



**PROBATION AND PAROLE BUREAU
STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES**

Procedure No.: P&P 10-5	Subject: MEDIA RELATIONS
Reference: 2-15-112, MCA; 41-5-215, and 216, MCA; 46-23-504, MCA; 53-1-203, MCA DOC 1.1.8; DOC 1.5.6; DOC 1.8.1; DOC 3.3.4	Page 1 of 6
Effective Date: 06/01/00	Revision Dates: 09/20/01; 03/14/03; 08/06/09
Signature / Title: /s/ Ron Alsbury	

I. BUREAU DIRECTIVE:

In an effort to facilitate positive relations with the public and media, Probation & Parole Bureau employees will provide timely, accurate and complete information to the public, which includes Bureau operations, accomplishments, critical incidents and emergencies. Inquiries will be answered in an accurate and timely manner, in keeping with the security concerns of the Bureau, and in compliance with all statutes governing confidentiality, public information and the rights of privacy.

II. DEFINITIONS:

Bureau Administrator (BA) – Adult Community Corrections Division Administrator, Probation & Parole Bureau Chief, Regional Administrators, and Probation & Parole Officer IIs.

Communications Director – An official spokesperson for the Department of Corrections’ (Department) programs, policies and plans, who develops Department communications policy and procedure and ensures the public is given accurate, consistent, and timely information.

News Media Plan – Written procedures that guide Public Information Officers in their day-to-day efforts to effectively work with the news media.

News Media Representatives – Properly credentialed representatives of any accredited news organization that reports news for a general circulation newspaper, news magazine, national or international news service, radio or television news program, and internet news service. Authors and freelance journalists who are researching and/or writing about corrections or criminal justice issues must provide their credentials to verify their association with legitimate news or media organizations. Nothing in this definition is intended to remove from the Department Director, Department Communications Director, or facility PIO the discretion to determine who constitutes news media representatives for purposes of access to offenders.

News Release – An official written statement distributed to the news media to inform the public and provide media coverage related to the Bureau’s programs and services.

Offender – Any individual in the custody or under the supervision of the Department or its contracted service providers.

Program – Any prison, correctional facility or community-based program operated under Department jurisdiction or contract.

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Public Information Officer (PIO) – A Bureau Administrator who has been designated to handle public information duties.

III. PROCEDURES:

A. Media Relations/General Issues:

Designated PIOs will handle the day-to-day public and media relations duties of the region or office to which they are assigned, subject to the guidance and direction of the Probation & Parole (P&P) Bureau Chief and/or Adult Community Corrections Division (ACCD) Administrator, and in keeping with the Department's and the Governor's media plan.

PIOs will provide current, factual verbal and written information to the media; however, at times information for immediate release is limited due to the confidentiality, safety, and security needs of the Bureau and its staff. In those cases, every effort will be made to provide the public and media with as much information as possible and to establish times when additional information may be available.

B. Access to ACCD Facilities, Programs, and Offenders

1. News media representatives will be permitted access to ACCD programs, facilities, personnel and offenders at reasonable times of the day, with proper notice, and when there is no direct threat to program security. The Department encourages the media to make on-site visits to these programs and facilities as time and availability of staff permit. Program administrators will make every effort to accommodate reasonable requests from the media for on-site visits. The media will have the ability to interview offenders consistent with the security needs of the facility or program; the availability of staff to arrange interviews and provide escorts; and the willingness of offenders to speak to the media.
2. Offenders under community supervision do not ordinarily need to provide written consent or receive Department approval for news media interviews. Consent will be provided by the offender with the submission of *P&P 10-5(A) Interview/Image Consent Form* when:
 - a. an interview is arranged by a Department staff member; or
 - b. an interview occurs at a Department facility, program, or office.

