

**East Lansing Police Department
Policy & Procedure**

Subject: Media Relations / Officer Involved Critical Incident Information Sharing	ELPD Policy #: 100-12
Effective Date: March 1, 2022 Revised Date:	Distribution: All Employees
MACP Accreditation Standard: Media Relations	MACP Standard: 1.7.1

I. PURPOSE

To set forth policy and procedures which will guide personnel in dealing with the media and releasing information.

II. POLICY

It is the policy of the East Lansing Police Department to maintain an open and honest rapport with the public and the news media. Furthermore, the police department recognizes the need for the open and transparent sharing of information during officer involved critical incidents.

The East Lansing Police Department has established a duty assignment in the Administrative Division designated as the department's Public Information Officer (P.I.O.). The P.I.O. is charged with the responsibility of the public information function and news media relations. The P.I.O.'s duty is to develop and maintain a cooperative relationship between the East Lansing Police Department and the news media, which will facilitate information dissemination to the public. The P.I.O. provides accurate and timely information to news media representatives regarding crime, police activities and related matters.

The goals and objectives of the P.I.O. include improving police-community relations by increasing public awareness of police service and criminal activity. A better understanding of the police department is a key element to improving public support and cooperation.

III. PROCEDURE

A. Functions Performed

The P.I.O. prepares press releases on major crimes, major incidents, unusual events involving the police department, or have a direct impact on the community. Media inquiries shall be referred to the shift supervisor if the P.I.O is not available. Incidents necessitating the initiation of a press release may require the P.I.O. to contact various news media representatives.

B. Information Release Guidelines

1. Preparation of a formal release is a primary duty of the P.I.O. The release should include basic information on an incident. The P.I.O. works directly with the City of East Lansing Communications Department on releases. The below information serves as a guide for what may be published within a press release:
 - a. The identity of victims, witnesses or any involved parties who may be endangered by publicity should be avoided as much as discretion will allow. These persons are generally identified by sex, age, and city of residence only.
 - b. The identity of the victim of any fatal incident shall be withheld until the identification and notification of family process has been completed. Prior to completion of the process, victims will be identified by sex, age, and city of residence only.
 - c. The identity of an arrested adult suspect shall be withheld until after arraignment. Information released after the arraignment shall be limited to the age, sex, city of residence of the suspect, the arraignment date, the arraiving authority's name and title, list of charge(s), bond amount, plea(s) entered, preliminary examination date, and the name of the institution where the suspect is being held. All other information, including photographs, shall only be released through the current FOIA process.
 - d. The identity of an arrested juvenile suspect shall be withheld. The juvenile suspect will be identified by sex, age, and city of residence only.
 - e. In most incidents, identities of drivers and passengers involved in a motor vehicle accident may be released after the accident report has been completed. The identity of the responsible driver should be withheld in situations where criminal prosecution is likely. The names of persons who are injured in a motor vehicle accident should also be withheld until next of kin has been notified. The identifying information released will be limited to sex, age, and city of residence.
 - f. Names of officers involved in department activity may be released to the media, except in situations when disclosure

would be inappropriate, i.e. an officer's safety or an investigation would be jeopardized.

- g. An incident which requires the issuance of a press release may require updating as the situation develops. A thorough follow up of an incident provides the news media with the complete story and promotes media confidence in the P.I.O.
- h. Complete identity and photographs of suspect(s) who are not in custody, but for whom warrants have been issued, may be released to the media only when the suspect remaining at large presents a public safety threat and media assistance will serve to aid law enforcement agencies in apprehending the suspect and alerting the public.
- i. Copies of incident reports will not be provided to the news media representatives except in compliance with a Freedom of Information Act request or court order.

C. The East Lansing Police Department will not release the following information:

1. The prior criminal record, character, or reputation of the accused, unless the release of information will serve a law enforcement function for apprehension.
2. The existence of any confession, admission of guilt, statement made by the accused, or refusal by the accused to make a statement.
3. The results of any examinations of tests conducted, or refusal by the accused to submit to any examinations or tests.
4. The identity, testimony, or credibility of any prospective witness.
5. Any opinion of agency personnel regarding the guilt or innocence of the accused.
6. Any opinion of agency personnel regarding the merits of the case or quality of evidence gathered.
7. Information received from other law enforcement agencies without their concurrence to release that information.

