



Office Of The Sheriff
Allegany County
Maryland

GENERAL ORDER NO: **6-100.00**

TO: All Patrol and Judicial Personnel

RE: **PUBLIC INFORMATION AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS**

PURPOSE: To establish procedures for the timely release of appropriate information on events of public interest to members of the News Media. To emphasize the office's commitment to consider community opinion/desires in the formulation of departmental policy

EFFECTIVE DATE: 2003

REVISION DATE: 3/1/2016

6-101.00 Public Information

.01 Agency Commitments to Keep Public Informed

- A. The Sheriff's Office is committed to informing the citizens of Allegany County, via the news media, of events and conditions within the public domain, which are addressed by, or involve the Sheriff's Office. The ability of the Office to function effectively is directly affected by an informed citizenry encouraged to become involved and to support the office through information sharing and preventive type programs. Failure to provide complete and accurate information is counterproductive to a successful public relations climate and will create an unfavorable impression with the public.

- B. The exercise of good judgment is imperative in the releases of information. The ideal objective is to inform the public with need to know information, while refraining from releasing information, which would hinder the office's abilities to conduct its investigation. Personnel will release only accurate information known to be factual and appropriate for release in accordance with this order and Maryland Annotated Code entitled, State Government, Sections 10-611 through 10-628. In all other cases, the inquiring party will be placed in contact with personnel having the knowledge and/or authority to make the release.
- C. Agency personnel will be diligent in their efforts to inform media sources when involved in newsworthy incidents. However, publicity which may be harmful to the office or contrary in any way to the due process of law will be cleared through the Sheriff or his designee before being released.

6-102.00 Public Information Function

- 01. The public information function established within the office serves the following purposes;
 - A. To establish an identifiable position as a contact point for interaction with media sources. While all personnel should contribute information to the media, when applicable, this position will coordinate the overall public information function.
 - B. To assist news personnel in the formulation of routine news stories involving the office, to the extent duty obligations allow.
 - C. Requires responding to and returning calls to media sources whenever possible in order to establish a relationship based on dependability.
 - D. Arranging for news conferences when appropriate. Scheduling such events will be the purview of the Sheriff or his designee. The Sheriff or his designee will be responsible for coordinating and authorizing the release of information concerning any confidential agency investigations/operations.
 - E. The preparation and distribution of news releases.
 - F. Pertinent release of information about victims, witnesses, and suspects, consistent with law and agency policy.

6-103.00 Position Responsible for Coordinating Function

- .01 While the primary task of coordinating the release of public information will be identified within a specific position, it is the responsibility of all employees to bring news worthy information, within their realm of authority, to the attention of the media through the completion and submission of the agency news release form.
- .02 The position of Shift Supervisor assigned the responsibility of coordinating the public information function, and will act as the primary liaison between the office and media sources.
- .03 During events or conditions which attract widespread media coverage; (i.e., an incident of long duration attracting media sources from outside Allegany County , possibly with news personnel wishing to gain access to the scene) the Shift Supervisor will coordinate with the Sheriff in scheduling and conducting news briefings.
- .04 The Shift Supervisor will establish a pattern of consistent contact with media sources, daily, if any information is available which may be of public interest.
- .05 The Duty Officer will be the point of contact for inquiring media sources seeking information on routine matters when the Shift Supervisor is off duty. The Duty Officer also may release routine newsworthy events, which occur during his/her shift in response to regular inquiries, or may designate other communications personnel to give approved news releases.
- .06 Inquiries concerning the Allegany County Detention Center will be referred to the Detention Center Administrator or higher authority.
- .07 Inquiries relating to agency policies, procedures or practices will be referred to the Sheriff or his designee. The release of information concerning agency operations in a sustained or complex matter with possible public relations ramifications will be coordinated with the Sheriff or his designee. The release of information concerning a major joint operation between the Sheriff ' s Office and another agency will be coordinated with the Sheriff.
- .08 Inquiries about a joint operation between the Sheriff ' s Office and other agency(s) in which the other agency is the primary investigating agency will be referred to that agency.

- .09 Release of any information from Central Records files (except the release of report copies in accordance with agency policy), will be coordinated with the Shift Supervisor or higher authority.