C. Media Spokesperson:

PIOs will be the designated spokespersons for the P&P Bureau. Other employees will not comment to the news media as an official Department spokesperson unless specifically requested to do so by a BA or the Department Director (Director). To ensure accuracy of information provided, Bureau staff is not authorized to publish or release original printed materials developed by the Department without prior approval from an administrator or the Director. Bureau staff who wish to speak to the media as private citizens and not as representatives of the Bureau, will make those media contacts during off-duty hours, and make clear to the media they are representing their own personal views, not those of the Department or the P&P Bureau.

D. Media Calls/Inquiries:

Media calls will be directed to the attention of the appropriate PIO or the Communications Director, who will respond promptly and accurately. The following will be taken into

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consideration when responding to inquiries from the media:

1. Responses will be confined to providing information about the P&P Bureau. Comments pertaining to official Department activities, operations or events at other Department facilities/programs should generally not be made.
2. In the case of a Bureau emergency, all public and media access may be limited. In this event, the BA will identify a press spokesperson who will periodically brief all media on emergencies. A media briefing center may be established away from the location of tactical operations if an emergency continues for an extended period of time.
3. The goal of the Bureau is to maximize the flow of accurate and timely information. Therefore, all requests for information will be answered unless an individual's right of privacy is in question, or there are legitimate security issues relating to the request that warrant the information not be released.

Whenever there is a question about releasing information to the press or the public, the P&P Bureau Chief and/or ACCD Administrator or the Director's Office should be contacted for direction. In cases where there may be a significant delay in responding to the inquiry, the spokesperson will explain the reasons for the delay and only provide information which can be released in the interim.

E. Release of Information:

Under normal circumstances, news media inquiries will be directed to and handled by the PIO or Communications Director. The following are some general guidelines for the release of information to the media and the public:

1. Information about non-restricted Departmental operations, policies, procedures, and issues, directed to the Central Office, will be released through the Communications Director.
2. PIOs will be responsible for releasing information pertaining to the P&P Bureau. The Communications Director will advise and assist PIOs in matters relating to national and international news media requests for access to, or information about, the Bureau. Any contact from a national or international news representative must be reported to the Communications Director as soon as possible. If a local reporter's inquiry involves an issue that is deemed controversial or impacts the Department, the Communications Director must be contacted as soon as possible.
3. Bureau employees are not allowed to make official statements on behalf of the Department unless authorized to do so by the PIO. Staff should refer all media inquiries about official Department business to the PIO.
4. PIOs will be responsible for notifying the media about newsworthy incidents. The content of such notifications should be provided to the Communications Director on an as-needed basis, or in the event of an emergency, at the earliest possible opportunity.
5. After normal duty hours, any media calls shall be directed to the appropriate PIO. If a call pertains to an issue that will affect the entire Department or will generate significant media coverage, the PIO must contact the P&P Bureau Chief and the Communications Director.

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F. Release of Information Requirements:

1. Accurate and complete information is to be provided to the media on a regular basis. Efforts to inform the public through a wide-range of opportunities, including but not limited to the media, about constructive correctional programs must be done on a routine basis in order for the public to be better informed about the Bureau's services and programs.
2. PIOs will provide the media with information about the complete range of Bureau activities. Every effort should be made to make these media contacts in a timely fashion in order to assist the media in meeting deadlines.
3. The Bureau should honor media requests for offender information that is a matter of public record. If there is a question about the legitimacy of an inquiry, or if there is an issue of confidentiality, requests should be referred to the P&P Bureau Chief, ACCD Administrator or to the Department Legal Unit. The following offender information may be released on adult offenders unless there is a restriction on the release of information, or if an offender is officially designated as an "identity protection" case:
 - current photograph
 - name
 - gender
 - date eligible for parole
 - date of execution of warrant
 - FBI number
 - full term expiration date
 - good time expiration date
 - incarceration credit time
 - facility of confinement
 - judicial district of release
 - court docket number/offense
 - reason for change of sentence
 - release destination
 - sentencing judge's name
 - transfer destination
 - physical description
 - nature of injury to an offender
 - crime committed
 - age
 - date of birth
 - date of commitment or release
 - date execution of sentence began
 - fine(s) imposed
 - good time allowance and rate
 - incarceration date
 - dead time
 - judicial district of confinement
 - mandatory release date (if any)
 - race
 - Offender I.D. number
 - sentence term
 - time of commitment or release
 - time served
 - work assignments
 - sentence and criminal conviction record
 - death (the identity of a deceased offender will be withheld until next-of-kin has been notified or 24 hours following death, whichever occurs first. If asked about cause, indicate the need to wait for an investigation and the coroner's report.
4. Information regarding psychiatric, medical or juvenile criminal histories of offenders cannot be released under law. The exception to this is sex offenders who have been required by the sentencing court to register under §46-23-504, MCA, Persons required to register and §46-23-508, MCA, Dissemination of information.
5. If determined by the PIO or Communications Director that there are no security risks involved, news organizations may copy photographs of adult offenders.

