

### **MEDIA RELATIONS POLICY/CRISIS MANAGEMENT**

1. By district policy, the contact for media inquiries is Public Affairs (Nancy Peters, Communications Specialist, 612 348 5022). Public Affairs will act as the spokesperson for the Guardian ad Litem Program, especially in the case of controversial matters or issues of policy.
  - a. All inquiries received by individual guardians ad litem or program staff will be referred to Public Affairs as soon as possible.
  - b. The Guardian ad Litem Program Manager is the designated contact for Public Affairs. If unavailable, Public Affairs will contact the GAL Program Officer of the Day.
  - c. GAL Program staff will assist Public Affairs as needed in providing information and answers to questions. Documents will be prepared when appropriate.
  - d. If so designated by Public Affairs, the GAL Program Manager will work with the media in a particular instance.
2. Inquiries about individual cases and/or the actions of an individual guardian ad litem are governed by the Minnesota Supreme Court Juvenile Protection Rules on Public Access.

Public Affairs and the GAL Program Manager/OD will be in touch with each other as soon as possible when a media inquiry occurs. Jointly, they will determine who and how stakeholders are to be contacted, such as:

- a. The Chief Judge and/or the Presiding Judge of Juvenile Court
  - b. The judge involved in the case
  - c. The guardian ad litem involved in the case and counsel if appointed
  - d. The county attorney and social worker involved in the case
  - e. The supervisor of the guardian ad litem
  - f. GAL Program office staff
3. If the Guardian ad Litem Program becomes aware of a situation that is likely to draw media attention, Public Affairs is to be contacted as soon as possible.

4. The GAL Program Manager, depending upon the situation, severity and potential for legal action will notify the state guardian ad litem authorities and the state court legal counsel and follow any procedural instructions issued.
5. The Guardian ad Litem Program Manager will notify Minnesota CASA and/or the National CASA Association depending upon the visibility and impact of the media attention—such as incidents with potentially negative ramifications for either state or national volunteer child advocates.
6. For the duration of the incident, Public Affairs and the Guardian ad Litem Manager will work jointly to address the situation.
  - a. Should there be negative impacts on the individual guardian ad litem or the program, appropriate communications will be issued (to paid and unpaid staff, the bench, etc.) until the situation is resolved.
  - b. The supervisor of the guardian ad litem will be involved in providing support and involving other individuals as circumstances warrant such as the mentor or support group of the guardian ad litem or the county's trauma response team (e.g. if a child death has occurred)
7. Inquiries from members of the state legislature or other governmental entities will be referred to Public Affairs. Procedures similar to the media will be followed. In addition to the Juvenile Court Rules of Public Access, Minnesota state statute (commonly referred to as the Whistleblower law) prohibits employers from penalizing employees who report violations, participate in investigations or hearings, or communicate to legislators or elected officials information that the employee believes would relate to improving services.

## EXAMPLE OF CRISIS MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

In June 2009, a local television reporter called about a tip the station had received that court employees were going on a boat trip at tax payer's expense. The station had already sent a camera person to film the event and had footage of the registration table, people embarking, etc. In reality, the boat trip was for volunteer recognition—a "bigger than usual" event that the program does every few years if there is money available at the end of the biennium (unspent funds do not rollover to the next biennium). The talking points below were adapted within a day for the situation by the GAL Program Manager and Public Affairs. Nancy Peters from Public Affairs worked with the reporter and answered questions. The television station decided not to run the story (although Nancy tried hard to get them to do a positive story on our volunteer child advocates). A potentially negative story averted.

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FOURTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT

### Fourth Judicial District Guardian ad Litem Program (GAL) in Hennepin County

**Nancy Peters**

Communications Specialist  
612-348-5022

#### Volunteer GAL, Juvenile Court

- A volunteer Guardian ad Litem is a court appointed special advocate to represent the best interests of abused and neglected children whose cases are petitioned in Juvenile Court
- **339 volunteers contributed 35,000 hours in 2008**
- Volunteers carry one-half of the caseload for the GAL Program in Juvenile Court
- Volunteers contribute their time and expertise and are reimbursed for parking and mileage

#### Value of Volunteer GAL Program in Hennepin County

- **13 cents per hour** based on 339 volunteers giving 35,000 hours for \$4,622.81 event cost
- 35,000 hours x \$22/hr for **independent contractors = \$770,000 annually**
- 35,000 hours x \$27/hour for **employees = \$950,000 annually**

#### GAL Recognition Event for Volunteers—June 30, 2009

- Boat trip on the Mississippi from Boom Island
- 200 participants (reservations for 192)
- 170 volunteers/guests
- 13 program employees staffed the event (program employees recruit, screen, train, supervise and support the volunteers throughout the year)
- 3 judicial officers (to show their appreciation to the volunteers)
- 3 attorneys who represent the volunteers

#### Funding for Volunteer Recognition

- **Half District Court funds and half private foundation funds for total event cost @\$8,873**
- District Court contributed the food (buffet dinner) -- \$4,622.81
- Balance from a private family foundation in Chicago (I & G Foundation grant to Minnesota CASA of \$10,000 to support volunteer GAL); paid for cost of 2 boats @\$1,515 each, gift – water bottles @\$2 each, parking, decorations, program printing

#### Volunteer GAL Programs in Minnesota - 3 official members of National CASA

- Fourth Judicial District (Hennepin County) is biggest and oldest (est. 1978)
- Second Judicial District (Ramsey County) has 200 volunteers
- First Judicial District recently began recruiting and training volunteers
- In greater Minnesota, there are a few volunteers among the judicial districts (most use independent contractors at \$22 hour)

