

Media Relations

313.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This policy provides guidelines for the release of official department information to the media.

313.2 POLICY

It is the policy of the Humboldt County Probation Department (HCPD) to protect the privacy rights of individuals, while releasing non-confidential information to the media regarding topics of public concern. Information that has the potential to negatively affect inter- or intra-agency investigations will not be released.

313.3 RESPONSIBILITIES

The ultimate authority and responsibility for the release of information to the media shall remain with the Chief Probation Officer. In situations not warranting immediate notice to the Chief Probation Officer and in situations where the Chief Probation Officer has given prior approval, designated supervisors may prepare and release information to the media in accordance with this policy and applicable laws regarding confidentiality.

313.4 PROVIDING ADVANCE INFORMATION

To protect the safety and rights of department members and other persons, advance information about planned actions by probation personnel, such as movement of persons in custody or the execution of an arrest or search warrant, should not be disclosed to the media, nor should media representatives be invited to be present at such actions except with the prior approval of the Chief Probation Officer.

Any exceptions to the above should only be considered for the furtherance of legitimate probation purposes. Prior to approving any exception, the Chief Probation Officer will consider, at a minimum, whether the release of information or the presence of the media would unreasonably endanger any individual or prejudice the rights of any person or is otherwise prohibited by law.

313.5 MEDIA REQUESTS

Any media request for information or access to department members shall be referred to the Chief Probation Officer, or if unavailable, to the first available division director. Prior to releasing any information to the media, members shall consider the following:

- (a) At no time shall any member of this department make any comment or release any official information to the media without prior approval from a supervisor or the Chief Probation Officer.
- (b) In situations involving multiple agencies or government departments, every reasonable effort should be made to coordinate media releases with the authorized representative of each involved agency prior to the release of any information by this department.

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- (c) Under no circumstance should any member of this department make any comment to the media regarding any probation incident not involving this department without prior approval of the Chief Probation Officer. Under these circumstances the member should direct the media to the agency handling the incident.

313.6 CONFIDENTIAL OR RESTRICTED INFORMATION

It shall be the responsibility of the Chief Probation Officer to ensure that confidential or restricted information is not inappropriately released to the media. When in doubt, authorized and available legal counsel should be consulted prior to releasing any information.

313.6.1 EMPLOYEE INFORMATION

The identities of officers involved in shootings or other critical incidents may only be released to the media upon the consent of the involved officer or upon a formal request filed.

Any requests for copies of related reports or additional information not contained in the information log (see the Information Log section in this policy), including the identity of officers involved in shootings or other critical incidents, shall be referred to the Chief Probation Officer.

Requests should be reviewed and fulfilled by the Custodian of Records or, if unavailable, the Chief Probation Officer or the authorized designee. Such requests will be processed in accordance with the provisions of the Records Maintenance and Release Policy and public records laws (e.g., California Public Records Act).

313.7 RELEASE OF INFORMATION

The Department may routinely release information to the media without receiving a specific request. This may include media releases regarding critical incidents, information of public concern, updates regarding significant incidents, or requests for public assistance in solving crimes or identifying suspects or probationers with warrants. This information may also be released through the department website or other electronic data sources.