander or designee, may release information to the media pursuant to this policy.

**C. Unusual Circumstances or Fast Breaking Events**

1. The PIO shall be immediately advised of unusual occurrences and/or fast breaking events, including but not limited to:
  - a. Natural disasters;
  - b. Riot or other civil disturbance
  - c. Communication, computer, and/or electrical systems failure;
  - d. Homicide;
  - e. Destruction of or significant damage to a public facility or a facility effecting the public, e.g., hospitals, public transit, etc;
  - f. Death of key personnel;
  - g. Major public utility disruption, e.g. power, gas, water; and/or
  - h. Multi-jurisdictional unusual occurrences.
2. All release of information shall be consistent with National Incident Management System (NIMS) protocols.
3. If an inquiry relates to one of the above situations, all media inquiries shall be directed to the on-scene supervisor (when the PIO is not on scene).
4. The supervisor in charge of the scene will cooperate fully with all news media representatives within the guidelines set forth by this policy and as allowed by NIMS protocols.

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**D. Information Not to Be Released**

1. This section does not apply to the release of information and records to other law enforcement agencies or in response to a judicial order.
2. The following information shall not be released to the media:
  - a. The identity of any suspect prior to arrest except as necessary to aid the investigation, to assist in apprehension of the suspect, or to warn the public of dangers;
  - b. Any opinion as to guilt or innocence of the accused or as to the merits of the case or the evidence in the case;
  - c. Any information revealing the substance of a confession by a person arrested until such time as the case is finally determined by adjudication, dismissal, or other final disposition;
  - d. The possibility of a plea of guilty to the offense charged or to a lesser offense;
  - e. Any information (including the photograph, name, address, or other information) that reveals the identity of the victim of any sex offense or child abuse. Information on child abuse or aggravated child abuse and juvenile cases except as provided in the news release guidelines listed above;
  - f. The home address, telephone number, social security number, and place of employment of active or former Department personnel, their spouses and children, and the names and locations of schools attended by the children of active or former Department personnel shall not be released without the consent of the member or employee.
  - g. The identity of persons killed or seriously injured, prior to notification of next of kin;
  - h. Information on elderly or disabled victims of abuse unless the victim is deceased;
  - i. "Confidential" information received from another law enforcement agency by the Department; or
  - j. Information revealing the identity of confidential informants or surveillance techniques.

**E. Information Not to Be Released -Juvenile**

Juvenile offender information will not be released with the following exceptions:

1. Juvenile offender's age;
2. Juvenile offender's sex;
3. Juvenile offender's city or area of residence; and
4. Offense committed/charges.

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**F. Media Access to Police Controlled Scenes**

1. In the event of a major crime, incident, or disaster, or other catastrophic event, police lines will be established for crowd control, to permit investigation and to preserve evidence.
2. Officers at the scene shall ensure that access of media personnel and photographers are controlled at the perimeter of crime scenes. The integrity of the crime scene will be preserved. When deemed necessary by on-scene law enforcement personnel, a media area may be designated to allow access and provide briefings.

**G. News Releases**

1. Public information shall be released as promptly as circumstances allow. The PIO shall be responsible for releasing press releases dealing with Department matters.
2. Supervisors shall ensure that information released to the press during the absence of the PIO is reported to the PIO as soon as possible.
3. When representatives of the media desire interviews with Department personnel other than those listed, such interviews may be conducted only with the approval of the Chief of Police or his or her designee, and shall be coordinated through the PIO.
4. Bureau Commanders may choose to make media releases on newsworthy events involving their respective Bureaus. Such releases will not be made without prior notification and approval by the Chief's office.
5. All media releases should be filed in the media folder on the "O" drive for records retention purposes.

