



Office of the Commissioner
Public Communications Policy

Policy #: DHHS-01-12

Issue Date: 8/28/12

Re-Issue Date: 3/06/15

I. SUBJECT

Public Communications Policy

II. POLICY STATEMENT

This policy applies to employees of the Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and is intended to guide their contact with the public and media in their roles as state employees and representatives of the department.

III. RATIONALE

As part of its commitment to transparency and to creating and maintaining public understanding and support for its objectives and programs, the DHHS will provide the public and media with accurate and consistent information in an accessible and timely manner. It also ensures the appropriate, coordinated use of Department-related materials, including its logo.

IV. OVERVIEW OF PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

The Department has a fundamental responsibility to communicate consistently, clearly and effectively with all constituents. Working effectively with the public and media is critical to achieving this goal. The Communications Director within the Office of the Commissioner manages all Department communications and education efforts, including the development and dissemination of all official agency announcements. These include media releases, weekly highlights, educational columns and other materials of interest to the public and regulated community. The Director coordinates, prepares public presentations and hosts media conferences. The Director of Communications serves as the liaison to the media, prepares subject-matter experts to respond to media requests and when appropriate, serves as agency spokesperson.

V. PROCEDURE STATEMENT

A. Providing Public Access to Departmental Information and Proceedings

1. The Maine DHHS conforms to the letter and spirit of the Freedom of Access Act (FOAA). All files, except enforcement, personnel, and others required by law to be kept confidential, are available for inspection during business hours. Staff must follow the Department's Freedom of Access Act Guidelines in determining the

appropriate response to requests for confidential information or consult the Department's FOAA Coordinator (DHHS General Counsel) for guidance.

2. Media representatives and members of the public have rights to observe the conduct of state business. The FOAA governs those rights, both regarding "public records" and "public proceedings."

B. Providing Information to the Public and Media in a Timely Manner

1. The Maine DHHS is committed to providing the highest level of transparency and customer service. A critical element of that commitment is to the extent practical, to respond to all requests from members of the public or media in a timely manner. Responding to media inquiries is a high priority and must be respectful of reporter's deadlines. To the extent possible, requests from the media will be responded to immediately and the reporter's deadlines will be met. If additional time is needed to gather the information or obtain data, staff should notify the Director of Communications in order to manage media expectations.

C. Representing the Department on Departmental Policy or Position

1. The Commissioner and Director of Communications, or their approved designee, is responsible for articulating Department policy, positions and any public personnel information, including but not limited to budgetary matters, legislative and regulatory positions and staffing/structural decisions. Any media inquiries on these matters should be referred directly to the Director of Communications.

D. Responding to Press Inquiries Regarding Specific Projects, Technical Issues (non-policy) or Agency Processes

1. Upon the approval and with the guidance of the Director of Communications, staff may respond to a reporter's inquiries regarding specific projects or technical issues within their professional purview. Inquiries regarding matters that do not fall within their expertise or jurisdiction may be referred to the Director of Communications, who will either respond or forward the inquiry to the appropriate staff person.
2. Responding staff should provide objective facts and not engage in speculation or opinion. When answering questions, staff should take advantage of opportunities to cite additional background or Department developed reference material, including relevant links to the Department's website.
3. Under no circumstances is it appropriate for a staff member to disclose a staff recommendation on an Order until it has been reviewed and approved according to Department policy. Typically this process requires Office Director involvement.
4. Many aspects of pending enforcement cases are not appropriate for discussion with the public or the media. Any inquiries related to an active enforcement case should be reviewed with DHHS General Counsel.

5. Interactions with the media must be summarized and forwarded to the Director of Communications on the same day the media interaction occurs. The attached Media Interaction Form may be used and forwarded electronically. An email summary is also sufficient.

