



**Maryland-National Capital Park Police
Prince George's County Division**



DIVISION DIRECTIVE

TITLE SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY		PROCEDURE NUMBER PG325.00	
SECTION Duties and Responsibilities	DISTRIBUTION A	EFFECTIVE DATE 07/01/20	REVIEW DATE 05/01/21
REPLACES PG325.0 "Social Media Policy" issued 01/01/17			
RELATED DIRECTIVES	REFERENCES	AUTHORITY  Chief Stanley R Johnson	

I. PURPOSE

The Maryland-National Capital Park Police endorses the use of social media to enhance communication, collaboration, information exchange, streamline processes, and foster productivity. This policy establishes the department's position on the utility and management of social media and provides guidance on its management, administration, and oversight. This policy is not meant to address one particular form of social media, rather social media in general, as advances in technology will occur and new tools will emerge.

II. POLICY

It is the policy of this agency to utilize social media in a responsible manner that respects all intended and unintended recipients, whether read today or at any point in the future. As public employees in positions of trust, we must understand that what we do as individuals is not necessarily interpreted as an isolated act and attributable to the sender only, but reflective of all members within the agency in the eyes of the public. What is shared on social media can either foster continued respect and admiration for the agency and its members or lead to fear, mistrust, and disrespect. These negative outcomes may have a direct impact on the morale, operations, or efficiency of the agency and significantly hamper our ability to carry out the mission of the Park Police. Therefore, no employee shall communicate on any social media platform any message (by words, images, symbols, or other means) that could be reasonably interpreted as conduct unbecoming and which negatively impacts the operation of the Commission. Conduct unbecoming includes, but is not limited to, any criminal, dishonest, prejudicial, or disgraceful act.

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III. DEFINITIONS

- A. Employees- any sworn, non-sworn member, volunteer, seasonal worker, or intern.
- B. Blog - A self-published diary or commentary on a particular topic that may allow visitors to post responses, reactions, or comments. The term is short for “Web log”.
- C. Page - The specific portion of a social media website where content is displayed and managed by an individual or individuals with administrator rights.
- D. Profile - Information that a user provides about himself or herself on a social networking site.
- E. Social Media – A category of digital communication platforms that integrate user- generated content and user participation. This includes, but is not limited to, social networking sites, microblogging sites, photo and video sharing sites, wikis, blogs and news sites. Some examples of social media include: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Reddit, and Tumblr.
- F. Social Networks – Online platforms where users can create profiles, share information, and socialize with others using a range of technologies.
- G. Speech – Expression or communication of thoughts or opinions in spoken words, in writing, by expressive conduct, symbolism, photographs, videotape, or related forms of communication.

IV. PRECAUTIONS – PUBLIC STATEMENTS AND PERSONAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

- A. The Department has a duty to protect the reputation of the organization and its employees, as well as limit its risk to liability. Therefore, employees are advised of the following: When posting information to the Internet or a social media site, employees should not assume there is an expectation of privacy, regardless of the type of social media platform, user privacy settings, pseudonyms, or other access controls. To this end, employees are cautioned that the content of social networking sites can be easily obtained by third parties and used in criminal and civil trials to impeach the employee’s testimony or to undermine the employee’s and/or Department’s character or reputation.
- B. “Conduct Unbecoming” applies to your actions whether committed on or off duty.
- C. Department members may express themselves on social media sites for professional or personal reasons. However, should employees engage in speech that does not relate to a matter of public concern and which has a direct or indirect negative impact on the Commission, that employee may be engaging in speech which is not protected and for which discipline may be imposed.
- D. For the purposes of employee safety and that of one’s family members, references regarding personal matters, home address, phone number, personal vehicle, etc., are

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strongly discouraged for social networking sites. Employees should be aware that certain posts may unintentionally include time and location data.

- E. If an employee is not acting in an officially sanctioned role as a spokesperson for the agency and reveals (intentionally or otherwise) his/her employment/position with the Department while posting personal comments or other material on a social media site, the employee should make it clear that he or she is not speaking for the Commission and he/she should add a disclaimer to the post, *“The comments expressed are those of the sender only, and are not authorized or endorsed by the M-NCPPC nor the Park Police.”*

V. DEPARTMENTAL SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is a valuable investigative tool when seeking evidence or information about: 1) Missing Persons; 2)Wanted Persons; 3) Crimes perpetrated online (i.e., cyberbullying, cyberstalking); 4) Photos or videos of a crime posted by a participant or observer. Social media can be used for community outreach and engagement by: 1) Providing crime prevention tips; 2) Offering online-reporting opportunities; 3) Sharing crime maps date; 4) Soliciting tips about unsolved crimes. Social media can be used to make time-sensitive notifications related to road closures, special events, weather emergencies and missing/endangered persons.

- A. The Chief of Police approves official department social media accounts.
- B. Unless otherwise permitted or directed by the Chief of Police, it is the Public Information Officer’s role to oversee all official department social media accounts.
- C. Social media content shall adhere to applicable laws, regulations, and policies, including all information technology and records management policies.
- D. The department will clearly identify its official social media accounts and have contact information prominently displayed.
- E. Investigative units may use non-official social media accounts with written permission from the Chief of Police.
- F. Social media pages will state that: 1) “The opinions expressed by are those of visitors to the page(s), and such opinions do not necessarily reflect those of the Department.” 2) The content posted or submitted for posting is subject to public disclosure. 3) Content posted or submitted for posting, including comments, will be monitored. 4) The Department reserves the right to remove comments which violate Federal, State, or local laws, are obscene or contain obscenities, are off-topic comments, or are otherwise inappropriate posts. (Employees must carefully and prudently act when completing this task because we are regulating speech. If there are any questions about whether or not to remove/limit a post made by an individual, employees should consult with their chain of command and with the Office of General Counsel.)

