

GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS



**Standard Operating Procedures**

<b>Policy Name:</b> Media Relations		
<b>Policy Number:</b> 102.01	<b>Effective Date:</b> 8/19/2020	<b>Page Number:</b> 1 of 17
<b>Authority:</b> Commissioner	<b>Originating Division:</b> Executive Division (Office of Public Affairs)	<b>Access Listing:</b> Level I: All Access

**I. Introduction and Summary:**

The Public Affairs Office (PAO) of the Georgia Department of Corrections (GDC) is responsible for disseminating information about the Department in an accurate and timely manner to the public, to the media, to federal, state and local legislators and to other government entities. The Director of Public Affairs or a designee represents the Department as official spokesperson(s) on all matters or policies affecting the agency. When appropriate, the PAO takes the initiative to work pro-actively with the media, contacting reporters and editors with story ideas that reflect positively upon the Department. The PAO is also responsible for in-house audio, video and print publications, special events, and internal training of GDC personnel in media relations, as designated by leadership. The PAO will review and update the office's policy, procedure, and practice at least annually.

**II. Authority:**

- A. Official Code of Georgia Annotated (O.C.G.A.): 50-18-70; 50-18-71; 50-18-72; 42-5-36; 42-8-62; 42-2-8.
- B. GDC Board Rules: 125-1-1-.09; 125-1-2-.01, 125-1-2-.08, and 125-1-2-.09;
- C. GDC Standard Operating Procedure (SOP): 225.02 Emergency Plans;
- C. FAA Regulations: 135.203 and 91.13; and
- D. ACA Standards: 2-CO-1A-15, 2-CO-1A-25, 2-CO-1A-26, 2-CO-1A-27, 2-CO-1A-27-01, 2-CO-3C-01, 5-ACI-1A-22 (ref. 4-4021), 5-ACI-3D-06 (ref. 4-4279), 4-ACRS-7F-01, 4-ACRS-7F-02, and 4-ALDF-7F-01.

**III. Definitions:**

- A. **Representatives of the Media** - Persons whose principal employment is to gather or report news for:

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1. A newspaper which qualifies as a general circulation newspaper in the community in which it is published. A newspaper is of "general circulation" if it circulates among the general public and if it publishes news of a general character of general interest to the public such as news of political, religious, commercial, or social affairs.
  2. A news magazine which has a national, regional or local circulation and is sold by newsstands, electronic circulation, or mail subscription to the general public;
  3. A national or international news service; or
  4. A radio or television news program, whose primary purpose is to report the news, of a station holding a Federal Communications Commission (FCC) license, and which news program is specifically or by category cited by the licensed entity in fulfillment of its public service obligations to obtain or renew its FCC license.
- B. Media** - Any agency or entity directly employing "Representatives of the Media" as defined in "A" above.
- C. Public Affairs Office or Officer (PAO)** - The term can refer to a specific person from the headquarters, Public Affairs Office or to the office as a whole.
- D. Critical Incident** - An escape from a work detail or low-to-medium security facility or serious injury to staff or offenders that may not require the PAO to be present at the scene.
- E. Emergency** - Any offender disturbance or mutiny, group injury, hostage situation, bomb threat, or facility/center search, group escape or escape from a high-security institution, or use of a firearm by any personnel, or physical threat to the general security of the facility, center, or regional office.

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**IV. Statement of Policy and Procedure:**

- A. PAO on Call: The Public Affairs Office will be on call 24 hours a day (main phone number: 478-992-5247), and the name and appropriate telephone numbers of PAO staff on duty will be given to the Communications Center, Commissioner's Office, and other appropriate personnel. When media inquiries come in to the Communications Center, the center will notify the PAO.
- B. Unit Public Affairs Officers (Unit PAO): The office shall maintain a statewide network of Unit Public Affairs Officers who are responsible for media relations in the field. Wardens, Superintendents or Directors of each facility, center or regional office should designate a Unit PAO and should communicate name and contact information to the Public Affairs Office. The Unit PAO's responsibility will be to contact the Public Affairs Office of any media inquiries or events at the facility, center or office. Events may include, but are not limited to, quarterly awards, retirements, firehouse news, and graduations. In addition, each Unit PAO is responsible for designating a media staging and emergency personnel area for their respective facility, center or office per SOP 225.02 Emergency Plans. The Unit PAO at each facility, center or regional office must provide the location of the media and emergency staging areas to the Public Affairs Office.

