

YORK-POQUOSON SHERIFF'S OFFICE	RULES AND REGULATIONS
SUBJECT: Social Media	NUMBER: RR 1-13A
EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2018	REVIEW DATE:
AMENDS/SUPERSEDES: New	APPROVED:  Sheriff
VLEPSC:	

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14 **PURPOSE**

15
16 A well informed public can assist the Sheriff's Office in many ways and the use of social media
17 is a valuable asset to enhance communication, collaboration and information exchange with the
18 public, other local governmental offices and the news media. The purpose of this policy is to
19 establish guidelines for the Sheriff's Office regarding the appropriate use of existing and future
20 social media technologies. As new technologies and social networking tools emerge, these
21 guidelines will concurrently evolve.
22

23 **POLICY**

24
25 Social media provides a new and potentially valuable means of assisting Sheriff's Office
26 personnel in meeting community outreach, investigative, crime prevention and other related
27 objectives. This policy identifies potential uses that may be utilized as deemed reasonable by the
28 Sheriff and Command Staff. The Sheriff also recognizes the role that social media plays in the
29 lives of agency personnel. The personal use of social media can have an impact on the Sheriff's
30 Office and its members in their official capacity. Although not all inclusive, this policy provides
31 information of a precautionary nature as well as prohibitions on the use of social media by
32 Sheriff's Office employees.
33

34
35 **DEFINITIONS**

36

37 Social Media – Social Media is internet and mobile-based tools for sharing and discussing
38 information. The term most often refers to activities that integrate technology,
39 telecommunications and social interactions. Examples include, but are not limited to: Facebook,
40 Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Nextdoor, etc.

- 41
- 42 • Platform
 - 43 ○ Platform refers to the social media account and pages, e.g. Facebook, Twitter,
 - 44 YouTube, Instagram, Nextdoor, etc.
- 45
- 46 • Post
 - 47 ○ A response, opinion or content submitted to a (social media) site.
- 48
- 49 • Profile
 - 50 ○ Information that a user, group or organization provides about himself, herself or itself
 - 51 on a social networking site.
- 52
- 53 • Follower
 - 54 ○ A member of the public who is following or is a member of our social media sites.
- 55
- 56 • Social Networks
 - 57 ○ Online platforms where users can create profiles, share information, and socialize
 - 58 with others using a range of technologies.
- 59
- 60 • Speech
 - 61 ○ Expression or communication of thoughts or opinions in spoken words, in writing, by
 - 62 expressive conduct, symbolism, photographs, video tape, or related forms of
 - 63 communication.
- 64

65 **PROCEDURES**

- 66
- 67 • Account Creation
 - 68 ○ All official York-Poquoson Sheriff’s Office social media accounts shall be
 - 69 authorized and approved by the Sheriff.
 - 70 ○ The use of social media tools on behalf of the Sheriff’s Office will be
 - 71 maintained and supervised by the Public Information Officer.
- 72
- 73 • Account Users
 - 74 ○ The Sheriff or his designated representative shall designate those Sheriff’s
 - 75 Office employees who may post content to Sheriff’s Office social media sites
 - 76 on behalf of the Sheriff’s Office.
- 77
- 78 • Identification and Origin
 - 79 ○ Statements posted on official social media accounts are made on behalf of the
 - 80 York-Poquoson Sheriff’s Office; thus, the response will be organizational.

- 81 ○ Official posts will be identified with the Sheriff’s Office name and/or official
82 logo or profile image.
83
- 84 ● Acceptable Use
 - 85 ○ All use of social media technologies should be consistent with applicable
86 state, federal, and local laws, regulations and policies.
87
 - 88 ● Accuracy and Integrity
 - 89 ○ York-Poquoson Sheriff’s Office members must not knowingly communicate
90 inaccurate or false information.
 - 91 ○ All reasonable efforts should be made by the Sheriff’s Office members to
92 provide only verifiable facts.
 - 93 ○ Sheriff’s Office members will act and conduct themselves according to the
94 highest possible ethical standards.
 - 95 ○ Respect and protection of citizen’s personal information is paramount.
 - 96 ○ Strive for transparency and openness in social media interactions.
 - 97 ○ Provide only links to credible sources of information to support interactions,
98 when applicable.
 - 99 ○ Publicly correct any information that has been published that is later found to
100 be in error.
 - 101 ○ Respect rules set forth by the social media sites.
 - 102 ○ Unless directed to do so by the Sheriff, employees shall not post content that is
103 publicly controversial.
 - 104 ○ Employees shall not express personal opinions through the Sheriff’s Office
105 sponsored social media sites. However; the Sheriff may direct his opinion or
106 response be published on topics of community interest.
107
 - 108 ● Confidentiality and Undue Caution
 - 109 ○ York-Poquoson Sheriff’s Office members must protect all information that is
110 considered to be confidential in nature.
 - 111 ○ York-Poquoson Sheriff’s Office members must communicate as much
112 information and be as transparent as possible, without disclosing confidential
113 matters.
114
 - 115 ● Implementation and Maintenance
 - 116 ○ Sheriff’s Office members shall receive prior authorization or permission to act as
117 designated members or site administrators.
 - 118 ○ Designated members will implement the Sheriff’s Office social media strategies
119 during the course of normal business hours.
 - 120 ○ Posts will be periodically monitored Monday – Friday, 8:00am – 4:30pm and
121 whenever possible during weekends and holidays.
 - 122 ○ New content will be posted at least once a week; although every day activity is
123 encouraged.
 - 124 ○ Official content posted by the designated members will accomplish and support these
125 initiatives:

- 126 ▪ Investigative leads;
- 127 ▪ Community policing;
- 128 ▪ Reputation management;
- 129 ▪ Customer service;
- 130 ▪ Public relations and awareness;
- 131 ▪ Crime prevention/solution.
- 132
- 133 ○ Disclaimers will be posted on social networking platforms, if deemed necessary.
- 134 ○ All official York-Poquoson Sheriff's Office social media accounts shall clearly
- 135 indicate that any articles and any other content posted or submitted for posting are
- 136 subject to public disclosure.
- 137 ○ Communication through social media is considered a public record and will be
- 138 managed as such.
- 139 ○ Content posted that is deemed unsuitable by the designated members because it is
- 140 deemed prohibited content based on the criteria outlined below, shall be retained
- 141 pursuant to records retention schedule.
- 142 ○ The York-Poquoson Sheriff's Office shall reserve the right to delete or not allow
- 143 comments that contain:
 - 144 ▪ Vulgar or abusive language
 - 145 ▪ Personal or obscene attacks of any kind.
 - 146 ▪ Offensive terms targeting individuals or groups;
 - 147 ▪ Threats or defamatory statements;
 - 148 ▪ Links to any sites not related to the subject of the post;
 - 149 ▪ Suggestions or encouragement of illegal activity;
 - 150 ▪ Any off-topic posts by a single user or repetitive posts copied and pasted by
 - 151 multiple users;
 - 152 ▪ Unsolicited proposals or other business ideas or inquiries;
 - 153 ▪ Content that violates a legal ownership interest of any other part.
- 154
- 155 ○ Sheriff's Office members who fail to conduct themselves, while posting content on
- 156 behalf of the Sheriff's Office, in an appropriate manner shall be subject to the
- 157 disciplinary procedures.
- 158 ○ Designated members will monitor the content on each of the Sheriff's Office social
- 159 media accounts to ensure adherence to the Sheriff's Office Social Media Policy for
- 160 appropriate use and message.
- 161 ○ It is the responsibility of all Sheriff's Office members to inform and alert the platform
- 162 administrators of inappropriate posts, especially those submitted outside of business
- 163 hours and on weekends.
- 164 ○ The language of official content or posting will be professional, familiar and in
- 165 laymen terms.
- 166 ○ Posts or comments that offer thoughtful criticism of the Sheriff's Office and its
- 167 initiatives are welcome and shall not be removed or altered except as provided for in
- 168 this policy.
- 169
- 170 ● Potential Uses

- 171 ○ Social media is a valuable investigative tool when seeking evidence or
172 information about
 - 173 ▪ Missing persons;
 - 174 ▪ Wanted persons;
 - 175 ▪ Gang Participation;
 - 176 ▪ Cyber bullying and Cyber stalking;
 - 177 ▪ Publishing photos and videos or information about crimes by participants
178 and observers.
- 179 ○ Social media can be used for community outreach and engagement by:
 - 180 ▪ Providing crime prevention tips
 - 181 ▪ Providing public safety alerts
 - 182 ▪ Sharing crime maps and data
 - 183 ▪ Soliciting tips about unsolved crimes (i.e., Crime Line)
 - 184 ▪ Promoting the image of the Sheriff's Office and its members.
- 185 ○ Social media can be used to make time-sensitive notification related to:
 - 186 ▪ Road closures
 - 187 ▪ Special events
 - 188 ▪ Weather emergencies or other natural disasters
 - 189 ▪ Missing or endangered persons

192 **PERSONAL USE**

- 193 • Precautions and Prohibitions
 - 194 ○ Barring federal and state laws to the contrary, Sheriff's Office personnel shall abide
195 by the following rules when using social media:
 - 196 ▪ As public employees, Sheriff's Office personnel are cautioned that speech on-or
197 off duty, made pursuant to their official duties, that owes its existence to the
198 employee's professional duties and responsibilities is not protected speech under
199 the First Amendment and may form the basis for discipline if deemed detrimental
200 to the Sheriff, Sheriff's Office or its personnel.
 - 201 ▪ Sheriff's Office personnel should assume that their speech related activity on
202 social media sites will reflect upon their office and the Sheriff's Office.
 - 203 ▪ Sheriff's Office personnel are free to express themselves as private citizens on
204 social media sites to the degree that their speech does not impair working
205 relationships of the Sheriff's Office for which loyalty and confidentiality are
206 important, impede the performance of duties, impair discipline and harmony
207 among co-workers, or negatively affect the public perception of the Sheriff, the
208 Sheriff's Office or any of its personnel.
 - 209 ▪ Sheriff's Office personnel except for the Sheriff, PIO or Division Commanders
210 shall not comment on posts on community or other social media sites where their
211 comment may be interpreted as an official position of the Sheriff's Office.
212
213