6-104.00 Procedures for Press Releases

- .01. Frequency of Press Releases
 - A. Agency personnel will prepare appropriate information for release to news media sources (utilizing the Agency Media EMAIL address of aco_pressrelease@allconet.org) concerning a criminal event or other news worthy situation which the public should be made aware of, before the end of shift. The release will be reviewed by the Duty Officer prior to dissemination. Media sources to which information is released are predetermined by the Sheriff and are included in the address listed. No additional media dissemination is permitted without authorization.
 - B. The Shift Supervisor, through review of the press releases, capsule reports, and investigative reports, will coordinate the overall release of information each day if pertinent information is available of interest to the media.
 - C. Information concerning public safety; i.e., road conditions, hazards, etc., will be reported to all media sources immediately after being received.
- .02 Subject Matter **Not** For Release: The following subject matter will not be released without authorization from the Sheriff or his designee:
 - A. The identity of a sex crime victim
 - B. The identity of a suspect for which a warrant or an indictment has not been issued.
 - C. The existence of a criminal record or other impugning information concerning character which tends to label a subject as a criminal.
 - D. The existence or contents of statements or confession.
 - E. The performance, refusal, or results of a test participated in by the victim or the accused.

- F. The identity of actual or possible witnesses to a crime other than the victim, or comments involving an opinion as to the credibility or veracity of any witness.
 - G. Opinions as to the guilt or innocence of an accused, or as to the possibility of any plea or pleas bargains.
 - H. The identity of juvenile accused who has not been waived by the court to adult status. Also, other unique information; i.e., address which could identify the juvenile. Juvenile age and sex, crime, city of residence, and other details about the crime may be released. Care must be taken in releasing reports that names and other personal information regarding juvenile accused be deleted, such as in accident reports.
 - I. Names of deceased prior to next of kin notification. If next of kin cannot be contacted within 24 hours, the name may be released.
 - J. Information concerning agency tactical plans or other specialized enforcement activities without authorization from the Sheriff or his designee.
 - K. Unique aspects of a crime should not be released nor should every detail of a crime be released. Withholding some pertinent information creates a validation tool if a person confesses to the crime.
 - L. Reported suicides not connected with additional crimes.
 - M. Any intelligence material considered confidential.
- .03 Subject Matter **Appropriate** For Release: Subject matter appropriate for release to media sources include:
- A. Type of event or crime. When and where occurring and a brief explanation of known facts.
 - B. Identity of the victim/person reporting the crime except victims of sexual crimes. If a victim of a crime requests their name not be released, that request will be honored. The Sheriff's Office, however, has no control over the name being released if obtained from another source.

- C. Information regarding types and value of property taken. Any physical injuries or death involved in the crime.
- D. General information on type and length of investigation.
- E. Other general information such as description of suspect or vehicles may be released for possible civilian identification.
- F. If a warrant has been issued, the name, address, description, etc., of the suspect may be released.
- G. Traffic accidents with fatalities, substantial injuries, or a large amount of property damage.
- H. Information concerning public safety.

6-105.00 Appropriate Information for Release After Arrest

- .01 The defendant ' s name, age, address along with other pertinent background information (excluding previous criminal history information).
- .02 Nature of charge.
- .03 Investigating deputy unless involved in an undercover or other sensitive assignment.
- .04 Status after initial appearance; i.e., bond set, released on personal recognizance.
- .05 Circumstances surrounding the arrest.

6-106.00 Media releases will be given to all media sources to include: Newspaper, Radio, Television and social media.

6-107.00 Personal Authorized to Release Information

- .01 Normally, information will be released to media sources via telephone through inquiries to the Office, or by calls to the media from the Shift Supervisor, or a Duty Officer. In other circumstances, personnel are allowed to release information as follows:

