





POLICIES AND PROCEDURES MANUAL

	PUBLIC INFORMATION	
	POLICY NUMBER: 54-1	ISSUING AUTHORITY 
	EFFECTIVE DATE: January 1, 2025	Christine Elow Police Commissioner

I. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS AND GUIDELINES

Police departments have an obligation to inform the public, with candor and transparency, of events that affect the lives of the citizens in their communities. Furthermore, when serious incidents occur, departments should communicate with citizens and the media swiftly and openly except where the law requires confidentiality. A good, working relationship between police departments and the media can help to build an atmosphere of trust and convey useful information to the public when needed.

II. POLICY

It is the policy of the Cambridge Police Department to:

- A. authorize a position of Public Information Officer to represent the department with regard to media relations;
- B. cooperate fully with authorized news media representatives in their efforts to gather factual, public information, as long as these activities do not unduly interfere with departmental operations, infringe upon individual rights, compromise investigations, or violate the law;
- C. promote the tenets of procedural justice in its media relations including transparency, inclusion, voice, fairness, and impartiality.

III. DEFINITIONS

- A. *News Media Representatives*: Persons who are directly employed by agencies of the electronic or print media, such as radio, television, and newspapers, and who are accredited by the Department of Public Safety and Security.
- B. *PIO*: Public Information Officer who serves as the Director of Communications and Media Relations for the police department and conducts media interviews, press conferences, and other public information functions.

- C. *Public Information*: Information that may be of interest to the public regarding policy, procedures, or events involving the department. This also includes newsworthy information that is not legally protected, and which does not unduly interfere with the mission of the department, infringe upon the rights of a defendant, or compromise the legitimate safety and privacy interests of officers, victims, witnesses, or others.

IV. PROCEDURES

A. 54.1.1 (O) Activities

1. The public information function shall include:
 - a. assisting media personnel in covering news stories at the scenes of incidents;
 - b. providing on-call availability to respond to news media;
 - c. preparing and distributing agency media releases;
 - d. arranging for and assisting at media conferences;
 - e. coordinating and authorizing the release of information about victims, witnesses, and suspects;
 - f. coordinating and authorizing the release of information concerning confidential agency investigations and operations;
 - g. developing procedures for releasing information when other public service agencies are involved in a mutual effort; and
 - h. providing guidelines for the use of social media by the agency.

B. 54.1.2 (O) Policy Input

1. The department involves the media in the development of policies and procedures relating to the public information function.
 - a. On occasion, the Police Commissioner will meet with local news media representatives to discuss any problems that may have been encountered and to advise them of any changes to our policies and procedures that may affect them.
 - b. The Commissioner may also solicit input from media representatives regarding ways to improve policies and procedures for mutual benefit.

C. 54.1.3 (M) Media Access

1. The department shall provide for control of media access at locations where such access would interfere with law enforcement operations.
 - a. The department recognizes the authorized Press Card issued by the Department of Public Safety and Security as the official identification for members of the press. Failure of media

personnel to present authorized identification may provide grounds for restricting access to requested information or to incident scenes.

- b. Authorized news media representatives shall have reasonable access to the department PIO/Director of Communications & Media Relations and the Police Commissioner. When the release of information must be denied to a media representative, the basis for that denial shall be fully and courteously explained.

D. 54.1.4 (O) Public Information Officer Training

- 1. Personnel assigned as a Public Information Officer or designated to perform that function shall receive training for the position.
 - a. Training will be provided by the Director of Communications and/or nationally recognized organizations, including but not limited to the Massachusetts Municipal Police Training Committee, International Association of Chiefs of Police, FBI Law Enforcement Executive Development Association, and the National Information Officers Association.

