



# VIA TRANSIT POLICE DEPARTMENT

## Standard Operating Procedures



### Section 405 Social Media

Office with Primary Responsibility:	COP	Effective Date: Prior Revision Date:	February 14, 2018 New
Office(s) with Secondary Responsibilities:		Number of Pages:	3
Forms Referenced in Procedure:	None	Related Procedures:	ALL

#### .01 INTRODUCTION

This procedure establishes guidelines regarding appropriate content for personal, social networking websites, web pages and other electronically transmitted or hard copied material with respect to the use of the VIA Transit Police Department's images, material, logos, video, data, information, or references to those entities. The purpose is to ensure that members use appropriate discretion in the use of information and references to the VIA Transit Police Department so as not to discredit the department; to safeguard the release of information to unauthorized persons regarding crimes, accidents, police incidents or police training; and to confirm that all members treat the official business of the Department as confidential as applicable by law or departmental policy. This policy is not intended to obstruct the professional development of any member or to infringe upon any member's protected rights to include communication, speech, or expression. Lastly, this policy serves to remind all members that any unsolicited information brought to the Department's attention may be used by the Department for administrative purposes as applicable to standing rules, regulations, policies, practices, and procedures.

#### .02 DISCUSSION

All members of the VIA Transit Police Department are reminded that integrity, ethics, and professionalism are paramount staples in the law enforcement community. Members are held to the department's elevated standards of conduct whether on or off duty. All members must avoid any conduct which would compromise the integrity of the Department; undermine the public's confidence in this agency; compromise operational and officer security; and/or adversely affect ongoing criminal, civil, or disciplinary cases; or bring reproach or liability upon the Department as a whole.

#### .03 DEFINITIONS:

- A. **BLOG:** A commentary or self-published journal allowing visitors to post comments, feedback, or reactions.
- B. **COMMENT:** Expressing a reaction or opinion on a webpage through remarks, in text, or video.
- C. **OFF-DUTY:** Time frame outside of a regular tour of duty and/or assigned duties.
- D. **ON-DUTY:** A regular tour of duty and/or assigned duties, participant in a special assignment for the department, or when an incident occurs requiring members to act in the capacity of a police officer.
- E. **POST:** An item inserted into a blog, or an entry to any type of computerized bulletin board, forum, or social media site; the act of creating, uploading, editing or adding to any social media outlet. This includes text, photographs, audio, video, or any other multimedia file.
- F. **SOCIAL MEDIA:** On-line sources that allow people to communicate, share, and/or exchange information with others via some form of on-line or cellular network platform. Information may include, but is not limited to, text, photographs, video, audio, and other multimedia files.
- 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.
- H. **WEB SITE:** A site (location) on the World Wide Web (www). Each web site contains a home page, which is the first document users see when they enter the site. The site might also contain additional documents and files. Each site is owned and managed by an individual, company, or organization. This is a broadly used term generically covering the various social media sites as well as news, information, and other similarly organized locations on the World Wide Web.



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#### **.04 POLICY**

It is the policy of the VIA Transit Police Department that all existing laws, rules, regulations, policies, procedures, and directives that govern on and off duty conduct are applicable to conduct associated with a member's use or participation with social media. When engaging in social media, to include but not limited to YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc., members will strictly adhere to any and all directives listed within this policy. The VIA Transit Police Department recognizes two general categories of social media usage among members. These categories include departmental use of social media and personal use of social media.

##### **A. Department-Authorized Use of Social Media**

The use of social media for the specific purpose of assisting the Department and its personnel in community outreach, problem solving, investigation, crime prevention, and/or other Department related objectives may be done only with prior written authorization by the Chief of Transit Police or his designee. Members seeking to represent the Department via social media outlets shall obtain written permission from the Chief of Transit Police, or his/her designee, prior to engaging in such activity. In addition to the Standard Operating Procedures and the VIA Salaried Employee Handbook the following provisions shall apply to department-authorized use of social media upon obtaining authorization:

1. Properly identify themselves as a member of the Department except in instances whereby proper identification poses a risk to officer safety or may impede the progress of a criminal investigation. Members with permission from the Chief of Transit Police or his/her designee may exclude Department membership from their profiles.
2. At all times, conduct themselves as representatives of the Department and, accordingly, adhere to all policies procedures, standards of conduct, and observe conventionally accepted protocols and proper decorum.
3. Observe and abide by all copyright, trademark, and service mark restrictions in posting materials to electronic media.
4. Department members shall not under any circumstances make statements about the guilt or innocence of any suspect or arrestee, or comments concerning pending prosecutions.

##### **B. Personal Use of Social Media**

1. There is no reasonable expectation of privacy when engaging in social networking online while using VIA assets or during a member's working hours. As such, the content of social networking websites may be obtained for use in criminal trials, civil proceedings, and administrative investigations.
2. Members are prohibited from posting, transmitting, and/or disseminating any pictures, recordings, or videos of official Department training, activities, or work-related assignments without written permission of the Chief of Transit Police or designee. Furthermore, members are prohibited from posting, transmitting, and/or disseminating any pictures, recordings, information, or videos that are in violation of any provisions of the Standard Operating Procedures.
3. Any member becoming aware of or having knowledge of a posting or of any website or web page in violation of the provisions of this policy shall immediately notify his/her supervisor, in writing, for follow-up action.
4. Sites deemed inappropriate, whether an employment association or not, bringing discredit to this Department or to a member, or promoting or encouraging misconduct, whether on or off duty, may be investigated by the Chief of Transit Police or designee.
5. All members shall treat the official business of the Department as confidential.



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6. Members shall state that the views and opinions expressed on a social media site are the member's personal views and not those of the VIA Transit Police Department by incorporating a disclaimer indicating this on their personal page.
7. Members are prohibited from using ethnic slurs, profanity, personal insults, and material harassing in nature, defamatory, fraudulent, or discriminatory, or other content or communications that would not be acceptable in a VIA workplace under agency policy or practice.
8. Members are prohibited from displaying or posting sexually explicit images, videos, cartoons, jokes, messages or other material that would be considered violations of the VIA policy preventing sexual harassment in the work place.
9. Members shall not post, share, text, "tweet," photos; comments; videos; or other representations of police related calls, incidents, scenes or training without the prior approval of the Chief of Transit Police unless such posting or sharing is for a legitimate police or investigative purpose.