

# Media Policy



Effective: March 22, 2019

From: Diana Becton, District Attorney

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## Introduction

The media policy outlined below represents our office's commitment to providing information to the public and media. Working with reporters can help share information with the community about our office, programs and activities. The policy ensures that media relations are enhanced and that information coming from the District Attorney's Office is accurate and timely. During the course of our interactions with the media, we must be mindful to only disclose information allowed by rules of professional conduct that will not impact legal proceedings. Our motto remains to "seek justice, serve justice and do justice," and this can only occur if we make sure that our statements to the media do not thwart that pursuit. With any release of information or interview, we must keep our victims in mind. We must respect the privacy of our victims and ensure we work with our Victim Advocates.

## Media Relations

All media requests received by any employee will first be sent to the Public Information Officer. All inquiries and requests for information should be responded to in a timely manner depending on the information requested. As a goal, inquiries for basic case information or documents shall be responded to the same day the request is made.

If it is appropriate to respond to a request, the assigned attorney will consult and work with the Public Information Officer before responding to a media request. The attorney assigned to the specific case will be presumed to be the primary spokesperson for any request. All other staff should speak with the Public Information Officer before speaking with the media. The designated spokesperson shall work with the Public Information Officer on any talking points, statements, press releases or strategy in responding to a request.

For office policies, external policy positions, legislative issues, or other issues of significant importance, the District Attorney or the District Attorney's designee will serve as the lead spokesperson for the office.

Attorneys and the Public Information Officer shall follow the Rule of Professional Conduct for media relations and California District Attorneys Association media guidelines (News & Social Media by Karyn Sinunu-Towery and Wendy Patrick, 2014).

<http://www.calbar.ca.gov/Attorneys/Conduct-Discipline/Rules/Rules-of-Professional-Conduct/Current-Rules/Rule-5-120>

## Public Information Officer

The Public Information Officer may serve as the spokesperson based on the circumstances surrounding the request or to provide routine, public information to a reporter. The Public Information Officer will strategize the response plan with the designated attorney.

For official social media accounts, the Public Information Officer will manage the content and accounts on behalf of the office. Staff are encouraged to provide content to the Public Information Officer on cases receiving media attention.

## Preparing for Interviews

Media interviews require preparation and deliberation among staff. The Public Information Officer will work with the spokesperson to identify the key message, objectives and talking points for the interview. The spokesperson will work with the Public Information Officer to anticipate potential questions and review strategy for the

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interview. Always assume the interview is on the record. We will avoid “no comment” as much as possible when dealing with a reporter.

### **Press Releases**

A request for a press release shall be sent to the Public Information Officer in writing. An employee making the request should provide the Public Information Officer suggested talking points and background material for the release. If available, the attorney will draft the first version of the release or the Public Information Officer can use the background material to draft the release. Once an initial version is reviewed by both the attorney and the Public Information Officer, the Public Information Officer will send the release to the attorney’s supervisor and senior manager for their input and review. The District Attorney, Chief Assistant District Attorney and Assistant District Attorneys along with the Chief of Inspectors will review all press releases before distribution. The District Attorney will give the final approval for any release. Any information describing a crime or victim should take into account the victim’s privacy and confidentiality. We must strive to avoid releasing sensitive case information that could lead to the identification of a victim who has a legal right to privacy.

If a press release is drafted for the DA’s Office to review by an outside agency, the requestor shall work with the Public Information Officer to approve any quotes or information for that third party press release. This includes requests by the County Administrator’s Office or another County department/agency.

### **Press Conferences or Media Avails**

Press conferences or media avails are an opportunity to assemble a high-profile group of spokespersons to tell an important story or make a major announcement. Any press conference must be approved by the District Attorney. If an outside agency would like us to participate in a press conference the request must be reviewed by the Public Information Officer and approved by the District Attorney.

### **Proactive Story Ideas**

If you have an idea for a story or digital content please contact the Public Information Officer to work on a plan to disseminate the information.

### **Articles for Publication**

If a request is made for an employee to write an article or publication in her or his capacity as an employee of this office, the employee must seek the approval of the District Attorney before submitting the publication. If approved, the employee will work with the Public Information Officer and her or his supervisor on any request for publication.