E. Releasing Investigative Information

1. Information That May Be Released

- a. From the initial stage of a criminal investigation until the completion of a trial or disposition without trial, police personnel shall refer all requests for information or records to the Director of Communications & Media Relations, the Police Commissioner, or ranking officer in charge of the investigation. Information that may be released in connection with investigations includes:
 - (1) the type or nature of an event or crime;
 - (2) the location, date and time, injuries sustained, damages, and a general description of how the incident occurred;
 - (3) the type and quantity of property taken;
 - (4) the age and approximate address (not specific residential address) of a victim or witness;
 - (5) requests for aid in locating evidence, a complainant, or a suspect; and
 - (6) the number of officers or people involved in an event or investigation, and the length of the investigation.
 - (7) Exceptions include incidents that are overseen by the District Attorney's Office.

2. Information That May Not Be Released

- a. Information that may not be released in connection with investigations of an incident or crime, unless specifically authorized by the Police Commissioner, includes:
 - (1) the identity of a suspect prior to arrest, unless such information would aid in apprehending the suspect or serve to warn the public of potential danger;

- (2) the identity of any victim of a domestic or sexual assault or any related information that, if divulged, could lead to the victim's identity;
- (3) the identity of victims or witnesses, if such disclosure would prejudice an investigation to any significant degree, or if it would place the victim or witness in personal danger;
- (4) the identity of any juvenile, less than 18 years of age, who is a suspect or defendant in a case subject to the jurisdiction of the juvenile court;
- (5) the identity of any complainant less than 18 years of age;
- (6) the identity of any critically injured or deceased person prior to notification to next of kin;
- (7) the results of any investigative procedure such as lineups, polygraph tests, or other procedures; the fact that these tests have been performed may be revealed without further comment;
- (8) information which, if prematurely released, may interfere with the investigation or apprehension of a suspect, such as the nature of leads, specifics of a *Modus Operandi*, details of the crime known only to the perpetrator and the police, or information that may cause the suspect to flee or avoid apprehension;
- (9) statements by or identifying information about a confidential informant;
- (10) information that may be of evidentiary value in criminal proceedings, including but not limited to, the content of narrative statements of victims or witnesses; the location of surveillance locations; method of surveillance; or confessions or statements by criminal defendants or suspects;
- (11) specific cause of death, unless officially determined by the medical examiner; and
- (12) the home addresses or telephone numbers of any members of the police department.

3. Information Regarding Suicide

- a. If the department is collaborating with the District Attorney's Office, the fact that a suicide or suspected suicide has occurred may be confirmed to the media, together with factual information describing how it happened, the approximate age, address, and gender of the victim.
- b. The fact that a suicide note exists may also be acknowledged without further comment.

4. Internal Investigations

- a. Sensitive information relating to an internal investigation of police officers and other members of the police department shall not be released without the express permission of the Police Commissioner.

5. Information Released by Individual Officers

- a. Nothing in this policy precludes members of the department from replying to charges of misconduct that are publicly made against them.
- b. The policy does not preclude police officers from participating in any legislative, administrative, or investigative hearing; nor does it supersede any more restrictive rule governing the release of information concerning juveniles or other offenders.

F. Releasing Arrest Information

1. Information That May Be Released

- a. Following an arrest or the issuance of an arrest warrant or indictment, it is permissible to release the following information.
 - (1) The accused person's name, age, and address unless the accused is less than 18 years of age or is taken into custody because of mental illness.
 - (2) The time and place of arrest, whether a pursuit was involved, or resistance was encountered, whether weapons were used, charges placed against the suspect, and description of contraband seized.
 - (3) Any information relative to the expected date and location for arraignment.

2. Information That May Not be Released

- a. Following arrest and formal charging of a suspect, but prior to adjudication, the following types of information shall not be released.
 - (1) Prior criminal conviction record; the existence of any outstanding default warrants.
 - (2) Information concerning the character or reputation of the defendant.
 - (3) Existence or contents of any confession, admission, or statement of a defendant or his/her failure or unwillingness to make a statement.
 - (4) Performance or results of any tests, or a defendant's refusal or failure to submit to tests, such as a polygraph, breathalyzer, or field sobriety tests.
 - (5) The identity, statements, or expected testimony of any witness or victim.
 - (6) The identity, testimony, or opinions about the credibility of prospective witnesses.
 - (7) The names of victims or witnesses, unless the victim is deceased and only when done so in collaboration of the District Attorney's Office.
 - (8) Any opinion about the guilt or innocence of a defendant or the merits of the case.
 - (9) Any opinion, knowledge, or speculation of the potential for a plea bargain or other pretrial action.
 - (10) Any information relative to the identity of a juvenile defendant, who is less than 18 years of age, who is a suspect or defendant in a case subject to the jurisdiction of the juvenile court.

(11) Any information received from other law enforcement agencies without that agency's concurrence in releasing such information.

(12) Any other information that is exempt from the Massachusetts Public Records Law.

G. Media Access to Crime/Incident Scenes

1. Department personnel shall extend every reasonable courtesy to media representatives at crime/incident scenes to the degree that such access does not interfere with the police mission, movement of traffic, or public safety.
2. Whenever police reasonably believe it is necessary to prohibit all but emergency personnel near a crime or incident scene, they may bar the entry of media representatives.
3. News media shall not be allowed access to any area or scene of an incident or crime where there is a possibility that evidence may be damaged, altered, destroyed, or otherwise prejudiced by its being published or portrayed. Once evidence has been processed, removed, and secured by the department, the media may be allowed to enter only with permission of the commanding officer at the scene. If the public has access to an area, the media should have access to the same area.
 - a. On private property, photography, film, or videotape recording requires the permission of the owner or the owner's representative.
 - b. Suspects or accused persons in custody shall not be posed or arrangements made for photographs, telecasts, or interviews, nor shall department personnel pose with suspects or accused persons in custody.
 - c. When an individual is charged with a criminal offense and is sought by law enforcement authorities, photographs and/or videos may be released to the media to help locate the individual. No departmental photographs, videotape, film, or composites of subjects in custody shall otherwise be released to the media unless authorized by the Police Commissioner or designee. These materials are considered criminal offender record information and are protected by statute. (See M.G. L. c. 6, § 167 et seq.)
4. At the scene of major crimes or other newsworthy events where a perimeter is established, the officer in charge shall designate a preliminary press area as early as possible and as close to the scene as safety and operational requirements allow. If the PIO/Director of Communications & Media Relations is requested to respond to the scene, it will be his/her responsibility to serve as the principal liaison with media officials who are assembled in the Press Area. Either the department's designated PIO or incident commander will coordinate with the Director of Communications & Media Relations on when information will be released and what will be said during these briefings. Depending upon the seriousness of the incident, prior to releasing any information to the press, the Director of Communications & Media Relations and/or the PIO will confer with:
 - a. the Department's Legal Counsel; and/or

- b. the Middlesex County District Attorney's Office.
5. In prolonged or sensitive operations, the following guidelines will be in effect.
 - a. The public information site will be removed from the immediate area or scene of the heightened emergency.
 - b. The public information site will not be set up within the immediate area of the Tactical Command Post.
 - c. The public information site should be set up in a location where there is good cell phone service available.
 - d. There should be sufficient space to accommodate those who wish to be in attendance.
 - e. It is preferable that the public information be located at a site other than the police station, if available.
 6. Whenever speaking to members of the news media or considering releasing information, members of the department authorized to speak to the media should keep the following guidelines in mind.
 - a. Generally, nothing is *off the record*. If information is given out in the presence of media personnel, then it should be expected to be seen again in print, regardless of the context in which it was given out.
 - b. Clearly indicate when a determination has been made that it is inappropriate to comment on a particular matter.
 - c. Be thoroughly briefed on the incident for which you are releasing information.
 - d. Never disclose information that is prohibited by law or might jeopardize an operation or investigation.
 - e. If possible, have someone present who is completely familiar with the operation or investigation, so that information can be supplied to the news release officer.
 - f. If information is not available at the time of the press conference, clearly indicate that fact in your statement.
 - g. Whenever possible, prepared statements should always be cleared through the Director of Communications & Media Relations and the Police Commissioner.
 - h. If it appears that a news conference will be lengthy, it is good practice to update the media on a regular basis.
 - i. A prepared statement is the preferred method of presenting information at a news conference or when information is being distributed by other means.
 7. The department may utilize news releases and/or social media posts as a vehicle to convey public information and may rely on the news media to assist in the release of critical

information during any crisis. The use of a news release and/or social media post also serves as a basis to ensure that the information being released is accurate and uniform.

- a. Whenever practical, news releases and/or social media posts shall be issued to the news media whenever there is an unusual event or incident. The frequency of written news releases and/or social media posts shall be determined according to the specific circumstances or as deemed appropriate by the Director of Communications & Media Relations or the Police Commissioner.
 - b. When working with sensitive information or events, the content of any news releases requires the prior approval of the Director of Communications & Media Relations or the Police Commissioner. Information contained within the news release shall be consistent with the guidelines that appear in this policy.
 - c. News releases shall be made available to any requesting news organization that seeks information pertaining to a specific incident or those organizations that are inquiring as to whether there are any newsworthy events.
8. Press conferences shall be conducted to provide the news media with timely and accurate information, while maintaining the integrity of an investigation or the response to an emergency. A press conference may only be held with the express permission of the Police Commissioner, or designee. Press conferences are intended for representatives of the news media with proper credentials or those authorized to be in attendance.
 - a. This policy does not preclude or prevent either one of the police associations from conducting their own press conferences in defense of or in response to allegations that may have been lodged against their respective members.
 9. At the scene of significant accidents or manmade or natural disasters, the principles of media cooperation shall be maintained so long as they do not interfere with the mission of the police, fire, medical, or other emergency relief workers.
 10. Media access to and movement within fire lines shall be controlled by the Cambridge Fire Department officer-in-charge. The ranking police officer at the scene shall establish an observation point from which the media may observe and photograph the incident. At the discretion of the Fire Department officer-in-charge, an inner perimeter may be established for the media to record the event.

H. Records and Reports

1. The Department will maintain a Daily Log in compliance with M.G.L. c. 41, § 98F. The Police Log, and other administrative reports of criminal activity as may be specified by the Police Commissioner, will be made available daily to media representatives by the Director of Communications & Media Relations or other employee as designated by the Director of Communications & Media Relations or the Police Commissioner.
2. Media representatives shall be denied access to the contents of investigative or incident reports and records release if the information would:

- a. interfere with law enforcement proceedings, including pending investigations;
 - b. deprive a person of the right to a fair trial or an impartial adjudication or give one party to a controversy an undue advantage by exclusive access to such information;
 - c. constitute an unwarranted invasion of the personal privacy rights of another person;
 - d. reveal the identity of an individual who has furnished information to the department under confidential circumstances;
 - e. disclose investigative techniques and procedures, thereby impairing the future effectiveness of the department; or
 - f. endanger the life or physical safety of any person.
- I. Other Public Information Forums
- 1. Other types of information that the department may make public include:
 - a. announcement of public community meetings or other public events;
 - b. public safety announcements or other types of crime prevention information;
 - c. requests for community assistance in community-based projects or initiatives;
 - d. information regarding regulatory issues where the police department is attempting to gain public compliance or involvement;
 - e. announcements of programs or projects that the police department may be participating in or undertaking;
 - f. seeking input from the public or requesting the community to evaluate the police department's performance; and
 - g. information relevant to the public where the police department is seeking information or other forms of public assistance.
 - 2. Other Types of public information include:
 - a. Cambridge's community-based publications;
 - b. Cambridge's Alert Network, including Code Red, Tip411, and NextDoor;
 - c. The City of Cambridge's web site, and the police department's web page;
 - d. public notices and other public postings;
 - e. public notices distributed to the local media;
 - f. neighborhood community meetings, community groups, and other community organized meetings;
 - g. informational brochures;
 - h. electronic alerts;

- i. CCTV – Cambridge Municipal TV;
- j. community-based information networks, such as the Cambridgeport list serve and those other communications networks that have been established by other community-based organizations; and
- k. social media tools, such as, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.