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VI. OFFICIAL SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNT REPRESENTATIVES.

The Chief of Police or the Public Information Officer (PIO) may authorize an employee to use the Department's official social media account(s) for the purpose of engaging with the community and/or sharing information. Any designee must follow the requirements of this policy as well as those contained in the Department's *Media Relations* directive.

- A. Personnel representing the department via social media outlets or when acting as an official social media account representative, users shall:
1. Always conduct themselves in a professional manner and refrain from engaging in on-line disputes with members of the public.
 2. Only post information they know to be true.
 3. Avoid posting images of minors unless a prior written approval has been obtained by the minor's parent or legal guardian.
 4. Obtain express permission from the appropriate Branch Chief prior to publicly releasing photographs, audio/multimedia files, suspect information, or any potential evidentiary item in furtherance of an on-going criminal case follow-up.
 5. Avoid using slang, stereotypes, or informal forms of communication that reflect poorly on the agency and/or is known to be offensive to others.
 6. Conduct themselves at all times as representatives of the department and, accordingly, shall adhere to all department standards of conduct and observe conventionally accepted protocols and proper decorum.
 7. Issue timely corrections or updates on information previously shared when such data will likely provide appropriate context and/or prevent the spread of inaccurate information which reflects negatively on the M-NCPPC or Park Police.
 8. Serve as administrators to the Department's official pages. This includes, but is not limited to, updating existing information and/or removing inappropriate comments that amount to personal attacks, that may compromise an on-going investigation, or that has the potential to endanger employee safety.
 9. Identify themselves as a member of the department.
 10. Not make statements about the guilt or innocence of any suspect or arrestee, or comments concerning pending prosecution, nor pass, transmit, or otherwise disseminate confidential information, including photographs or videos, related to department training, activities, or work-related assignments without express written permission.
 11. Not conduct political activities or private business.
 12. Observe and abide by all copyright, trademark, and service mark restrictions in posting

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materials to electronic media.

VII. EMPLOYEE PERSONAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA- PROHIBITED ACTIVITIES.

The department recognizes the role that social media plays in the personal lives of some department employees. However, the personal use of social media can have bearing on employees in their official capacity. Regardless of duty status, employees shall not post, transmit, or endorse any information contained on a social media platform, website, or any other internet site when such activity does not relate to a matter of public concern and will have a direct or indirect negative impact on the Commission (including but not limited to an of the departments of the Commission).

- A. The following are examples of posts that may not be protected speech and may be the subject of a disciplinary action.
 1. Discourteous or disrespectful regarding another person's ethnicity, race, religion, gender, gender identity/expression, sexual orientation, and/or disability.
 2. A pattern of behavior which constitutes harassment or contains threats against another person.
 3. Slanderous, obscene, vulgar, or hateful messages.
 4. Comment(s) on the guilt or innocence of a suspect, or the credibility of a witness prior to adjudication of the matter for which the employee is involved in any work-related capacity.
 5. Images or descriptions of Park Police uniforms, badges, patches, marked vehicles or property of any kind used for personal purposes, or in any context which would likely have an adverse effect on the reputation, integrity of the agency that impacts the agency's mission.
 6. Sharing of personal opinions of judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, witnesses, victims, or others directly involved in judicial proceedings, especially when one's actions can be interpreted as having the intent to harass, intimidate, or coerce.
 7. Information which contains Confidential Information, or which is protected from disclosure by law, such as Social Security Information, Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA), or Personnel Records.
 8. The private, personal, or personnel information of a fellow employee without their consent.
 9. Using personal handles that identify their M-NCPPC job or workplace such as @parkpd_johndoe or @policemnc_janedoe.

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10. Links to inappropriate websites such as those that are associated with known hate groups, and/or that promote violence against others.
11. Confidential information on past, present, or future investigations obtained as a result of one's position as a member of the agency that has not been made public to include: photographs or video recordings from crime scenes; witness or victim statements; or any other sensitive public safety information/items.
12. Political or private business while using an official M-NCPPC or Park Police source such as one's agency email address, department letterhead, etc.
13. Posts that violate any Federal, State, Local Law, or the Commission's MSRR, Practices, or Procedures.

B. Other Duties & Responsibilities regarding social media.

1. Employees shall make reasonable efforts to remove content appearing on their social media account that violates this policy upon learning of the offensive content.
2. Employees may not use their departmental email address to register for a personal account on social media.
3. Employees May Not Post Privileged Information or Represent the Department.
4. Employees shall not post or otherwise disseminate any confidential information they have access to as a result of their employment with the Department.
5. Employees may not make any statements, appearances, endorsements, or publish materials that could reasonably be considered to represent the views or positions of the Department. (Exception for those authorized to do so.)

VIII. POTENTIAL ADVERSE CONSEQUENCES.

A violation of this policy may result in disciplinary action ranging from reprimand to termination of employment.

IX. RECORD RETENTION

Whenever possible, the Department's official social media accounts will be archived. All posts/comments are considered public information, therefore subject to the Maryland Public Information Act (MPIA).

X. SEVERABILITY

In the event that one or more provisions contained herein are determined by a court of competent jurisdiction to be in conflict with existing law, that provision will be considered severed and the balance of the document shall remain enforceable.

XI. LEGISLATION AND REFERENCES

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Maryland Declaration of Rights.

Maryland Public Information Act.

First Amendment to the United States Constitution.

HIPAA.

LEOBR.

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