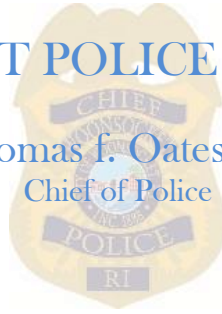


WOONSOCKET POLICE DEPARTMENT

Thomas F. Oates, III
Chief of Police



TYPE OF ORDER	NUMBER/SERIES	ISSUE DATE	EFFECTIVE DATE
General Order	520.01	4/20/2018	Immediately
TITLE		PREVIOUSLY ISSUED DATES	
Release of Police Information & Media Relations		7/25/2014	
ACCREDITATION		RE-EVALUATION DATE	
CALEA Standards: 54.1.1, 54.1.2, 54.1.3 RIPAC Standards: 3.14, 7.13, 15.2, 15.3		1/11/2022	
SECTION	SUBSECTION	DISTRIBUTION	
Community Relations & Services	Information Services	All Personnel	

RELEASE OF POLICE INFORMATION AND MEDIA RELATIONS

I. PURPOSE

To establish guidelines for the release of information to the news media.

To provide the news media and public with timely and accurate information regarding Department activities while ensuring that police investigations are not jeopardized by the premature release of information.

II. POLICY

The Woonsocket Police Department actively seeks to establish a cooperative climate in which the news media may obtain information on matters of public interest in a manner that does not hamper police operations. The Department is committed to informing the community and the news media of events within the public domain. However, certain information must be withheld from the media to protect the constitutional rights of an accused, avoid interfering with a Department investigation, or because it is legally privileged.

III. PROCEDURE

A. PUBLIC INFORMATION FUNCTION

1. A designate of the Chief of Police will be assigned as the Public Information Officer (PIO) and is responsible for the public information function of the Department and compliance with the Access to Public Records Act of the State of Rhode Island.

2. In the absence of the PIO, the Officer-in-Charge (OIC), will be responsible for:
 - a. Assisting news personnel in covering routine news stories and at the scene of incidents when so required;
 - b. Being available for on-call responses to the news media;
 - c. Preparing and distributing formal news releases subject to the approval of the Chief, or designee;
 - d. Arranging for and assisting at news conferences; and
 - e. Coordinating and authorizing the release of information about victims, witnesses, and suspects.
3. It shall be the responsibility of the Chief of Police, or designee, to coordinate and authorize the release of information concerning:
 - a. Confidential Department investigations and operations; and
 - b. Assist with crises within the Department.
4. Police officers who are approached by members of the news media for information concerning official activities of the Department are to refer all such inquiries to the OIC.

RI 7.13 B. NEWS MEDIA / AT SCENE ACCESS

1. News personnel and photographers covering stories at the scene of major incidents, disasters, or events will be directed to an area designated by the on-scene OIC.
2. The area designated for the media should be convenient to the reporting of the incident so long as the investigation is not jeopardized and safety considerations are not compromised.
3. The area will be outside of the crime scene perimeter.
4. The OIC should periodically update the media under this policy and Rhode Island Law.
5. If other agencies are involved in a mutual effort, the agency with primary jurisdiction will be responsible for releasing information unless other arrangements have been made.

C. NEWS RELEASES

News releases are divided into three (3) categories. The frequency and content of the release depend upon the objective desired. Normally releases will be provided to those media agencies that have a direct relationship with the service community. The three types of news releases are:

1. **ONGOING INVESTIGATIONS** - It is important that all releases contain the same information. If possible, a printed release will be prepared for distribution to the media. The Chief, or designee (the OIC in their absence), MAY RELEASE the following information:
 - a. The type of crime or nature of the incident;
 - b. The location (certain restrictions apply), date, time, injuries sustained, damaged property, and a brief description of the incident;
 - c. Amount and type of property taken, including value if known;
 - d. The name, age, and general area of residence of any adult charged with a crime;

