

Speech, Expression, and Social Networking

829.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This policy is intended to address issues associated with the use of social networking sites and provide guidelines for regulating and balancing member speech and expression with the legitimate needs of the Sonoma County Probation Department.

This policy applies to all forms of communication including but not limited to film, video, print media, public or private speech, and use of all internet services, including the World Wide Web, email, file transfer, remote computer access, news services, social networking, social media, instant messaging, blogs, forums, and video-sharing and other file-sharing sites.

Nothing in this policy is intended to prohibit or infringe upon any communication, speech, or expression protected or privileged under law. This includes speech and expression protected under state or federal constitutions as well as labor or other applicable laws. For example, this policy does not limit a member from speaking as a private citizen, including acting as an authorized member of a recognized bargaining unit or an employee group, about matters of public concern, such as misconduct or corruption, or workplace concerns.

Members are encouraged to consult with their supervisor regarding any questions arising from the application or potential application of this policy.

829.2 POLICY

Members of public entities occupy a trusted position in the community, and thus, their statements have the potential to contravene the policies and performance of the Sonoma County Probation Department. Due to the nature of the work and influence associated with the probation profession, it is necessary that members of this department be subject to certain reasonable limitations on their speech and expression. To achieve its mission and efficiently provide service to the public, the Department will carefully balance the individual member's rights against the needs and interests of the Department when exercising a reasonable degree of control over its members' speech and expression.

829.3 SAFETY

Members should carefully consider the implications of their speech or any other form of expression when using the internet. Speech and expression that may negatively affect the safety of Sonoma County Probation Department members, such as posting personal information in a public forum or posting a photograph taken with a GPS-enabled camera, can result in compromising a member's home address or family ties. Members should therefore not disseminate or post any information on any forum or medium that could reasonably be anticipated to compromise the safety of any member or a member's family or associates. Examples of the type of information that could reasonably be expected to compromise safety include:

- (a) Disclosing a photograph and name or address of an officer who is working in a specialized assignment or interagency task force.

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- (b) Disclosing the address of a fellow officer.
- (c) Disclosing where another officer can be located off-duty.

829.4 PROHIBITED SPEECH, EXPRESSION, AND CONDUCT

To meet the department's safety, performance, and public-trust needs the following are prohibited unless the speech is otherwise protected (for example, a member speaking as a private citizen, including acting as an authorized member of a recognized bargaining unit or an employee group, on a matter of public concern):

- (a) Speech or expression made pursuant to an official duty that compromises or damages the mission, function, reputation, or professionalism of the Department or its members.
- (b) Speech or expression that, while not made pursuant to an official duty, is significantly linked to, or related to, the Department and could compromise or damage the mission, function, reputation, or professionalism of the Department or its members. Examples may include:
 - 1. Statements that indicate disregard for the law or the state or U.S. constitutions.
 - 2. Expression that demonstrates support for criminal activity.
 - 3. Participating in sexually explicit photographs or videos for compensation or distribution.
- (c) Speech or expression that could reasonably be foreseen as having a negative impact on the credibility of the member as a witness. For example, posting statements or expressions to a website that glorify or endorse dishonesty, unlawful discrimination, or illegal behavior.
- (d) Speech or expression of any form that could reasonably be foreseen as having a negative impact on the safety of Department members. For example, a statement on a blog that provides specific details on how and when custody transportations are made could reasonably be foreseen as potentially jeopardizing employees by informing criminals of details that could facilitate an escape or attempted escape.
- (e) Speech or expression contrary to the Code of Conduct Policy as adopted by the Department.
- (f) Use or disclosure, through whatever means, of any information, photograph, or video or other recording obtained or accessible because of employment with the Department for financial or personal gain, or any disclosure of such materials without the express authorization of the Chief Probation Officer or the authorized designee.
- (g) Posting, transmitting, or disseminating any photographs, video or audio recordings, likenesses, or images of department logos, emblems, uniforms, badges, patches, marked vehicles, equipment, or other material that specifically identifies the Sonoma County Probation Department on any personal or social networking or other website or web page, without the express authorization of the Chief Probation Officer or unless it involves a department-sanctioned fundraiser or community event, such as the Special Olympics.

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Members must take reasonable and prompt action to remove any content, including content posted by others, that violates this policy from any web page or website maintained by the employee (e.g., social or personal website).

829.4.1 UNAUTHORIZED ENDORSEMENTS AND ADVERTISEMENTS

While members are not restricted from engaging in the following activities as private citizens or as authorized members of recognized bargaining units or employee groups, members may not represent the Sonoma County Probation Department or identify themselves in any way that could be reasonably perceived as representing the Department in order to do any of the following, unless specifically authorized by the Chief Probation Officer (Government Code § 3206; Government Code § 3302):

- (a) Endorse, support, oppose, or contradict any political campaign or initiative
- (b) Endorse, support, oppose, or contradict any social issue, cause, or religion
- (c) Endorse, support, or oppose any product, service, company, or other commercial entity
- (d) Appear in any commercial, social, or nonprofit publication, or motion picture, film, video, or public broadcast, or on any website

Additionally, when it can reasonably be construed that a member, acting in the individual's own capacity or through an outside group or organization, including as an authorized member of a recognized bargaining unit or an employee group, is affiliated with this department, the member shall give a specific disclaiming statement that any such speech or expression is not representative of the Sonoma County Probation Department.

Members retain their right to vote as they choose, to support candidates of their choice, and to express their opinions as private citizens, including as authorized members of recognized bargaining units or employee groups, on political subjects and candidates at all times while off-duty. However, members may not use their official authority or influence to interfere with or affect the result of elections or nominations for office. Members are also prohibited from directly or indirectly using their official authority to coerce, command, or advise another employee to pay, lend, or contribute anything of value to a party, committee, organization, agency, or person for political purposes (5 USC § 1502).

829.5 PRIVACY EXPECTATION

Members forfeit any expectation of privacy with regard to emails, texts, or anything published or maintained through file-sharing software or any internet site that is accessed, transmitted, received, or reviewed on any department technology system.

The Department shall not require an employee to disclose a personal username or password for accessing personal social media or to open a personal social website; however, the Department may request access when it is reasonably believed to be relevant to the investigation of allegations of work-related misconduct and/or the member's potential violation of applicable laws and regulations. (Labor Code § 980).

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829.6 CONSIDERATIONS

In determining whether to grant authorization of any speech or conduct prohibited under this policy, the factors that the Chief Probation Officer or the authorized designee should consider include:

- (a) Whether the speech or conduct would negatively affect the efficiency of delivering public services.
- (b) Whether the speech or conduct would be contrary to the good order of the Department or the efficiency or morale of its members.
- (c) Whether the speech or conduct would reflect unfavorably upon the Department.
- (d) Whether the speech or conduct would negatively affect the member's appearance of impartiality in performance of duties.
- (e) Whether similar speech or conduct has been previously authorized.
- (f) Whether the speech or conduct may be protected and outweighs any interest of the Department.

829.7 TRAINING

Subject to available resources, the Department will provide periodic training regarding the limitations on speech, expression, and use of social networking to all members of the Department.