- A. At an Incident Scene: Depending upon the nature and duration of an incident scene, media representatives may go directly to the scene. Agency personnel, with accurate information at the scene, may provide information and assistance to media personnel consistent with this order and as duty obligations will allow. If agency activities and media coverage are extensive, a scene media liaison officer will be designated and media inquiries will be directed to that person. If the Sheriff's Office is serving in a support capacity; i.e., at a fire scene, inquiries will be directed to the primary agency. If an on-scene media liaison officer is not required, media personnel with questions will be told that a press release will be compiled **before the end of shift**, and that information may be obtained from the Shift Supervisor or in his absence, the Duty Officer.
- B. From Agency Files: Media personnel will not be allowed direct access to agency files. While in the Patrol Building, media personnel will be escorted. Information from files concerning criminal activity or other incidents which the public should be made aware of can be released by the Duty Officer, Shift Supervisor, or higher authority, in accordance with this order and consistent with law. Any inquiries for information on internal investigations, or other agency operational policies or procedures will be referred to the Sheriff or his designee.
- C. Inquiries from media personnel regarding an ongoing investigation will be forwarded to the investigating deputy. If the release of the information is appropriate, the deputy will prepare a press release and submit it to the Duty Officer for approval. If such contact is not feasible, the Shift Supervisor or Duty Officer may be able to answer the question with information from the Open Case File in the Agency's Incident program. Care must be taken, however, not to give information in an ongoing open investigation which could jeopardize the case. Any information given will be consistent with this order. If there is any question as to the propriety of releasing information, the request should be forwarded to the Shift Supervisor or higher authority.
- D. If the Shift Supervisor is not available, the responsibility for overall coordination of the release of information falls to the Duty Officer.
- E. Information releases pertaining to auxiliary type activities; i.e., Police

6-108.00 Media Personnel Access

- .01 During the occurrence of serious/sensational incidents; i.e., fires, natural disasters, hostage situations, plane crashes, etc., media personnel may respond directly to the incident site. While agency personnel will assist media personnel whenever possible, deputies have a legal right to prevent media personnel from being in a position or taking action that would interfere with investigative or rescue efforts, or that would place them in harms way. Appropriate perimeter lines will be established at such sites in order to control access into the area. If media personnel respond to such an event, an area will be designated as soon as possible for news briefings and all media personnel directed to that area. Deputies will not interfere with news media personnel in the performance of their duties, as long as media actions are not in violation of law, or not hampering rescue/enforcement actions.
- .02 Media personnel should be allowed into a scene as soon as no danger exists, and to do so would not jeopardize the investigation or destroy evidence. If the scene is private property, however, media personnel must abide by the wish of the owner with regards to access.
- .03 Incidents in which media personnel violate the law or interfere with duties of rescue/enforcement personnel will be reported to the Sheriff through the Shift Supervisor. The Shift Supervisor may contact the media person 's Supervisor if circumstances dictate.
- .04 Personnel may require identification from anyone who requests close access to a scene and claiming to be with the media. If there is doubt as to the identity, deputies may deny access pending satisfactory identification.

6-109.00 Media Input into Agency Policy

- A. This agency order on public information may be disseminated to media sources upon their request. Comments/questions from those sources and that information obtained will be considered in policy formulation with the media.

6-110.00 Community Relations

- .01 Ties with the Community

- A. The office will strive to cultivate a positive relationship with the community through pro-active activities. Activities include Crime Prevention Programs such as Neighborhood Watch organizations, School Programs such as the DARE Program and Hug-a-tree program, attendance at council meetings in the Office ' s service area, Police Week activities, etc. Through such activities, the office will become better acquainted with the needs and concerns of the citizens in the service area.
- B. Community Relations Function: The community relations function will be coordinated by each supervisor. Cooperation between the Sheriff ' s Office and citizens will be stressed as an effective, inexpensive method to address law enforcement related problems. Grass roots support from the citizenry has the potential to produce significant information as to any criminal activity in the area. While the supervisors will be responsible for coordinating the Community Relations Function and associated programs, the ultimate level to which cooperation rises depends upon individual actions and attitudes of agency personnel. All personnel are responsible for presenting, through their action, the image of an enforcement officer who, not only works in a community, but is also a part of that community. The objective of community relations activities will reach maximum benefit only if personnel realize that all share in the responsibility.
- C. Community Relations programs will be evaluated annually to ensure that activities are still applicable to community problems and concerns.
- D. The Sheriff ' s Office is committed to correcting any actions, practices, or attitudes that may contribute to community tension. Personnel who may be aware of such a problem are encouraged to bring it to the attention of appropriate personnel as soon as possible. Recognition of any such problem at an early stage and appropriate preventive action may ward off greater problems in the future.
- E. Obtaining Community Input
- F. Opinions and desires of the citizens of Allegany County will be taken into consideration during the development of agency policies. Input from citizens can be obtained via contacts with civilians made possible through pro-active programs such as Neighborhood Watch, Council meetings, or opinion surveys.

By Order Of:

Craig A. Robertson, Sheriff