



## POLICY DIRECTIVE

Policy:	<b>DOC 1.1.8 MEDIA RELATIONS</b>
Effective Date:	12/01/1996 <span style="float: right;">Page 1 of 4</span>
Revision Date(s):	06/01/2015; 04/24/2026
Signature/Title:	/s/ Eric Strauss, Director

### I. POLICY

The Department will maintain positive and informative relationships with the public, the media, and other agencies with related functions. It will provide timely, complete, and accurate information on Department operations, accomplishments, critical incidents, and emergencies in compliance with all statutes that govern confidentiality and public information by balancing the public's right to know with the individual's right to privacy.

### II. APPLICABILITY

All divisions, facilities and programs Department-owned and contracted, as specified in contract.

### III. DEFINITIONS (see Glossary)

### IV. REQUIREMENTS

#### A. General Requirements

1. The Department will operate in a transparent way that encourages better public understanding of program goals and operational procedures, and will:
  - a. provide prompt, complete responses to correspondence and requests from the media;
  - b. participate 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;
  - c. provide structured visits to facilities and programs for media, community members, academic professionals, law enforcement agencies, victims and victims' families, and other selected groups and organizations; and
  - d. meet as needed with media staff and editorial boards to address areas of mutual concern about newsworthy event coverage that relates to the Department.
2. The Communications Director and PIO will provide current and factual information in verbal and written form to the public and media unless the information release is limited by the confidentiality, safety, and security needs of the program.

#### B. Department Spokespersons

1. Designated spokespersons for the Department include the Director, Deputy Director, Communications Director, division administrators, and the PIO.
2. To ensure accuracy of information provided to the public, the Department does not authorize staff or contracted staff to comment to the news media as official Department spokespersons, or to publish or release original printed materials developed by the Department without prior approval from an administrator, the Department Communications Director, or the Director.
3. Department staff wishing to speak to the media as private citizens, not as representatives of the Department, will make such contacts during off-duty hours and make clear to the media they are representing personal views, not the views of the Department.

### C. Responsibilities

1. The Department Director is responsible for:
  - a. responding to media inquiries after normal duty hours or referring inquiries to the PIO; and
  - b. contacting the Communications Director and appropriate administrator if an inquiry pertains to an issue that may affect the entire Department or generate significant media coverage.
2. Each facility or program administrator, or designee, is responsible for:
  - a. developing written plans in consultation with the Communications Director that guide contact with the news media to establish and maintain working relationships and to ensure media plans are consistent Department-wide;
  - b. arranging on-site facility and program visits when administrators are provided sufficient notice, when the visit requested is at a reasonable time of day, and as staff availability and time permit; and
  - c. allowing adult offender interviews consistent with security requirements during an on-site visit with willing offenders after the offender and attorney, when applicable, sign the *Interview and Photo Consent* form.
3. The Communications Director is responsible for:
  - a. releasing information to the public and news media about Department operations, policies, procedures, and issues;
  - b. advising and assisting the PIOs as needed;
  - c. reviewing and approving all news releases prior to release; and
  - d. recording radio or television news coverage involving the Department.
4. Responsibilities of the PIO include, but are not limited to:
  - a. providing the public and media information pertaining to the Department;
  - b. promptly reporting any contact from a national or international news representative to the Communications Director;
  - c. promptly contacting the Communications Director if a local reporter's inquiry involves a controversial issue or may impact the Department;
  - d. routinely providing the media with newsworthy coverage about a range of Department operations and activities, the contents of which will be provided to the Communications Director on an as-needed basis or, in the event of emergency, at the earliest possible opportunity; and
  - e. forwarding to the Communications Director, when necessary and available, copies of videotapes and newspaper clippings pertaining to the Department.
5. Department employees are responsible for:
  - a. referring media inquiries to the Department Director, Deputy Director, Communications Director, PIO, or administrator depending on the nature of the inquiry;
  - b. referring media inquiries for staff information to the administrator; and
  - c. consulting with the Department's Legal Services with questions regarding confidentiality or the legitimacy of an inquiry.

### D. Media Access to Youth Facilities and Programs

1. In order to access youth facilities and programs, news media representatives must:
  - a. sign the *Youth Confidentiality* form upon admission to the program;
  - b. agree not to identify youth offenders by name; and
  - c. agree not to film or photograph youth offenders in a manner that allows for visual identification.

2. In accordance with confidentiality requirements for youth offenders in correctional facilities, staff may only provide media representatives with information confirming whether a specific offender is in residence.

#### **E. Media Inquiries**

1. Designated spokespersons will ensure that media inquiries are promptly and accurately responded to:
  - a. inquiries that require a telephone response will be responded to during the working day in which the inquiry is received, or as soon thereafter as possible;
  - b. written responses will be made within two weeks of receipt of the inquiry; and
  - c. when a response may be significantly delayed, an interim verbal or written response will be provided.
2. In emergencies, the administrator may:
  - a. limit public and media access;
  - b. identify a press spokesperson to periodically brief all media; and
  - c. locate a media briefing center away from tactical operations if an emergency continues for an extended period of time.
3. Information may be released from adult offender records except for information in which the offender or another person has a right to privacy that outweighs the public's right to know as demonstrated in the following circumstances:
  - a. the information threatens the security or safety of a person or institution;
  - b. medical or psychological information;
  - c. the information is made confidential by law (for example, the presentence investigation (PSI) report);
  - d. investigative information; or
  - e. youth offender records maintained within an adult offender record in compliance with this policy.

#### **F. News Releases**

1. The Department Director or person authorized as spokesperson must, during an emergency incident command operation, contact the incident commander for approval of content of a news release prior to release.

#### **G. Filmmaker and Writer Access to Programs**

1. Filmmakers, writers for non-news magazines, and other related personnel will direct inquiries about access to correctional programs to the Communications Director.
2. The Department Director and program administrator will consult and consider permission for access on a case-by-case basis.
3. Filmmakers and writers will be subject to established requirements for offender confidentiality.

#### **H. Denial of Media Access**

1. When the Department Director declares a facility state of emergency or determines that media access could adversely affect the safety or security of a facility, the Department Director, Deputy Director, Communications Director, PIO, or program administrator may deny media access to programs.
2. The appropriate staff will lift the emergency restriction as soon as possible without jeopardizing the safety and security of the program, staff, or offenders.

3. During emergencies, and to the extent possible, regular briefings will be scheduled to ensure the flow of timely information to the media.

## **V. CLOSING**

Questions about this policy should be directed to the Department Communications Director.

## **VI. REFERENCES**

- A. *Art. II, Sec 9 and 10 of the Montana Constitution*
- B. *Title 2, Chapter 3; §§ 2-6-101; 2-6-102; 2-15-112; 41-5-215; 41-5-216; 46-23-504; 46-23-508, MCA*
- C. *4-4019, 4-4020, 4-4021; ACA Standards for Adult Correctional Institutions, 4th Edition*
- D. *3-JTS-1A-25, 3-JTS-1A-26; ACA Standards for Juvenile Correctional Facilities, 2003*
- E. *DOC 1.5.5 Case Records Management; DOC 1.8.1 Victim Services; DOC 3.3.4 Media Access to Offenders*

## **VII. FORMS**

*Interview/Photo Consent*  
*Youth Confidentiality*