**NOTE: Articles (print or electronic) and Videotaped Recordings of Media Coverage:** When possible, the Unit PAO shall fax or email PAO copies of any newspaper articles, radio coverage or TV stories that appear in local media soon after they appear. Articles (print or electronic) should show the date of publication and the name of the newspaper, broadcast or radio station.

- C. Media Training: The PAO may offer ongoing media relations training and guidance to any other department manager or administrator who is likely to interact with the media.
- D. Audio/Visual Support: The Graphics & Visual Services Section of the PAO is responsible for ongoing production of professional-level graphics, photography and

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agency videos to inform and educate the public about the Department of Corrections. Requests for services must be made in writing at least two (2) weeks in advance, if feasible.

- E. **Publications:** The PAO produces a monthly interactive magazine, Impact Georgia, which is distributed on the public website and social media networks the first Thursday of every month. In addition, PAO is responsible for providing written expertise for articles, press releases, etc. for publication. Press releases are written and distributed via the GDC public website and social media networks for leadership promotions, special events, implementation of programs (educational and vocational), escapes, and large disturbances within our facilities.
- F. **Special Events Coverage:** The PAO maintains the expertise, resources and personnel necessary to help field units complete special events, such as grand openings and groundbreakings for new facilities, centers, and offices.
- G. **Media Contact:** Release of information to the media or public concerning GDC shall be authorized by the PAO and distributed by the PAO by phone or email. Central Office and field personnel in facilities, centers, and regional offices shall notify the PAO of any contact with the media within 24-hours and no later than the following business day. The following procedures are applicable to media contact:
  1. If a reporter or media representative contacts an employee of GDC for an interview, that employee or their supervisor should notify the PAO before speaking with the media.
  2. No GDC employee below the rank of Assistant Commissioner shall act as an official spokesperson for GDC without prior approval from the Commissioner or the Director of Public Affairs or designee.
  3. In the event of an critical incident, the ranking officer shall contact the PAO immediately, supplying all details. After hours, the PAO should be contacted through the Communications Center.

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4. No employee shall initiate contact with the media to report critical incidents without the authorization of the Director of Public Affairs or a designee. Undesignated employees who contact media without approval are subject to immediate disciplinary action.

**NOTE:** Contact with media includes, but is not limited to, verbal communication (interviews on and off the record, telephone), email exchange, text message, and social media, blog and online news article postings.

5. When an investigation is pending, employees shall make no comment about matters under investigation unless authorized by the Director of the Office of Professional Standards (OPS), Director of Public Affairs or their designees.
6. No employee who is permitted to be interviewed shall endanger the lives of staff or offenders or compromise the security of any facility, center or regional office by revealing classified information.
7. Upon request from a media representative, the following information about an offender shall be made available:
  - a. Name;
  - b. Age;
  - c. Birth Year;
  - d. Physical Description;
  - e. Sex;
  - f. County of Conviction;
  - g. Crime, Sentence;

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- h. Prior GDC Incarcerations;
  - i. Release eligibility; and
  - j. Death--ID withheld until next of kin notified; cause withheld until autopsy results available.
8. Information about employees that **can** be released to the media includes:
- a. Work History (only historical data, no characterization);
  - b. Confirmation of employment or termination;
  - c. Adverse actions and historical grievances, once officially filed, unless specially purged;
- NOTE:** In adverse actions, employee's names cannot be released until ten (10) days after service of the official action (suspension, charges, demotion, termination) has been filed per O.C.G.A. §50-18-72(a)(8).
- d. Suspension; and
  - e. Charges, after served to employee.
9. Information about offenders or employees that **cannot** be released include:
- a. Information such as medical and mental health conditions and juvenile crimes;
  - b. Information about prior **arrests** if not considered public record (prior convictions can be released);
  - c. Information concerning victims of a crime unless on the indictment;

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- d. Names and addresses of an offender's or employee's family;
  - e. Employee's address, Social Security number, and medical and beneficiary information;
  - f. Employee's age; or
  - g. An offender's Institutional file and central office file, which are deemed confidential under O.C.G.A. §42-5-36(c), therefore cannot be released.
10. Information involving an investigation of an event or crime that **may** be released:
- a. Nature of event or crime;
  - b. Location, date, time, damages inflicted, and general description of injuries sustained along with the circumstances surround the incident;
  - c. Type and quantity of property taken;
  - d. Identity of victim with the exception of sex crime victims or in other cases where reprisals or intimidation may be employed and in the case of death investigations, only after the victim's family has been notified; and
  - e. Number of agents involved in an event (released after event) or investigation and the length of the investigation.
11. Information that **may not** be released in connection with an investigation of an event or crime, unless authorized by the Director of Professional Standards or designee:
- a. Existence or identity of suspects (term 'person of interest' shall not be used);

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- b. Identity of the accused prior to arrest unless such information would aid in apprehending the accused or serve to warn the public of potential danger;
- c. Identity of any victim of a sex crime or any related information which, if divulged, could lead to the victim's identity;
- d. Identity of victims or witnesses if such disclosure would prejudice an investigation to any significant degree, or if it would place the victim or witness in personal danger;
- e. Identity of any juvenile (as defined by Georgia law) who is a defendant in a case subject to the jurisdiction of the juvenile court;
- f. Identity of any critically injured or deceased person prior to notification of next of kin;
- g. Performance or results of any investigative procedure, such as lineups, polygraph tests, or other procedures;
- h. Information which, if prematurely released, may interfere with the investigation or apprehension such as the nature of leads, specifics of a modus operandi details of the crime known only to the perpetrator and investigators, or information that may cause the suspect to flee or more effectively avoid apprehension;
- i. Information that may be of evidentiary value in criminal proceedings; and
- j. Specific cause of death unless officially determined by the medical examiner.

H. Interviews/Visits: **Media representatives do not have the automatic right to visit any facility or center.** However, access may be granted through approval by the PAO. Media representatives will have the same access to facilities and centers as

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members of the public. Additional access may be granted at the discretion of the Warden, Superintendent, or designee.

1. Media requests for interviews (requests for information, contact with offenders, staff or officials, or for institutional visits) shall be communicated to the PAO immediately by phone, and confirmed by email. These requests will be communicated by the PAO to facility leadership, Directors or designee and Assistant Commissioners. At least 48-hours advance notice is required for visits to facilities, centers, or regional offices, except in emergency situations as determined by the PAO, Commissioner or designee.
2. Media representatives who have been approved for visits to or interviews in facilities, centers or regional offices shall be required to sign Attachment 3, Interview Conditions and Media Agreement Form, outlining these rules and operating procedures prior to their visit.
3. Media representatives visiting facilities, centers or regional offices for interviews or other purposes shall be accompanied by a member of the PAO staff or a facility, center or regional office representative. GDC representatives must be fully briefed by the PAO as to the nature of the visit and the area(s) to which the media is to be escorted. GDC representatives must be present while interviews are being conducted.
4. Media representatives shall visit only those locations of the facility, center or regional office previously approved by the PAO and the Warden, Superintendent or Regional Director.
5. Media representatives must wear proper attire as determined by the facility, center or regional office. No short pants, short skirts, suggestive or revealing clothing can be worn. When necessary, a facility, center or regional office may require or provide an appropriate change of clothes.

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6. All cameras, video and audio recording equipment will be subject to normal search procedures and shall only be allowed in facilities, centers or regional offices by prior permission of the PAO and the Warden, Superintendent or Regional Director.
7. Media members are not allowed to bring the following items inside facilities or centers:
  - a. Cell phones;
  - b. Laptops;
  - c. Tablet PCs (i.e. iPads);
  - d. Tobacco products;
  - e. Purses;
  - f. Briefcases;
  - g. Keys; or
  - h. Other contraband items identified by the Department.
8. Disregard of Departmental policy and security, or the conditions of the visit shall result in the immediate termination of the visit and may result in refusal of future access to the facility, center, or regional office for the particular media representative.
9. Media access to any facility, center or regional office may be suspended during a critical incident or emergency and for a reasonable time after the incident.