- D. Bureau Commanders or Shift Commanders or PIO Designee, will assume the responsibility for formal information release to the news media in the absence of the P.I.O.
- E. Media inquiries regarding matters involving extensive criminal investigation, traffic accident follow up, etc., will be referred to the appropriate Division Commander when the P.I.O. is unavailable.
- F. The P.I.O. may respond to the scene of incidents which command major coverage.
- G. Any officer may respond to media inquiries at the scene of an incident when duties allow. The officer should respond in brief, advising the media as to the type of situation, e.g., shooting, assault, number and type of casualties, sex and age of victims if known, and number of effected arrests. Information that would preempt proper notification of next of kin or that would jeopardize prosecution efforts must be avoided.
- H. Media Access to Incident Scenes
 - 1. Media representatives will be allowed access to the site up to the established incident perimeter line.
 - 2. Members of the media will be permitted to take video or photographs from any area they have permission to occupy. Members of law enforcement will not attempt to restrict the lawful photographing or recording activities of the media.
 - 3. Media vehicles will be allowed to park near incident scenes so long as it does not present a traffic hazard, safety hazard, or restrict the flow of normal or re-routed traffic. Members of law enforcement will assist media members in parking safely if available to do so.
 - 4. All members of this department should be aware that law enforcement incidents are of public concern and are subject to media reporting.
- I. When incidents involving the East Lansing Police Department and other public service agencies occur wherein the other agencies have primary jurisdiction, the responsibility for information release will be referred to that Agency.
- J. When mutual law enforcement effort occurs, information release will be coordinated with representatives of the respective law enforcement agencies.

K. Any officer who releases information to the media, other than an official Department press release, shall, as soon as practicable, inform the P.I.O. regarding the nature of the information released.

I. Officer Involved Critical Incident Information Sharing

1. An officer involved critical incident is defined as any incident involving a police department employee that results in the death or serious bodily injury of any person(s) because of any police action or activity.
 - a. An officer involved critical incident shall also include the discharge of any firearm towards any person by sworn personnel acting under the color of authority even when death or injury does not occur.
 - b. All in custody deaths and serious bodily injury incidents will follow the guidelines set forth in this section.
2. When an officer involved critical incident occurs information shall be shared with the public in a timely manner.
3. The Chief of Police or designee will review each officer involved critical incident to determine what information may be released and the timing of the release. In some instances, the Chief of Police may determine to release information to community groups directly in addition to traditional media sources.
 - a. The information released shall balance the safety of those involved, the ongoing investigation, and the public's interest in disclosure.
 - i. Information considered for release may include:
 1. Official department statement on the matter.
 2. Description of the incident.
 3. Body Worn Camera Footage
 4. Photographs
 5. Police Reports
 6. Any additional information deemed appropriate by the Chief of Police.

- ii. Information released should comply with existing policy and law.
 - b. The Chief of Police will make the determination whether to release the identity of the employee(s) involved in the critical incident. If circumstances exist that would present a safety concern to the employee(s) involved the Chief of Police should consider withholding their identity. If identities are withheld the following information should be released:
 - i. Assignment of the Employee.
 - ii. Demographic information of the Employee.
 - 1. Age
 - 2. Race
 - 3. Sex
 - iii. Years of service with the department.
 - iv. Number of disciplinary incidents in the previous two years.
 - v. Number of previous officer-involved critical incidents.
 - c. Prior to publicly releasing the name of an involved employee, the employee shall be notified.
4. Unless otherwise designated, the Chief of Police shall serve as the primary media spokesperson. The Chief of Police may designate the department P.I.O. or senior supervisor as the spokesperson if so desired.

IV. CANCELLATIONS

None applicable

Authorized By:


Kim Johnson, Chief of Police