

18.122 MEDIA REQUESTS

Reference:

Procedure 12.200, Snow Emergencies and Hazardous Road Conditions
 Procedure 12.700, Search Warrants/Consent to Search
 Procedure 18.110, Department Medals, Awards, and Recognition
 Procedure 18.120, Public Records Requests
 Procedure 18.135, Public Appearances
 City of Cincinnati Media Protocol
 City of Cincinnati Records Policy
 Kallstrom v. City of Columbus
 Ohio Revised Code Section 149.43, Availability of Public Records for Inspection and Copying
 Ohio Revised Code Section 2151.421, Reporting Child Abuse or Neglect

Definitions:

Media Inquiry – A written or verbal request for an interview, comment or information.

Community Relations Unit (CRU) – Staffed by the Public Information Officer (PIO) and the Director of Communications, CRU is the Department's liaison with the media and the City of Cincinnati's Office of Communications. The PIO coordinates and provides interviews and briefings, and aids Department personnel in releasing information to the media. The Director of Communications prepares and distributes daily formal media releases about Police Department activities.

Purpose:

Establish protocols to provide responsive, consistent and transparent communications between the Police Department and the media.

Information:

This procedure is a guide for Department personnel to promote cooperation when interacting with the news media, control access of news media representatives at crime scenes, natural disasters and other catastrophic events, and ensure consistency when responding to media inquiries.

Policy:

CRU serves as the primary point of contact for media. When a media inquiry is received, Department personnel will contact the PIO prior to responding or participating in an interview.

Media personnel requesting information will be referred to CRU, Monday through Friday, 0800 to 1700 hours. After hours or if the PIO is unavailable, the officer-in-charge (OIC) of an incident is responsible for handling basic media requests for information concerning the incident.

Procedure:**A. Handling Media Inquiries**

1. When CRU is notified of a media inquiry, the PIO will promptly assess the inquiry and determine the appropriate response.
2. After consultation with the lead investigator or investigation OIC, the PIO, a bureau commander, Night Inspector, or a district/section commander, in the absence of the PIO, may authorize the on-site release of records, including ECC tapes and dispatch logs, to the media.
3. The Department will not release information from reports involving the abuse or neglect of a child in accordance with ORC 2151.421(H)(1) and (H)(2).
4. In cases of death or serious injury, the police will request the media not release the identity of a deceased or seriously injured person until the next of kin is notified.

B. Investigations - Arrests

1. From the initial stage of a criminal investigation until the completion of a trial or disposition without a trial, police personnel will direct all media requests for information to the supervisor responsible for the investigation. The supervisor, their designee, or CRU will release the information following the listed guidelines.
2. Before the issuance of an arrest warrant or the filing of any complaint, information, or indictment, the identity of a suspect is confidential and will not be disclosed.
 - a. This does not apply to 911 tapes in which a potential suspect is named.
 - b. Do not expose persons in custody to the media for pictures or interviews.
3. After the arrest or citation of a juvenile, information and reports pertaining to the arrest or citation are public record.
4. From the time of arrest, issuance of an arrest warrant, or the filing of any complaint, information, or indictment of any person 18 years of age or older, the following information will be released upon request:
 - a. A factual statement of the accused's name, sex, race, age, residence, occupation, and family status.
 - b. The facts of arrest, time and place of arrest, pursuit, and use of weapons.
 - c. Charges, including a brief description of the elements establishing probable cause.
 - d. The identity of the investigating and arresting officers or agency and the duration of the investigation.

- 1) Do not reveal the identity of covert officers.
 - 2) Do not reveal the home address or telephone number of any officer.
 - e. The suspect's prior criminal record, including arrests, indictments, or other charges.
5. Prior to an official court disposition, Department personnel **will not** release or authorize the release of any statement regarding the following without the Police Chief's approval:
- a. The existence or contents of any confession, admission, or statement given by the accused, or the refusal or failure of the accused to make any statement.
 - b. The performance or results of any examination or test, or the accused's refusal to submit to such examination or test.
 - c. The identity, testimony, or credibility of prospective witnesses.
 - d. The possibility of a guilty plea to an offense charged.
 - e. An opinion concerning the accused person's guilt, innocence, mental competency, or to the merits or evidence in the case.
6. Critical information will be withheld from the public if danger to a victim still exists, (e.g., a kidnapping victim not yet returned) in accordance with *Kallstrom v. City of Columbus*.
7. Releasing photographs:
- a. Requests for photographs of arrested persons will be referred to the Hamilton County Sheriff's Office Warrant/Identification Unit.
 - b. Do not release photographs of victims or witnesses.
- H. Incidents Involving Police Officers
1. Command officers, district/section commanders, or the OIC of an investigation has the authority to release the names of police personnel involved in an incident as soon as possible.
 - a. Before release, ensure the accuracy of the information.
 - b. Allow the officer the opportunity to notify family members before releasing the information if the report of an incident would cause them concern.
 - c. The timely release of the names of police personnel involved in a major incident adds to the credibility of the Department and forestalls the possibility of the media adversely commenting on the incident because information was withheld.

2. Notify the Police Chief immediately upon receipt of court ordered request for pictures of Department personnel in connection with an event which will reflect unfavorably upon the individual officer or the Department.
- I. Statistical Data - Criminal Reports
 1. The PIO will verbally provide information from Police Department administrative reports.
 2. Refer requests for copies of Police Department administrative reports to Police Records Section (PRS).
 - L. Media Access
 1. Media personnel have the same right and access to crime and incident scenes as the general public.
 2. The incident OIC should establish a media staging area, assign an officer to coordinate it until PIO arrives, and notify ECC of the media staging area location and name of the assigned officer.
 - a. The media staging area should be established outside the outer perimeter, in close proximity to the incident to satisfy both safety concerns and the media's right to cover the incident.
 3. Media personnel should not be staged near, or permitted access to, locations where they would be able to transmit live images of incidents such as SWAT operations involving hostages or barricaded persons.
 4. Media personnel must have approval of a district/section/unit supervisor or the Public Information Officer before entering non-public areas of a police facility. While in non-public areas of a police facility, media personnel must be accompanied by police personnel and wear a Visitor ID Pass.
 5. Refer to Procedure 12.700, Search Warrants/Consent to Search, regarding restrictions and guidelines for civilians, media, and third parties during the execution of a search warrant.