- e. The fact that a juvenile has been taken into custody, including sex, age, and general area of residence;
 - f. The nature, substance, or text of the charge;
 - g. The facts, time, and place of arrest;
 - h. If known, the next step in the judicial process.
 - i. Requests for aid in locating evidence, a complainant, or a suspect may be released. The identity of a suspect before arrest will not be disclosed except to the extent necessary to aid in the investigation, to assist in the apprehension of the suspect, or to warn the public of any danger. A person's gender, general physical characteristics, and race may be released as descriptive information in such cases; and
 - j. Available photographs may be released only if they serve a valid law enforcement function such as identifying an unknown victim or enlisting public assistance in the apprehension of the offender. The release of a photograph of an unknown victim requires the authorization of the Chief of Police.
2. **PUBLIC RELATIONS** - The Chief of Police, or designee, shall be responsible for issuing public relations news releases. Information should be provided regularly to all media agencies that have a contact within the Department's service area. The content of the news releases may include:
- 1) Department accomplishments;
 - 2) New program announcements;
 - 3) Crime prevention information;
 - 4) Relevant crime problems and statistics; and
 - 5) Appointments and promotions.
3. **EMERGENCY NEWS RELEASE** - Whenever there is an immediate need to inform the public concerning an emergency, and efforts have been made to notify the chain of command, the on-duty OIC may contact the news media and issue a press release. The need for such release will depend upon the severity of the situation and the need for the public to be informed. In special situations of public concern such as natural disasters (tornadoes, severe wind, snow emergencies, floods or rainstorms, etc.), a major fire, or a chemical spill, the OIC may issue a press release at their discretion. Comments to reporters should be comprised only of factual, on-the-record information. The Chief of Police will be informed of the emergency release as soon as practical.

D. SOCIAL MEDIA

The Department recognizes the value of social media and its usefulness in keeping the public informed. Select personnel, including the PIO, have access to the official Woonsocket Police Department social media pages and may issue releases via this outlet provided:

RI 3.14.a
RI 3.14.b

- 1. The Chief of Police approves of the information released;
- 2. Sensitive information (i.e. investigations, future plans, undercover operations, etc.) shall not be released;

3. Information, if released, that would have the effect of damaging the Department's reputation, credibility or is detrimental to the Department's mission shall not be released.

E. WITHHOLDING INFORMATION

1. In general, comments to the news media concerning investigations, indictments, arrests, and criminal incidents should be minimal, consistent with the responsibility of keeping the public informed without jeopardizing the rights of individuals; however, the Woonsocket Police Department will make every effort to release as much information as possible.
2. The following information **WILL NOT** be released:
 - a. Any victim, complainant, or witness information such as identity, address, phone number, age, etc., in the following instances:
 - 1) The information is contained in an ongoing investigation whereby release of such information may jeopardize successful resolution and/or prosecution of the case.
 - 2) The information is contained in any sex offense or sex-related investigation, which if divulged, would tend to lead to the victim's identification.

RI 15.3.c

- b. Law enforcement officers may not disclose the identity of any juvenile in releasing information to the general public as to the arrest, investigation, or disposition of any case involving a juvenile, unless under the written direction of a Justice of the Family Court;
- c. Medical information relating to health history, any diagnosis, medical condition, treatment provided or evaluation made by health care providers as defined in R.I.G.L. (5-37.3-3) unless specific consent has been obtained under the guidelines of R.I.G.L. (5-37.3-4);
- d. The identity of any critically injured or deceased person, before notification of the next of kin;
- e. Personnel data relating to any sworn member or employee of the Department will not be released. Questions concerning personnel will be referred to the Chief of Police;
- f. Exact information concerning an ongoing investigation, whether it is a crime or traffic accident, will not be released if the information would jeopardize the investigation or prosecution of a subject;
- g. Any police information released from other agencies that were furnished for confidential or law enforcement purposes, ex. BCI, Triple "I", license checks;
- h. Preliminary drafts, notes, impressions, memoranda, etc.;
- i. Confidential intelligence or operations will not be disclosed except by express permission of the Chief of Police;
- j. Sensitive or investigative information concerning internal investigations except by express permission of the Chief of Police per the RI Law Enforcement Officer's Bill of Rights; and
- k. Any records are required to be kept confidential by federal or state law or the rule of the court.

