



# Rhode Island State Police

## General Order – 6E

<i>Section:</i>	<b>Administration – General Management</b>
<i>Article:</i>	<b>6E – MIS</b>
<i>Title:</i>	<b>Social Media</b>
<i>Special Instructions:</i>	

### I. PURPOSE

To establish procedures and guidelines for Division employees, both sworn and civilian, in their use of Division-sanctioned, on-the-job and personal social media sites, and to outline expectations with respect to such usage and the effect it has upon the reputation and perception of the Rhode Island State Police.

### II. DEFINITIONS

- A. **SOCIAL MEDIA** – A category of Internet-based resources that integrate user-generated content allowing people to communicate, share information, photos, videos and exchange text and other multimedia files via some form of online or cellular network. This includes, but is not limited to, social networking sites (Facebook, My Space, LinkedIn), micro blogging sites (Twitter, Nixle), photo- and video-sharing sites (Flickr, YouTube, Instagram), wikis (Wikipedia), blogs and news sites (Digg, Reddit).
- B. **SOCIAL NETWORKS** – Online platforms where users can create profiles, share information and socialize with others using a range of technologies.
- C. **SOCIAL NETWORKING** – Interacting with a group of people with common interests in a virtual environment.
- B. **BLOG** – A self-published diary or commentary on a particular topic that may allow visitors to post response or comments. A blog (short for “Web log”) is a personal online journal that is intended for public consumption.
- C. **PAGE** – The specific portion of a social media site where content is displayed, and managed by an individual or an individual with administrator rights.
- D. **POST** – Content users share on a social media site or the act of publishing content on a site.
- E. **PROFILE** – Information that a user provides about himself or herself on a social networking site.

- F. SPEECH – Expressions or communication of thoughts or opinions in spoken words, in writing, by expressive conduct, symbolism, photographs, videotape, or related forms of communication.
- G. COMMENT – A response made to a post on a social media site.

### III. POLICY

- A. Social media provides a new and potentially valuable means of assisting the Division in meeting community outreach, problem-solving, investigative, crime prevention, and related objectives. The Division endorses the secure use of social media to enhance communication, collaboration, and information exchange; streamline process; and foster productivity.

The Division recognizes the role these tools may play in the personal lives of Division employees. It shall be the policy of the Division to acknowledge that employees have a right to have personal web pages or sites. Division employees also have the right to form, join or associate with groups and engage in activities for the purpose of collective bargaining or other employment related matters. However, it is necessary to ensure that employees using such personal web pages/sites or who publish information on the Internet exercise discretion in their use of references to the Rhode Island State Police and do so in accordance with expected behavior prescribed in the Division Rules & Regulations.

This policy establishes the Division's position on the utilization and management of social media and provides guidance on its management, administration and oversight. This policy provides precautionary information as well as prohibitions on the use of social media by Division personnel. Any online activity that sheds a negative light on the Division, or its employees, will be viewed as a violation of this policy. To the extent that members' web pages are in the public domain, they should be expected to be monitored for appropriate conduct.

Sworn and civilian employees are to conduct themselves regardless of on-duty or off-duty status in accordance with Division Rules & Regulations, Policies and written directives, particularly GO 1A - Law Enforcement Role and Authority, 27A- Unlawful Harassment & Discrimination and 61A - Public Information/Media Briefing

### IV. DIVISION SANCTIONED PRESENCE AND OFFICIAL USE

A. DIVISION SANCTIONED SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE

1. All official Division social media sites and pages shall be approved by the Superintendent or his/her designee and managed by his designee.
2. Where possible, social media pages shall clearly indicate that they are maintained by the Division and shall have Division contact information prominently displayed.
3. Where possible, each Division social media site or page shall include:
  - a. An introductory statement that clearly specifies that purpose and scope of the Division's presence on the website;
  - b. A link to the Division's official website, where possible;
  - c. Be designed for the target audience such as potential Division recruits or the public at large.
4. Social media content shall adhere to applicable laws, regulations and Division policies and regulations.
  - a. Content is subject to public record laws and relevant record retention schedules.
  - b. Content must be stored, managed and retrieved to comply with open records laws, e-discovery and Division policies.
5. Where possible, social media pages should state that the opinions expressed by visitors to the page(s) do not reflect the opinions of the Division.
  - a. Pages shall clearly indicate that posted comments will be monitored and that the Division reserves the right to remove obscenities, off-topic comments, and personal attacks.
  - b. Pages shall clearly indicate that any content posted or submitted for posting is subject to public disclosure.
6. Examples of Division use of social media may include, but not limited to, the following:

- a. Seeking evidence or information about:
  - i. missing persons;
  - ii. wanted persons;
  - iii. gang participation;
  - iv. crime perpetrated online (i.e. cyberbullying, cyberstalking);
  - v. photos or videos of a crime posted by a participant or observer.
  
- b. Community outreach and engagement by:
  - i. providing crime prevention tips;
  - ii. offering online-reporting opportunities;
  - iii. sharing crime maps and data;
  - iv. soliciting tips about unsolved crimes.
  
- c. To make time-sensitive notifications related to:
  - i. road closures,
  - ii. special events,
  - iii. weather emergencies,
  - iv. missing or endangered persons.

