

General Order

Houston Police Department



ISSUE DATE:

February 28, 2025

NO.

800-02

REFERENCE: Supersedes all prior conflicting Circulars and Directives, and General Order 800-02, dated March 31, 2020

SUBJECT: MEDIA RELATIONS

POLICY

Employees shall be transparent, open, fair, and honest with the media in accordance with the guidelines outlined in this General Order and all applicable federal, state, and local laws.

This General Order applies to all employees.

DEFINITIONS

Media. A person who (1) distributes information through a traditional news organization or (2) operates an independent outlet (e.g., podcast, YouTube, blog).

1 PROCEDURES

When an employee is unsure if a person requesting information is in fact a representative of the media, the employee shall direct the person to contact the Office of Community Affairs.

The department recognizes that each employee has constitutional rights regarding free speech and respects each employee's right to express personal opinions; however, when an employee receives a media request for information or an interview, the employee **shall**:

- a. Refrain from making public statements about departmental policy or initiatives unless otherwise approved by the Office of the Chief of Police.
- b. **Emergency Situation:** Provide the media with information regarding an emergency scene or event and/or scene-related situation in a timely manner. After releasing any information, the employee shall notify the Office of Community Affairs as soon as practicable by sending an email to DL-CAMediaRelations@houstonpolice.org with any pertinent information and the officer's contact information. If the employee needs an immediate response, they should contact the Command Center, which shall contact a public information officer (PIO).
- c. **Non-Emergency Situation:** Coordinate the release of non-emergency and/or follow-up information by contacting the Office of Community Affairs, which shall assist in handling the media request prior to the response. When it is impractical to contact the Office of Community Affairs prior to the release of information, the employee shall do so as soon as practicable after releasing any information.
- d. **Critical Incidents:** Contact the Command Center when receiving a request regarding an injured officer, officer involved shooting, weapon discharge incident, or any other significant incident. The Command Center shall contact a PIO, who will handle the release of any related information.

Media At Police Scenes

When at a crime scene or an incident location with media present, each officer shall:

- a. Not allow the media access inside an established inner perimeter and/or immediate crime scene but may allow the media inside an established outer perimeter if it does not jeopardize their safety, public safety, or a criminal investigation.
- b. Assist members of the media by providing accurate information.
- c. Contact the Command Center and request to have a PIO respond to the scene if a PIO is needed to disseminate information to the media.
- d. Refer the media to investigative personnel when such personnel are present at a scene.

During special threat situations, the operational commander shall designate an area for the media and shall have officers direct the media to that location.

2 POLICE AND MEDIA RELATIONS

Officers shall not permit the media to question any witness, complainant, or suspect until the police have questioned such persons.

An employee shall not arrange for the media to interview any person under arrest. If the media attempts to interview an arrested person an officer is escorting (e.g., to a patrol vehicle), officers should not view the interaction as interfering.

An employee shall not release details of an internal investigation to the media until the department has concluded the investigation and only if approved by the Chief of Police.

When an office, command, or division is unable to handle the volume of media requests for information about a specific incident, or when an answer to such requests would compromise the success of an investigation or operation, a supervisor from that office, command, or division shall contact the Office of Community Affairs, brief a PIO about the incident, and ask the Office of Community Affairs to handle calls on the matter. The office, command, or division shall then refer all future calls regarding the matter to the Office of Community Affairs.

3 CONFIDENTIALITY OF INFORMATION

An employee shall not release confidential information (e.g., employee numbers, home addresses, personal telephone numbers) contained in any personnel database.

An employee shall not place an officer's home address and/or personal telephone number on forms such as incident and crash reports.

If a form requires any such personal information about an officer, the employee shall use the following:

- a. Name (officer's initials and last name)
- b. Address (1200 Travis)
- c. Phone Number (officer's work phone number)

This policy applies regardless of the duty status of the officer at the time of an incident.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "J. Noe Diaz, Jr.", with a stylized flourish at the end.

**J. Noe Diaz, Jr.
Chief of Police**