#### Annual event?

- Volunteer recognition is a routine part of the program budget
- Funding for the 2009 event was included in the FY08-09 budget (budget developed in 2007)
- In 2008 there was a volunteer recognition dinner at a local church
- **Last “big” event was 2005 (boat trip for District Court volunteers from Harriet Island)**

#### On Camera Recommendations

- Juvenile Presiding Judge Kathryn Quaintance
- Volunteer Guardians ad Litem
  - Jane Borochoff
  - Beverly Middlebrook

# Fourth Judicial District Administrative Policy

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<b>Source:</b>	Senior Managers Committee
<b>Category:</b>	
<b>Title:</b>	Media Relations
<b>Effective Date:</b>	July 18, 2007
<b>Revision Date(s):</b>	June 12, 2009
<b>Supersedes:</b>	Media Relations Judicial Bench Policy, October 22, 2003

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## Media Relations

In accordance with strategic priority 3B to “strengthen public education regarding the role of the courts,” all staff shall direct media inquiries to the Office of Public Affairs.

One role of the Office of Public Affairs is to serve as the primary liaison between the Fourth Judicial District and the media. This policy applies to all staff upon receipt of media inquiries and interview requests. This could include court business requiring news advisories / releases, publicity, community outreach activities, monitoring and distribution of media coverage, and media relations consultation.

1. Public Affairs will work with judges and staff to respond to the media in a timely and accurate manner.
2. Staff should respond to media inquiries concerning routine matters such as hours or operation, number of clients served or whether or not a case has been filed.
3. For other media inquiries involving case-related data and non-routine information, tell the reporter someone will get back to him or her shortly. Inform your supervisor about the inquiry and contact Public Affairs. Note: This procedure is particularly important in the case of controversial matters or issues of policy that may require a designated spokesperson.
4. Requests for on-camera interviews should be approved by the chief judge or designee.
5. Public Affairs also serves as a liaison to the Minnesota Supreme Court Communications Director on issues that may be of interest statewide or receiving metro-wide coverage.

6. Refer to individual policies, best practices and services for additional information on CourtNet, [Public Affairs](#).

Media Relations Contacts:

1. Name:  
Address:  
Phone:  
Email:

- 2.



# MINNESOTA JUDICIAL BRANCH

## FOURTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT

### Public Affairs Services for Staff

#### Media Relations

- Respond quickly and accurately to media inquiries concerning routine matters with which you are familiar (hours of operation, number of clients served, whether a case has been filed, etc.).
- If the media requests to be contacted when a jury completes deliberation, you may inform the media that the jury is returning to the courtroom. If there are more than two media requests for the same case, Public Affairs will assist with returning calls to the media.
- For other media inquiries involving non-routine information, tell the reporter someone will get back to him or her shortly. Inform your supervisor about the inquiry and contact Public Affairs. *Note: This procedure is particularly important in the case of controversial matters or issues of policy that may require a designated spokesperson.*
- After the designated spokesperson has been interviewed by a reporter, the spokesperson should inform his/her supervisor and Public Affairs.
- Do not provide reporters with information that is protected by the Court's Rules of Public Access or is otherwise restricted. If you are unsure of what information is private or public, please work with your supervisor who may want to check with the state court attorney, an expert on public access.
- If a reporter asks about an active case, refer to Canon 3 (8) of the Minnesota Code of Judicial Conduct at <http://www.bjs.state.mn.us/canon2.html> <sup>i</sup> The recommended response is **“The canons of judicial ethics prohibit judges (and their staff) from commenting on any pending case.”**
- Do not speculate on possible changes in District Court policies or procedures, or pending court cases.
- Notify Public Affairs of potentially high-profile cases that have been filed or District Court activities that you believe may be of interest to the media.
- Place case files of potential interest to the media in the media baskets on the PSL and on C12 (civil).
- Contact Public Affairs, your supervisor or administrative manager for the status of a media relations matter in your division.

#### Website and CourtNet Maintenance

- Orders of public or media interest can be posted on the website by sending a signed copy of the order electronically to Public Affairs.
- Website and CourtNet requests, questions, comments and suggestions are coordinated through Public Affairs.

### **Community Outreach and Speaker's Bureau**

- Develop, coordinate and provide materials for outreach events (i.e. PICA Fair, Minnesota StandDown).
- Outreach events are reported on SharePoint for the Minnesota Judicial Branch.
- Speakers Bureau requests are received via the website and phone inquiries.
- Arrangements for mock trial tournaments are coordinated with Hennepin County through Public Affairs, including courtroom reservations, security, heating / cooling maintenance and insurance waivers.

### **Print Materials**

- The *Full Court Press*, an employee newsletter, is published ten times per year via email.
- Brochures and other written materials explaining specific areas of District Court are created upon request.

### **Public Trust & Confidence (PT&C) Committee**

- An administrative appointee, designated by the chief judge, serves as a liaison to Judicial Branch PT&C Committee working towards the goal to strengthen public education regarding the role of the courts.

### **Tours**

- Schedule tours of District Court by contacting Public Affairs.

### **Photograph Court Events**

- Photos may be requested for court related events such as Swearing-in ceremonies, awards, Full Court Press articles, special events, etc.

### **Media Coverage Archives**

- Public Affairs maintain a file of court coverage.

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<sup>i</sup> Canon 3(8) of the Minnesota Code of Judicial Conduct states:

A judge shall not, while a proceeding is pending or impending in any court, make any public comment that might reasonably be expected to affect its outcome or impair its fairness or make any nonpublic comment that might substantially interfere with a fair trial or hearing. The judge shall require similar abstention on the part of court personnel subject to the judge's direction and control. This subsection does not prohibit judges from making public statements in the course of their official duties or from explaining for public information the procedures of the court. This subsection does not apply to proceedings in which the judge is a litigant in a personal capacity.