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10. As mandated by Federal Air Regulation 135.203, media are forbidden to fly a helicopter at an altitude of less than 300 feet over a facility or center. Media representatives traveling to a facility/center by helicopter must arrange clearance through the PAO before attempting to land. The PAO will notify the Warden or Superintendent.
11. Federal Air Regulation 91.13 prohibits operation of an aircraft in a careless and reckless manner endangering persons or property. GDC shall enforce observance of this regulation where it applies to Corrections facilities, centers, officers or personnel.
  - I. Interviewing and Photographing Offenders: Facilities or centers shall maintain adequate copies of Attachment 1, Interview Request Form, on which offenders give permission to be photographed or videotaped by the media in such a way as they will be identified. The offender will be asked to sign Attachment 1, Interview Request Form, if they voluntarily agree to be photographed or videotaped, when requested. Media representatives may be permitted to interview a specific offender **if (s)he agrees to the interview** and under the following conditions (Attachment 3, Interview Conditions and Media Agreement Form):
    1. Interviews will be conducted Tuesdays – Thursdays and will be limited to one (1) hour in length.
    2. Offender interviews must be arranged at least 48 hours in advance through the Public Affairs Office. Media representatives must submit such requests in writing, via email.
    3. An offender may not receive any compensation for interviews of any type.
  - J. Research: The Department will entertain requests for research/data collected from offenders provided the research project has gained approval from a University Institutional Review Board or similar organization. Researchers must adhere to the same guidelines as reporters. Term papers and other course requirements are not

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considered to be research projects; a doctoral dissertation though would be.

K. **Media Pools:** In any emergency or critical incident situation, when it is determined that several media outlets want access to an offender or a facility, or center, the PAO may establish a **media pool** of reporters and photographers. All media representatives who have requested access to the facility or center, or permission to interview an offender shall be notified of the decision to form a pool. Video, audio and print information and other materials generated by each pool representative shall be made immediately available to all other media representatives who have requested pool access without right to first publication or broadcast. Media pool participants will be required to sign Attachment 2, Pool Participant Agreement. Members of the pool shall be selected by their peers within the group of media requesting access, and shall include:

1. A representative of the media in the county where the news event occurred.
2. One representative each from television, radio and newspapers; including one photographer (if applicable), one videographer (if applicable) and one reporter from each medium.

L. **Press Conferences:** When any emergency or non-emergency situation has attracted the attention of numerous media outlets, a press conference may be held at the initiation and discretion of the Commissioner or the Director of Public Affairs. Conferences will be held at an appropriate location at a facility, center, regional office or central office. When possible, a podium and microphone will be provided. Media will receive at least one-hour notice, and as much as 24-hours notice, when possible. Media representatives will be notified by email or telephone.

M. **Executions:**

1. Upon scheduling an execution, the GDC will notify the Associated Press (AP), Georgia Press Association (GPA), Georgia Association of Broadcasters (GAB),

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and the county legal organ of the jurisdiction in which the condemned was convicted. One reporter designated by the AP, two reporters designated by the GPA, and two reporters designated by the GAB may witness the execution. One person designated by the GPA shall be a reporter from the county legal organ of the jurisdiction in which the condemned was convicted if that publication wishes to send a representative. One person designated by the GAB shall be a reporter from a broadcaster in the jurisdiction in which the condemned was convicted if that station wishes to send a representative. The AP, GPA and GAB may designate reporters from any news agency if they are unable to identify attendees from their own membership who wish to attend the execution.

2. The reporter from the county legal organ of the jurisdiction in which the condemned was convicted shall be selected as the media monitor if such reporter is designated as a witness by the GPA. If neither of the GPA's designees is from the county legal organ, then the reporter designated by the GAB from a broadcaster in the jurisdiction in which the condemned was convicted shall be selected as the media monitor. If none of the reporters designated by the GPA and GAB is from a news agency whose principal place of business is in the county in which the condemned was convicted, then the Commissioner shall designate one of the media witnesses to serve as the media monitor for the execution. The designation of the media monitor in such circumstances shall be on a rotating basis beginning with the AP, then the GPA, then the GAB and continuing in this order as the need arises.
3. Each designation of a media witness for an execution shall include the reporter's name, news agency, contact information and last four digits of Social Security number. This information must be received by the PAO via email at least 72 hours prior to the scheduled execution. The Commissioner may decline to allow a media witness to attend an execution or serve as the media monitor in his or her sole discretion for any reason.
4. In the event that more than one execution is conducted in any single day, the same same media representatives shall be the designees for those executions,

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with the exception of the representatives of the county in which the crime occurred.

