



TYPE OF ORDER	NUMBER/SERIES	ISSUE DATE	EFFECTIVE DATE
General Order	520.03	5/15/2024	5/17/2024
SUBJECT TITLE		PREVIOUSLY ISSUED DATES	
Social Media/Internet Policy		8/12/2021; 5/6/2018; 4/7/2015; Supersedes G.O. #5 Series 2011, "Social Media Policy"; G.O. #3 Series 2002	
REFERENCE		RE-EVALUATION DATE	
N/A		5/6/2028	
SUBJECT AREA		DISTRIBUTION	
Community Relations & Services		All Personnel	

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to establish procedures and guidelines for Department employees, both sworn and civilian, in their use of Department-sanctioned, on-the-job and personal social media sites, and to outline expectations with respect to such usage and the effect it has upon the reputation and perception of the Providence Police.

POLICY

This policy establishes the Department's position on the utilization and management of social media and provides guidance on its management, administration and oversight. This policy provides precautionary information as well as prohibitions on the use of social media by Department personnel.

DISCUSSION

Social media provides a potentially valuable means of assisting the Department in meeting community outreach, problem-solving, investigative, crime prevention, and related objectives. The Department endorses the secure and responsible use of social media to: enhance communication, collaboration, and information exchange; streamline processes; and foster productivity.

The Department recognizes the role that social media plays in the personal lives of Department employees. It is the policy of the Department to acknowledge that employees have a right to have personal web pages or sites. Department employees also have the right to form, join or associate with groups and engage in activities for the purpose of collective bargaining or other employment related matters. However, it is necessary to ensure that employees using social media or personal web pages or web sites or who publish information on the Internet exercise discretion in their

use of references to the Providence Police Department, and that their participation in social media is in accordance with the expected behaviors prescribed in Department Rules & Regulations and written directives.

Any online activity that sheds a negative light on the Department or its employees will be viewed as a violation of this policy. To the extent that members' web pages are in the public domain, they should be expected to be monitored for appropriate conduct.

Sworn and civilian employees are to conduct themselves in accordance with all applicable Department Rules & Regulations and written directives regardless of on-duty or off-duty status.

For the purpose of this directive, the following definitions shall apply:

Social Media – A category of Internet-based resources that integrate user-generated content allowing people to communicate, share information, photos, videos and exchange text and other multimedia files via some form of online or cellular network. This includes, but is not limited to, social networking sites (i.e. Facebook, My Space, LinkedIn), micro blogging sites (i.e. Twitter, Nixle), photo-and video-sharing sites (i.e. Flickr, YouTube, Instagram), wikis (i.e. Wikipedia), blogs and news sites (i.e. Digg, Reddit).

Social Networks – On-line platforms where users can create profiles, share information and socialize with others using a range of technologies.

Social Networking - Interacting with a group of people with common interests in a virtual environment of social networks.

Blog – A self-published diary or commentary on a particular topic that may allow visitors to post response or comments. A blog (short for “Web log”) is a personal online journal that is intended for public consumption.

Page – The specific portion of a social media site where content is displayed, and managed by an individual or an individual with administrator rights.

Post – Content users share on a social media site or the act of publishing content on a site.

Profile – Information that a user provides about himself or herself on a social networking site.

PROCEDURE

I. DEPARTMENT-SANCTIONED SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE

- A. All official Department social media sites and pages shall be approved by the Commissioner of Public Safety and/or the Chief of Police and/or their respective designees, and managed by their respective designees.

- B. Whenever possible, social media pages shall clearly indicate that they are maintained by the Department and shall have Department contact information prominently displayed.
- C. Whenever possible, each Department social media site or web page shall include:
1. An introductory statement that clearly specifies that purpose and scope of the Department's presence on the website.
 2. A link to the Department's official website, whenever possible.
 3. Information aimed for a target audience, such as potential Department recruits or the public at large.
- D. Social media content shall adhere to all applicable laws as well as the Rules & Regulations and written directives of the Department.
- E. Whenever possible, social media web pages should state that the opinions expressed by visitors to the page(s) do not reflect the opinions of the Department.
1. Pages shall clearly indicate that posted comments will be monitored and that the Department reserves the right to remove comments, including but not limited to those that contain obscenities, off-topic comments, and personal attacks.
 2. Pages shall clearly indicate that any content posted or submitted for posting is subject to public disclosure.
- F. Examples of Department use of social media may include, but are not limited to, the following:
1. Seeking evidence or information about:
 - a. Missing persons.
 - b. Wanted persons.
 - c. Gang participation.
 - d. Crime perpetrated online (i.e. cyberbullying, cyberstalking).
 - e. Photos or videos of a crime posted by a participant or observer.
 2. Community outreach and engagement by:
 - a. Providing crime prevention tips.

- b. Offering online-reporting opportunities.
 - c. Sharing crime maps and data.
 - d. Soliciting tips about unsolved crimes.
3. Making time-sensitive notifications related to:
- a. Road closures.
 - b. Special events.
 - c. Weather emergencies.
 - d. Missing or endangered persons.

II. OFFICIAL DEPARTMENT SOCIAL MEDIA USE

- A. Department employees authorized to represent the Department via social media outlets shall:
- 1. Identify themselves as an employee of the Department.
 - 2. Conduct themselves at all times as a representative of the Department and adhere to all Department standards of conduct, and observe conventional accepted protocols and proper decorum.
 - 3. Not make statements about the guilt or innocence of any suspect or arrestee, or comments concerning pending prosecutions, nor post, transmit, or otherwise disseminate confidential information, including photographs or videos, related to department training, activities, or work-related assignments without authorization or express permission.
 - 4. Not conduct political activities or private business.
- B. Official access/posting of comments to any non-Department social media or social networking site is prohibited other than when necessary in the furtherance of official duty.