B. OFFICIAL DIVISION SOCIAL MEDIA USE

1. Division employees representing the Division via social media outlets shall:
  - a. Identify themselves as an employee of the Division
  - b. Conduct themselves at all times as a representative of the Division and adhere to all Division standards of conduct, and observe conventional accepted protocols and proper decorum.
  - c. Not make statements about the guilt or innocence of any suspect or arrestee, or comments concerning pending prosecutions, nor post, transmit, or otherwise disseminate confidential information, including photographs or videos, related to department training, activities, or work-related assignments without authorization or express permission.
  - d. Not conduct political activities or private business.

2. Official access to any non Division social media or social networking site is prohibited other than that necessary in the furtherance of official duty.

#### C. ON-DUTY SOCIAL MEDIA USE

1. Division employees shall not utilize Division owned computers, cell phones or other communicative devices for any unauthorized purpose, including participation in social media or social networking unless such conduct is required in the course of a permitted duty assignment.
2. As part of employment background process, sworn Division members will:
  - a. Advise applicant a search of social media in the public domain will be conducted;
  - b. Conduct a search of social media presence in the public domain regarding the applicant;
  - c. Not inquire about or obtain applicant password information regarding access to social media sites;
  - d. Will not utilize passwords, in the event they are provided by applicant;
  - e. Will not use online aliases to conduct employment background investigations.
3. All official investigations are to be conducted using authorized logon credentials.
4. Employees may engage in personal social media activities while on duty (Example: status updates, tweeting, blogging, monitoring comments, etc.) provided:
  - a. The activity is accomplished during scheduled authorized break;
  - b. They are using personally owned device.

#### V. OFF-DUTY USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Division employees who choose to maintain or participate in social media or social networking platforms while off duty shall conduct themselves with professionalism and in a manner consistent with published Rules & Regulations and Division policies governing off-duty conduct. In the course of operating or participating the following shall apply:

- A. Division employees are free to express themselves as private citizens on social media sites to the degree that their speech does not impair working relationships of this Division for which loyalty and confidentiality are important, impede the performance of duties, or negatively affect the public perception of the Division.
- B. Sworn members shall not use their personal social networking website accounts to conduct official law enforcement investigations.
- C. Division employees are prohibited from using Division e-mail address as contact information to register for personal social media participation.
- D. Division employees are to abide by the provisions of GO 61A - Public Information/Media Briefing, Section III, C 1 through 9, which spells out information that is not to be released under any circumstances.
- E. Division employees should be aware that privacy settings and social media sites are constantly in flux, and they should never assume that personal information posted on such sites is protected.
- F. Division employees should expect that any information created, transmitted, downloaded, exchanged, or discussed in the public domain may be accessed by the Division at any time without prior notice.
- G. Division employees shall be held responsible for the content that appears on their personally maintained social media or social networking sites and will be obligated to remove any posting or material contributed by others that reflects negatively upon the Division and/or violates Division Rules & Regulations.
- H. Division employees are **prohibited from posting** the following information on any social networking platform, either their own site(s), the site(s) of others known to them, the site(s) of others unknown to them, news media pages, or other information exchange forums:
  - 1. Any material that brings discredit to, or may adversely affect the efficiency, reputation or integrity of the Division.

2. Any text, photograph, audio, video, or any other multimedia file related to any investigation, both current and past, of this Division.
3. Any confidential text, pictures, audio or videos related to departmental training, activities or work-related assignments.
4. Information that could affect the safety or security of the Division or its employees.
5. Sexually graphic, explicit, violent, racial or ethnic posts, comments, pictures, artwork, audio, video or other reference.
6. Sensationalizing or displaying of excessive alcohol use.
7. Any comment, discussion, text, photograph, audio, video or any other multimedia or digital technology media file included that infers, implies, states, opines or otherwise expresses the employee's views on the public which would be detrimental to the Division's overall publicized mission as stated in the published Division Rules & Regulations.
8. Any text, photograph, audio, video, or other multimedia file included on social media or social networking site that infers, implies, states, opines, or otherwise expresses the employee's views on the legal, judicial or criminal systems which in any way, undermine the public's confidence or trust in the Division.

## V. PROVISIONS

- A. Division employees should consider the possible adverse consequences of internet postings. The content of social networking web pages/media can and may be subpoenaed and used in criminal and civil trials to impeach testimony and/or credibility, such as in cross-examination in criminal cases.
- B. Employees are encouraged to limit the amount of personal information shared on a social networking website. Criminal offenders, gang members, etc. have access to the internet and search for persons in the same manner as the public.
- C. Employees are encouraged to seek guidance from the Major - Chief Administrative Officer for clarification of any of the contents of this policy as well as any posting that they believe may adversely reflect upon either the Division or the integrity of an employee.

- D. Any form of social media maintained by employees and deemed inappropriate in accordance with published Division Rules & Regulations, whether an employment association or not, bringing discredit to the Division or to a Division member, or promoting misconduct, whether on or off duty, may be investigated through a criminal or administrative investigation.



By Order of Colonel O'Donnell

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Steven G. O'Donnell". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored background.

Steven G. O'Donnell  
Colonel  
Superintendent