RI 3.14.c

F. ACCESS TO PUBLIC RECORDS

1. The Woonsocket Police Department has appointed the BCI Lieutenant as the Public Records Officer.
2. The Woonsocket Police Department shall provide the name of its Public Records Officer, business address, and phone number to the Department of the Attorney General.
3. The Woonsocket Police Department adopts the language of the public notice placard and agrees to maintain it in a prominent place in the lobby of the police station.
4. The Woonsocket Police Department adopts the Access to Public Records Procedure.
5. The Woonsocket Police Department agrees to maintain copies of the Access to Public Records Procedure at its front desk for distribution to the public.
 - a. If someone requests a copy of the Access to Public Records Procedure, it will be provided. These copies will be located at the front desk.
6. The Woonsocket Police Department agrees to maintain the public records request form at its front desk and shall make them readily available, as well as pens or pencils, to the public for completion.
 - a. In most cases, reports will be available within twenty-four (24) hours of the request on the following business day. Regular business hours of the record department will be 8:15 am to 3:50 PM.
 - b. Crash reports will be available within twenty-four (24) hours of the crash. Reports can be obtained from the Traffic Division window during normal business hours 8:00 am to 4:00 pm. Crash reports can also be obtained online at CrashReports.com. All other requested records will be forwarded to the Police Clerk (e.g. larceny reports, arrest reports, etc.)
 - c. The Records Clerk will be responsible for any redaction or refusal of the requested information. (Examples of redacted or denial of records; witness information, victim information, juvenile defendants, ongoing investigation, suspects, medical information, social security numbers, etc.)
7. The Woonsocket Police Department understands and respects the right of the public to access public records, and will treat citizens requesting public records with courtesy consistent with the Department's Rules and Regulations.
 - a. Officers may ask a person requesting records for their name and the reason for the report. However, if they refuse to give their name or the reason they are requesting a record they cannot and will not be denied access to the record requested.
 - b. If a person requesting a report refuses to give their name, the request will be completed and the copy will be left with a description of the record requested and "anonymous request" typed at the top of the envelope.
8. The Woonsocket Police Department recognizes that it must respond to public record requests within ten (10) business days. If due to the request, we must seek an extension of up to an additional twenty (20) business days, we must inform the requester within the initial ten (10) day period of the need for an extension. If we do not send the extension letter or respond to the request within the initial ten (10) days, our inaction is considered a denial and we may have waived our defenses if court action is filed.

9. If we need advice as to whether a document is a "public record", we will promptly contact our city solicitor. If he or she is unable to provide an answer, he or she may contact the Civil Division of the Department of the Attorney General for an advisory opinion. If the city solicitor is for some reason unavailable, the Chief of Police may contact the Department of Attorney General directly.
10. The Public Records Officer, or designee, should review the initial arrest report and other public documents to ensure that the privacy rights of individuals are maintained and informants or law enforcement techniques are redacted and not disclosed.
11. The Public Records Officer shall maintain a central file of all public records request forms. The file will contain the completed request forms once the request has been responded to or fulfilled. It is understood that in many instances the Woonsocket Police Department provides public records that are readily available to the requester without requiring them to complete the Public Records Request Form.

If someone feels as though they have been denied access to public records they have the right to appeal to the Chief of Police. If they are still not satisfied, they may file a complaint with the Department of the Attorney General.

G. MEDIA REVIEW

The Woonsocket Police Department will involve the news media in the development of changes in policies and procedures relating to the public information function by allowing them to review and comment on this procedure.

Per order,

Thomas F. Oates, III

Chief of Police

Written directives published within PowerDMS are in full force and effect on the referenced dates and have been approved by the Chief of Police