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6. Media inquiries regarding staff should be referred to the Regional Administrator (RA) who will consult with the P&P Bureau Chief and ACCD Administrator prior to releasing any information that is in question.
7. Other information shall be released to the news media at the discretion of the ACCD Administrator or Communications Director.

G. News Releases:

1. All news releases shall be forwarded to the Communications Director for review and approval prior to release.
2. In the event of an emergency, the Department will fax or email releases to news organizations throughout the state.
3. The Communications Director and PIOs will maintain a file of information released to the media. Media representatives may review the file after scheduling an appointment during normal working hours.

H. News Clippings/Videotaped News Coverage:

When possible, the Communications Director and/or the PIO will record radio or television news coverage involving the Bureau. The PIO should forward copies of videotapes and clippings from newspapers pertaining to the Bureau to the Communications Director when necessary and available.

I. Responsiveness to the Media:

The Bureau will operate in a transparent way that encourages a better public understanding of Bureau goals and operational procedures. This will be accomplished, in part, by:

1. Providing prompt, complete responses to all correspondence and other requests from the media.
2. Participating in organizations and meetings that assure cooperation with other criminal justice agencies in information gathering, exchange, and standardization, including strategic and contingency planning at federal, state, and local levels.
3. Providing access to programs through structured visits for the media, as well as for community and academic members, law enforcement agencies, victims and their families, and other selected groups and organizations.
4. Meeting on a regular basis with media staff and editorial boards to address areas of mutual concern about the coverage of newsworthy events that relate to the Bureau.

J. Written and Verbal Inquiries:

Written and verbal inquiries from representatives of the news media will be routed to the Communications Director, the Director, or P&P Bureau Chief depending on the nature of the inquiry. Inquiries requiring only a telephone response will be answered the same working day in which they are received or as soon thereafter as possible. Written responses will be made within

two weeks of receipt of the inquiry. In cases where there is likely to be a significant delay in

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responding, an interim response will be provided verbally or in writing as each case dictates.

K. Film/Movie Making Access to Correctional Programs:

Inquiries about access to P&P Bureau programs by filmmakers, writers for non-news magazines and others shall be directed to the Communications Director. Permission for access by these individuals will be considered on a case-by-case basis after consultation between the Director and the program administrator, and will be subject to the same rules regarding offender confidentiality.

L. Denial of Media Access:

The Director, Communications Director, or PIO may deny media access when the Director or designee has declared that a state of emergency exists. The emergency restriction will be lifted as soon as possible without jeopardizing the safety and security of the Bureau. During emergencies, regular media briefings will be scheduled to ensure the flow of timely information to the extent possible.

M. Related Department Policies:

In order to fully understand policy requirements associated with media relations, it is required that reference be made to policies *DOC 3.3.4 Media Access to Offenders* and *DOC 1.5.6 Offender Records Access and Release*.

N. Juvenile Information:

All inquiries regarding juvenile offenders shall be referred to the Youth Services Division Administrator, Communications Director or the respective facility PIO.

V. CLOSING:

Questions concerning this procedure shall be directed to the P&P Bureau Chief or RA.

Forms

P&P 10-5(A) Offender Interview/Image Consent Form