III. ON-DUTY SOCIAL MEDIA USE

- A. Department employees shall not utilize Department owned computers, cell phones, or other communicative devices for any unauthorized purpose, including participation in social media or social networking, unless such conduct is required and authorized in the course of a permitted duty assignment.

- B. As part of employment background process, sworn Department members shall:
 - 1. Advise the applicant that a search of social media in the public domain will be conducted.
 - 2. Conduct a search of social media presence in the public domain regarding the applicant.
 - 3. Neither inquire about nor obtain applicant password information regarding access to social media sites.
 - 4. Not utilize passwords to access an applicant's web pages, in the event such passwords are either provided by applicant or otherwise revealed.
 - 5. Not use online aliases to conduct employment background investigations.
- C. All official investigations are to be conducted using authorized logon credentials.
- D. Employees may engage in personal social media activities while on duty (Example: status updates, tweeting, blogging, monitoring comments, etc.), provided:
 - 1. The activity is accomplished during a scheduled, authorized break;
 - 2. The activity is accomplished using a personally-owned device.

IV. PERSONAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

- A. Department employees who choose to maintain or participate in social media or social networking platforms as private citizens shall conduct themselves with professionalism and in a manner consistent with published Rules & Regulations and Department policies governing off-duty conduct. In the course of maintaining or participating, the following shall apply:
 - 1. Department employees are free to express themselves as private citizens on social media sites to the degree that their speech does not:
 - a. Impair working relationships of this Department for which loyalty and confidentiality are important.
 - b. Impede the performance of duties.

- c. Negatively impact the public perception of the Department.
2. Sworn members shall not use their personal social networking website accounts to conduct official law enforcement investigations.
3. Department employees are prohibited from using Department e-mail address as contact information to register for personal social media participation.
4. Department employees should be aware that privacy settings and social media sites are constantly in flux, and they should never assume that personal information posted on such sites is protected.
5. Department employees should expect that any information created, transmitted, downloaded, exchanged, or discussed in the public domain may be accessed by the Department at any time without prior notice.
6. Department employees shall be held responsible for the content that appears on their personally maintained social media or social networking sites and will be obligated to remove any posting or material contributed by others that reflects negatively upon the Department and/or violates Department Rules & Regulations and/or written directives.
7. Department employees are prohibited from posting the following information on any social networking platform, either their own site(s), the site(s) of others known to them, the site(s) of others unknown to them, news media pages, or other information exchange forums:
 - a. Any material that brings discredit to, or may adversely affect the efficiency, reputation or integrity of the Department.
 - b. Any text, photograph, audio, video, or any other multimedia file related to any investigation, either current or past, of this Department.
 - c. Any confidential text, pictures, audio or videos related to Department training, activities or work-related assignments.
 - d. Information that could affect the safety or security of the Department or its employees.
 - e. Posts containing comments and/or pictures, artwork, audio, video, or any other type of content that is sexually explicit or

graphic, violent, and/or racially or ethnically biased and/or discriminatory in nature.

- f. Sensationalizing or displaying excessive alcohol use.
- g. Any comment, discussion, text, photograph, audio, video or any other multimedia or digital technology media file included that infers, implies, states, opines or otherwise expresses the employee's views on the public which would be detrimental to the Department's overall publicized mission as stated in the published Department Rules & Regulations.
- h. Any text, photograph, audio, video, or other multimedia file included on social media or social networking site that infers, implies, states, opines, or otherwise expresses the employee's views on the legal, judicial or criminal systems which in any way undermine the public confidence or trust in the Department.

V. UNIVERSAL PROHIBITIONS ON SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT

- A. The following information shall not be released via any form of social media or internet website without the express written authorization of the Commissioner of Public Safety or the Chief of Police:
 - 1. The existence and/or identity of a suspect prior to arrest, except to the extent authorized and necessary to aid in the investigation, or to assist in a suspect's apprehension, or to warn the public of potential danger.
 - 2. Information which could lead to the discovery of the identity or address of a juvenile offender, except as authorized by law.
 - 3. Statements concerning the character, reputation, and/or guilt of an accused person.
 - 4. Any information regarding a statement, confession, or admission by an accused person.
 - 5. The possibility of a guilty plea by an accused person.
 - 6. The merits of any case as it relates to an accused person.
 - 7. The past criminal record of an accused person, unless to warn the public of potential danger.
 - 8. The names of victims of sexual assault or child molestation.

9. Any information about a crime which would be known only to the person(s) responsible for the crime.

VI. PROVISIONS

- A. Department employees should always consider the possible adverse consequences of social media/internet postings. The content of social networking web pages/media can and may be subpoenaed and used in criminal and civil trials to impeach testimony and/or credibility.
- B. Employees are encouraged to limit the amount of personal information shared on a social networking website. Criminal offenders, gang members, etc. have access to the internet and the ability to search for persons in the same manner as the law-abiding public.
- C. Employees are encouraged to seek clarification and guidance from their immediate supervisors regarding the contents of this policy as well as the acceptability of any actual or potential social media posting.
- D. Any form of social media maintained by any employee that is either deemed inappropriate in accordance with Department Rules & Regulations and/or directives, and/or brings discredit upon the Department or any member of the Department, and/or promotes on-duty or off-duty misconduct, regardless of whether or not an employment association exists between the social media in question and the Department, may be investigated criminally and/or administratively.

APPROVED:



**COLONEL OSCAR L. PEREZ
CHIEF OF POLICE**