**H. News Release Guidelines**

The following information will be made available to the media in criminal matters:

1. "Open Public Record" information as defined by KSA 45-215 *et seq.* or, KSA 38-2310;
2. The arrested person's name (if an adult) including middle initial, when possible, age, city/state of residence, employment, marital status and any similar background information;
3. The time, date, location and nature of the reported crime; However, the location shall not be divulged if it may identify the victim of a sex offense, child abuse, or elderly or disabled abuse (unless the elderly or disabled victim is deceased). Also, the location shall not be divulged if it is the home or work address of a victim of aggravated stalking, harassment, aggravated battery, or domestic violence. All information will be released in accordance with the Crime Victims Bill of Rights; KSA 74-7333;
4. The identity of the investigating or arresting agency;

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5. The circumstances immediately surrounding the arrest, including the time and place of arrest. However, consistent with the Crime Victim's Bill of Rights, the place of arrest shall not be divulged regarding victims of certain crimes;
6. The name of any victim, address, age, and sex, subject to all conditions listed hereafter. However, consistent Crime Victim's Bill of Rights, the name and/or address shall not be divulged regarding victims of certain crimes;
7. Regarding mistreatment of a dependent adult, sex offenses, and child abuse as outlined in Crime Victim's Bill of Rights, the general location of the incident e.g., apartment complex, subdivision; KSA 21-5417
8. The lead investigator of a newsworthy, on-going investigation, or his or her supervisor, shall forward information to the PIO if release of such will not compromise the investigation or the subsequent prosecution. The PIO shall be responsible for releasing the information to the media; and
9. The PIO will coordinate with the Legal Advisor the release of statistics and information concerning confidential Department investigations and operations when such material becomes public record.
10. Employees should consult with the Crime Analysis Unit on respects for statistics and figures to ensure accuracy.

#### I. Press Conferences

1. Press conferences will be conducted only with the approval of the Chief of Police through the chain of command. Press conference releases will be sent via email to media sources and may be coordinated with the City's Director of Communications.
2. Personnel knowledgeable about the case or incident may be on hand to speak with the approval of the Chief of Police.
3. Department representatives shall be appropriately attired and respond professionally to questions.
4. The PIO may respond to improper or adversarial questions.
5. If the location of the press conference is inside the LEC, the media representatives shall be escorted while in the secure portions of the LEC. Classroom A is now open to public events.
6. Media representatives can be supplied with appropriate press packets. Packets may include, but are not confined to:
  - a. A general press release detailing the incident;
  - b. Flyers;
  - c. Photographs or other pertinent visuals.
7. Media representatives shall remain in one central location during the press conference and be escorted from the secure portion of the building.

#### J. Photographing and Interviewing of the accused by the news media

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1. Personnel of the Department shall not deliberately pose any person in custody for photographing or televising nor shall they allow any person in custody to be interviewed.
2. Nothing herein shall be construed to prohibit the accused and/or their attorney from issuing a denial of guilt.
3. Nothing herein shall be construed to prevent the media from taking candid photographs of the individuals, or events, without interfering with the Department.

**K. Department Character Management**

1. Employees may monitor media outlets and social media platforms to ensure the Department's reputation and credibility are upheld. If an employee feels inaccurate information has been shared, they are encouraged to inform employees within the Media Unit.
2. When media inquiries are made, employees within the Media Unit will follow up on the story to ensure accuracy in reporting.
3. For incidents involving inaccuracies, the Chiefs Office and his/her designee may respond to and inform the public and/or media outlets on the known facts concerning the department.
4. Events in which acts of recourse are appropriate to manage the reputation of the Department or clarify information; employees should alert chain of command and develop a suitable action. Potential actions may include but are not limited to:
  - a. A written letter to media outlet outlining concern
  - b. Request for correction
  - c. Writing or producing video to follow up on story and correct inaccuracies.
5. The PIO shall also be responsible for identifying problems which may occur between the Department and the press. If these problems are the result of a policy failure, the PIO may solicit ideas and suggestions from the press and submit a written evaluation of the problem(s) and input from the press to the Chief of Police.