- 214 ▪ Sheriff's Office personnel except for the Sheriff, PIO or Division Commanders
215 shall not comment on posts that are derogatory in nature towards the Sheriff's
216 Office, its personnel or operations.
217
- 218 ○ Sheriff's Office personnel are encouraged to notify the PIO any time they become
219 aware of posts on community or other social media sites that are derogatory in nature
220 towards or questions the Sheriff's Office, its personnel or operations.
221 ○ Sheriff's Office employees must be cognizant of the fact that their personal social
222 media sites and pages and those sites and pages that they host can and will be subject
223 to scrutiny by attorneys in criminal and civil cases and may be the basis for attacks on
224 their credibility.
225 ○ Because speech used in a social media setting becomes part of the worldwide
226 electronic domain, adherence to the Sheriff's Office's code of conduct is required in
227 the personal use of social media. In particular, Sheriff's Office personnel are
228 prohibited from the following:
229 ▪ Posting content or hosting sites containing obscene, profane or sexually explicit
230 language, images or acts and statements or other forms of speech that ridicule,
231 malign, disparage, or otherwise express bias against any race, religion or protected
232 class of citizens
233 ▪ Posting content or hosting sites involving themselves or other Sheriff's Office
234 personnel which reflects behavior that would reasonably be considered reckless or
235 irresponsible
236 ▪ Posting content or hosting sites engaging in prohibited speech noted herein may
237 provide grounds for undermining or impeaching a deputy's testimony in court.
238 Sheriff's Office personnel thus sanctioned are subject to disciplinary action up to
239 and including termination
240 ▪ Sheriff's Office personnel shall not post, transmit or otherwise disseminate any
241 information to which they have access as a result of their employment without the
242 express permission from the Sheriff of his designee.
243
- 244 ○ For safety and security reasons, Sheriff's Office personnel should be aware that the
245 disclosure of their employment with the Sheriff's Office may cause potential personal
246 and family safety concerns. Employees of the Sheriff's Office shall not post
247 information pertaining to any other member of the Sheriff's Office that would tend to
248 identify that member as a Sheriff's Office employee without their permission.
249 ○ Sheriff's Office personnel who may reasonably be expected to work undercover
250 operations shall not post any form of visual or personal identification.
251 ○ Sheriff's Office personnel who are working undercover on-line investigations may
252 post visual or other forms of identification under a false identity.
253 ○ Under no circumstances will Sheriff's Office personnel knowingly assume the
254 identity of any person known to be living or deceased.
255 ○ Sheriff's Office personnel may not divulge information gained by reason of their
256 authority, make any statements, speeches, appearances and endorsements, or publish
257 materials that could reasonably be considered to represent the views or positions of

- 258 the Sheriff or the Sheriff's Office without express permission from the Sheriff or his
259 designee.
- 260 ○ Sheriff's Office personnel shall not divulge or publish information regarding any calls
261 for service, operations or tactics or express opinions about the citizens we serve.
 - 262 ○ Sheriff's Office personnel should be aware that they may be subject to civil litigations
263 for:
 - 264 ▪ Publishing or posting false information that harms the reputation of another
265 person, group or organization;
 - 266 ▪ Publishing or posting private facts and personal information about someone
267 without their permission that has not been previously revealed to the public, is not
268 a legitimate public concern and/or would be offensive to a reasonable person;
 - 269 ▪ Using someone else's name, likeness or other personal attributes without that
270 person's permission for an exploitative purpose;
 - 271 ▪ Publishing the creative work of another, trademarks, or certain confidential
272 business information without permission of the owner.
 - 273 ○ Sheriff's Office personnel should be aware that privacy settings and social media sites
274 are constantly in flux, and they should never assume that personal information posted
275 on such sites is protected.
 - 276 ○ Sheriff's Office personnel should expect that any information created, transmitted,
277 downloaded, exchanged or discussed in a public online forum may be accessed by the
278 Sheriff's Office at any time without prior notice.
 - 279 ○ Any speech, photograph, video etc. posted or published through social media,
280 published by Sheriff's Office personnel, in any manner that tends to tarnish or demean
281 the Sheriff's Office core values shall be subject to disciplinary action.
 - 282 ○ Prospective employees of the Sheriff's Office will be requested to provide access to
283 their respective social media accounts for review as part of the background
284 investigation. This review shall be conducted by the person conducting the
285 background investigations or a Command Staff member.
- 286 ● Reporting violations
 - 287 ○ Any Sheriff's Office employee becoming aware of or having knowledge of a posting
288 or of any web site in violation of this policy shall notify his or her supervisor
289 immediately for follow up action.
 - 290
 - 291