5. Media representatives shall present valid identification upon admission to the facility.
6. The following procedures shall apply to media representatives attending executions:
  - a. Media witnesses shall arrive at the media staging area at time designated by PAO.
  - b. No electronic or mechanical devices including cell phones, smart phones, tablet PCs, cameras, video cameras, audio recorders or similar devices shall be permitted in the facility or the execution witness room.
  - c. Media representatives shall be escorted as a group to the main prison building, where they will be cleared for security purposes and provided with a pad of paper and a writing instrument.
  - d. Witnesses may be asked to secure keys, wallets, and other personal items before entering the institution.
7. Failure to comply with GDC rules regarding witnessing of executions, or any behavior that may endanger the security of the facility or safety of the community or others, shall be considered grounds to refuse to allow an individual to witness an execution or to remove that individual from the observation room.

**N. Special Considerations on Criminal Matters:**

1. OPS personnel shall extend every reasonable courtesy to media at the scene of a crime, incident, natural disaster, or catastrophic event. This may include closer

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access of personnel and equipment than available to the general public, to the degree that it does not interfere;

2. Media shall not be allowed access to any area or scene of an incident or crime where there is a possibility that evidence may be damaged, altered, destroyed or otherwise prejudiced by its existence being published or portrayed. Once evidence has been processed, removed and secured, the media may be allowed to enter by permission of the highest ranking agent on the scene;
3. OPS personnel will not allow media to accompany them during the execution of arrest or search warrants without authorization from the Director of OPS or designee;
4. Media should not be prevented from access to any area solely because of the possibility of their injury or death. Media should be advised of the danger and be allowed to make the decision to enter at his/her own volition;
5. On private property, it is required that media obtain permission from the owner or the owner's representative to photograph or film;
6. When an individual is charged with a criminal offense and is sought by law enforcement authorities, photographs or mug shots may be released to the media to help locate the individual;
7. At the scene of major crimes, such as hostage and barricade situations, the highest ranking agent shall designate a preliminary press area as early as possible and as close to the scene as safety and operational requirements allow. If required on scene, the Public Affairs Director or designee, will operate the press area. The Public Affairs Office will be the point of contact for media inquiries.
8. In cases of unusual occurrences, a Public Affairs Office representative should be designated, if necessary, to meet with community leaders in order to relay information, address concerns, and suppress rumors and misinformation. Press

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releases and media briefings will be handled by the Public Affairs Office and either a representative of the law enforcement agency, OPS, or a combination of the two;

9. The fact that a suicide or suspected suicide has occurred may be reported to the media, along with factual information describing how it happened. The name, age, address, sex, and occupation of the victim may also be released following the notification of next of kin. The fact that a suicide note exists may also be acknowledged without further comment. The content of such notes is personal and confidential and shall not be released except as provided by law;
  10. Never confirm nor identify by name target(s) of the investigation until that name(s) becomes public information through arrest or indictment.
- O. Critical Incident and Emergency Procedures: In the event of an emergency or critical incident at a facility, center, regional office or in central office, the Communications Center will be notified immediately by the facility, center or regional office, which will then notify the PAO who will then begin to set up appropriate emergency response procedures to handle media inquiries, if needed. The PAO may travel to and remain at the scene of the emergency as warranted, helping to coordinate timely and accurate communication with the media concerning developing events.
1. Critical Incident Plan:
    - a. After following its previously defined emergency procedures, the facility, center or regional office involved contacts the PAO or the Communications Center if the incident occurs after business hours. If there have been any media contacts, the facility, center or regional office notifies the PAO on duty before responding to media questions. The facility/center or regional office should decline to comment and must refer the media representative to the PAO.

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- b. The Communications Center notifies PAO, the Director of PAO, Assistant Commissioners, and Commissioner, as appropriate.
  - c. The PAO will return any media calls made to the facility, center, regional office or the Communications Center. The PAO, when appropriate, will notify any media of the incident as necessary.
  - d. If the incident is one likely to be of concern or likely to be the subject of continuing media attention, the Director of Public Affairs or designee may contact the facility, center or regional office and any other authorities concerned to get background information for dissemination to media.
2. Emergency Situations: As with critical incidents, the Communications Center follows their emergency procedures after being notified by the facility, center or regional office. Those procedures may involve notifying the PAO, Director of PAO and Assistant Commissioners or the Commissioner. The Commissioner or designee decides when a crisis becomes an "Emergency Situation."

**V. Attachments:**

Attachment 1: Interview Request Form

Attachment 2: Pool Participant Agreement

Attachment 3: Interview Conditions and Media Agreement Form

**VI. Record Retention of Forms Relevant to this Policy:**

Upon completion, all attachments and any documentation pursuant to this policy, shall be retained for at least three (3) years.