E. Initiating Media Contacts

1. Media relations are the responsibility of the Office of the Commissioner. Suggestions for media releases, events and other public and media activities representing the Department to the public or media are welcomed and should be brought directly to the Director of Communications before any action is pursued, with as much advanced notice as possible. If the suggestion is approved, the Director of Communications will delegate roles and responsibilities to move forward, in consultation with the appropriate Office management.
2. All media releases and media-related activities (events/activities orchestrated for the press and public with the intent of heightening awareness) must be approved by the Director of Communications and the Commissioner or their designee. Media releases will conform to Associated Press Style, be distributed by the Director of Communications and also be displayed on the Department's web site.

F. Corrections/Letters to the Editor/Opinion Pieces

1. When the media seems to have erred or unfairly represented Department staff, their actions or Department policy positions, it is important to correct the misinformation and/or mischaracterization via a request for a correction, letter to the editor or other appropriate action. Please contact the Director of Communications who will determine the course of action and coordinate the appropriate response in partnership with staff.

G. Public Speaking/Presentation Engagements

1. When a staff member is requested to represent the Department in a public speaking engagement, exhibition or policy-related forum (not including mandated public meetings or hearings), he/she must inform the Director of Communications and the Office Director of the engagement, audience, objective, subject matter and resources required before accepting. The Director of Communications, in partnership with the Office Director and the Commissioner, will review the request and advise on the response. Staff is not permitted to present on behalf of the Department unless approved.
2. Requests from external entities for Department speakers may be submitted directly to the Director of Communications or his or her designee, who will decide whether it is appropriate for the Department to be represented and will coordinate and help to prepare the appropriate representatives. Department staff is not to solicit speaking/presentation engagements but can bring suggestions for potential opportunities to the Office of Communications for consideration.

3. All Department presentations must utilize the Department PowerPoint template and be approved by the Director of Communications and/or their designee prior to being given. Presentations must be provided to the Director of Communications no less than three full working days in advance of the staff person's departure for the presentation for review.

H. Department Education and Outreach Materials

1. Any outreach materials – including but not limited to letters, brochures, postcards, technical bulletins, issue profiles, reports, print/broadcast/web advertisements or promotions not specific to an individual facility, policy or project must be approved by the Director of Communications and as necessary, by the Policy Director. If staff require an outreach piece to be developed or wish to partner on an advertising/promotional campaign, they are to contact the Director of Communications or their designee who will coordinate staff to develop the appropriate materials in partnership with the relevant program staff.

I. Sponsorships/Use of Department Logo

1. A sponsorship by the Department – whether monetary, in-kind or via logo– suggests endorsement of the sponsored initiative. Therefore, all requests for sponsorship or Department endorsement must be approved by the Office of the Commissioner and by the appropriate Office Director. Requests should be reviewed by the appropriate staff and a recommendation made concurrently to the Director of Communications and the Office Director. If the sponsorship and use of the Department logo is approved, the Director of Communications will provide the correct logo file to the requestor.

VI. DISTRIBUTION

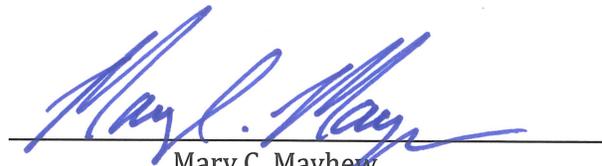
All Staff via e-mail and posting on the DHHS Intranet.

VII. ATTACHMENTS

Media Contact Form

March 6, 2015

Re-Issue Date



Mary C. Mayhew
Commissioner



Department of Health
and Human Services

Maine People Living
Safe, Healthy and Productive Lives

Paul R. LePage, Governor

Mary C. Mayhew, Commissioner

**Maine Department of Health and Human Services
Media Contact Form**

Subject:

Date:

Media Contact:

Staff Contact:

Affiliation:

Desk Phone:

Telephone:

Information requested/provided:

Reason for inquiry/interview: (check applicable boxes below)

- Background/General information:**
- Follow-up from previous contact:**
- Article in print (include the date):**
- Tape for broadcast (include the date):**

Is media follow-up expected? Yes No - Why?

Is follow-up appropriate? Yes No - If so, by whom?

Additional Comments:

If you referred the original contact to another person, program, agency, etc., please identify: