



HOWARD COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE  
**GENERAL ORDER ADM-14**  
**MEDIA RELATIONS**  
EFFECTIVE MARCH 6, 2013

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This General Order contains the following numbered sections:

- I. POLICY
- II. RELEASE OF INFORMATION
- III. PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER
- IV. CANCELLATION

**I. POLICY<sup>1</sup>**

The Howard County Sheriff's Office (HCSO) will develop and maintain a flow of information to the news media with a minimum disruption of business activity. The HCSO will make information on its policies, programs, and daily activities available to the media on an as needed basis.

The HCSO, as an agency of government, is open to any reasonable and timely examination by the media that does not disrupt its normal activities, jeopardize its investigations, or otherwise reveal information protected by law.

**II. RELEASE OF INFORMATION**

A. Any official information, reports, photographs, or other materials that reflect the official position of the HCSO must first be approved by the Sheriff, or his designee, prior to their release.<sup>2</sup>

- 1. Confidential or internal office memoranda that are not part of public information shall not be released without the express consent of the Sheriff.
- 2. Personal information, addresses, and telephone numbers of HCSO personnel may not be released without a personnel member's express permission.
- 3. Under no circumstances will an employee's home address and/or telephone number be released over the telephone.
- 4. When feasible, requests for information should be directed to the governmental agency that generated the document the HCSO is servicing.

B. Internal Investigations<sup>3</sup>

- 1. Internal investigations are personnel matters. The HCSO and its personnel are prohibited by law from releasing information to the media about internal investigations unless the personnel member involved waives the privilege of confidentiality.
- 2. Personnel may request a waiver of the confidentiality of their cases by submission of a Form 16 to the Sheriff.
- 3. Personnel who release information about their cases to the media will be deemed by the HCSO to have waived confidentiality.

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<sup>1</sup> CALEA 54.1.2

<sup>2</sup> CALEA 82.1.1 c

<sup>3</sup> CALEA 82.1.1 c

4. Personnel who elect an open trial board or other open hearing, or who appeal a decision to the Circuit Court, will be deemed by the HCSO to have waived confidentiality.
  5. The HCSO may comment to the media in those cases where confidentiality has been waived. Any comments will be made only with the express consent of the Sheriff.
- C. Media Access to Incident Scenes & HCSO Headquarters<sup>4</sup>
1. HCSO members will accord appropriate privileges to local, national, and international news media representatives, including photographers displaying appropriate identification (place of employment credentials).
  2. Whenever information must be denied to a media representative, the reason for the denial shall be fully explained.
  3. Members will extend every possible courtesy to accredited media personnel at incident scenes or at any HCSO headquarters.
    - a. Media personnel will not be restricted from a scene beyond what is necessary for crime scene preservation.
    - b. Media personnel will be permitted as close or be granted closer access (generally providing an opportunity to view the scene) than that which is granted to the general public.
    - c. Access arrangements will:
      - a. Be restricted until the deputy in charge determines the area is safe.
      - b. Allow press vehicles and equipment to be located as close or be granted closer than the general public as long as those arrangements do not interfere with the sheriff mission at hand.
  4. The Incident Commander shall designate a preliminary press area as soon as possible and as close to the scene as safety and operational requirements allow at the incidents listed below. Public information will be provided to media representatives at the following:
    - a. A scene involving major crime, such as hostage and barricade situation.
    - b. A scene involving a major fire, natural disaster, or other catastrophic event.
    - c. Bomb threats or emergencies, man-made disasters, civil disturbances and other unusual occurrences.
  5. Media personnel will be allowed to photograph, film, and videotape members, suspects, witnesses or victims under any circumstances where a member of the public would be permitted to view the same. On private property, photography, filming or videotaping requires the permission of the owner or owner's representative.
  6. Members of the HCSO will neither encourage nor prevent the photographing of defendants in public places. However, in no case will posing defendants for photographs be allowed.
  7. Persons in custody will not be permitted to be interviewed nor will members be interviewed while an arrestee or prisoner is present.

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<sup>4</sup> CALEA 54.1.3

8. Members will not instruct or warn victims or witnesses not to talk to the media personnel, although members may caution victims or witnesses about disclosing specific evidentiary information.
9. Media personnel will be afforded cooperation when visiting Sheriff Headquarters.
10. Requests for HCSO participation in feature articles and programs will be considered on a case-by-case basis by the Public Information Officer (PIO). The PIO will first contact the member advising them of the request, which they may decline. If the member has not first been contacted by the PIO they are to assume that the request has not or has yet to be approved. If approved, permission for interviewing HCSO members and photographing Sheriff Headquarters will be limited to the specific scope of approval.
11. Sworn and non-sworn members of the HCSO who experience difficulties with media personnel will report the matter promptly to the PIO.

### III. **PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER**<sup>5</sup>

- A. The Public Information Officer (PIO) is designated by the Sheriff to be the primary spokesperson for the HCSO.
- B. The functions of the PIO shall include, at a minimum:
  1. Assisting media personnel in covering news stories at the scenes of incidents;<sup>6</sup>
  2. Preparing and distributing agency media releases;<sup>7</sup>
  3. Arranging for, and assisting at media press conferences;<sup>8</sup>
  4. Coordinating and authorizing the release of information about victims, witnesses, and suspects;<sup>9</sup>
  5. Coordinating and authorizing the release of information concerning confidential agency investigations and operations; AND<sup>10</sup>
  6. Developing procedures for the release of information when other public service agencies are involved in a mutual effort.<sup>11</sup>
- C. The PIO may issue a briefing sheet to the Duty Officer if the PIO is not available to respond to media requests.

### IV. **CANCELLATION**

This General Order cancels and replaces General Order ADM-14, Media Relations, dated September 11, 2009.

Authority:

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James F. Fitzgerald  
Sheriff

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<sup>5</sup> CALEA 54.1.1

<sup>6</sup> CALEA 54.1.1 a

<sup>7</sup> CALEA 54.1.1 b

<sup>8</sup> CALEA 54.1.1 c

<sup>9</sup> CALEA 54.1.1 d

<sup>10</sup> CALEA 54.1.1 e

<sup>11</sup> CALEA 54.1.1 f