POLK COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

NOTICE AND TERMS OF USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM POLICY

Members of the public who post, comment, reply, message, tag, mention, upload, or otherwise submit content to an official Polk County Sheriff's Office ("PCSO") social media site are deemed to have notice of and agree to comply with this policy and the applicable rules of the social media platform.

PCSO may use publicly accessible online engagement tools and social media platforms to provide residents, businesses, visitors, news media, and other interested persons with public safety information, agency news, crime prevention information, emergency notifications, community information, and other communications related to PCSO's mission.

For purposes of this policy, "social media platform" includes publicly accessible websites, applications, or online services that permit users to view, create, share, respond to, or interact with written, photographic, audio, or video content. Examples include Facebook, Instagram, X, YouTube, LinkedIn, Nextdoor, TikTok, and similar platforms.

By voluntarily participating on a PCSO social media site, a user accepts personal responsibility for the content the user submits, the account or username used, and any information disclosed through that account.

PURPOSE

Our social media platforms help promote and disseminate information to the public about the Polk County Sheriff’s Office and events and promote and encourage crime prevention and reduction, crime solving initiatives, accountability for law breakers, and promote public safety. Polk County Sheriff’s Office social media accounts have been created as a limited public forum to allow community members of all ages to receive information and discuss matters related to the topics being discussed.

PUBLIC RECORDS, PRIVACY, AND SECURITY

Content created, received, transmitted, or maintained in connection with official PCSO business may constitute a public record under Chapter 119, Florida Statutes, and may be subject to applicable retention and disclosure requirements.

A comment, message, photograph, video, attachment, or other submission may remain available through platform records, screenshots, archives, backups, or public-records retention systems even after a user or another person deletes it.

To protect privacy and security, users should not submit sensitive personal information through social media, including:

- Social Security numbers;
- financial-account or payment-card information;
- passwords or access credentials;
- medical or other highly sensitive personal information;
- information concerning victims, juveniles, witnesses, confidential informants, or other persons when disclosure may be restricted by law; or
- information that a user would not want publicly disclosed.

PCSO social media sites and third-party social media platforms should not be treated as secure channels for the transmission of sensitive or confidential information.

Anonymity cannot be guaranteed when a person posts, comments, or sends a message through a social media platform.

EMERGENCY SERVICES AND ASSISTANCE

PCSO social media sites are not continuously monitored and are not a substitute for calling 911.

IF YOU NEED EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE, CALL 911.

A person wishing to report a crime, provide a tip, request law-enforcement assistance, or communicate time-sensitive information should use the official PCSO reporting, dispatch, tip, or contact methods designated for that purpose. A response to a social media post, comment, tag, mention, or private message is not guaranteed. Please go to polksheriff.org/contact-us

LIMITED PUBLIC FORUM

Official PCSO social media sites are designated as limited public forums when and to the extent PCSO enables public commenting or other interactive participation. They are not traditional or general-purpose public forums.

The purpose of PCSO's social media comment areas is to permit discussion of matters identified and raised by PCSO. Each comment area is limited to discussion reasonably related to the subject matter of the specific PCSO post, video, notice, announcement, or other content to which the public response is attached.

PCSO welcomes public opinion, including compliments or criticism of PCSO, the Sheriff, deputies, employees, policies, operations, and law-enforcement, or detention, or animal control practices. Except for categories of content expressly restricted by this policy, moderation will not be based on whether PCSO agrees or disagrees with the speaker's position. PCSO will not engage in viewpoint discrimination.

Terms of Use

By voluntarily submitting content to a PCSO social media site, the user acknowledges and agrees that:

- the user is submitting the content voluntarily and is responsible for the submission;
- the user's comments and views are the user's own and do not constitute PCSO speech or endorsement;
- content submitted to PCSO may be retained, archived, disclosed, copied, or shared as permitted or required by law;
- content may constitute a public record under Florida law;
- unless PCSO specifically identifies a social media account as a designated public-records request portal, social media is not the preferred method for submitting a public-records request;
- PCSO may apply this policy and the rules of the applicable platform to content appearing on its social media sites; and
- PCSO may discontinue, suspend, or modify a social media site or commenting function when reasonably necessary for operational, technical, security, legal, or resource reasons.

CONTENT SUBJECT TO REMOVAL OR RESTRICTION

PCSO may hide, remove, or otherwise restrict user-submitted content when the content falls within one or more of the categories below. The stated categories must be applied consistently and in accordance with applicable law.

Off-Topic Content

Content that is clearly unrelated to the subject matter of the specific PCSO post or discussion thread, including random or unintelligible content.

Obscene and Unlawful Sexual Content

Obscene, indecent, profane, or vulgar language; pornographic images, depictions, or videos; child sexual abuse material; and other sexual content whose possession, display, or distribution is unlawful. PCSO does not endorse profane or vulgar expression. PCSO may restrict profane or vulgar content when, considering the context and manner of the communication, it independently falls within another provision of this policy, including obscenity, a true threat, unlawful harassment, spam or materially disruptive repetitive posting, or content clearly unrelated to the subject matter of the originating post.

Discriminatory Content

PCSO does not endorse discriminatory, hateful, or offensive expression. Content that constitutes a true threat, unlawful harassment, incitement, or other independently prohibited conduct remains subject to moderation under the applicable provision of this policy.

Political Campaign or Candidate Content

Content whose primary purpose is to use the PCSO forum for campaign advertising, campaign fundraising, solicitation of campaign contributions, recruitment of campaign volunteers, distribution of campaign promotional material, or unrelated campaign advocacy may be removed. This provision does not prohibit otherwise on-topic discussion or criticism of elected officials, candidates, elections, governmental policies, or public issues merely because the comment may affect or express a view concerning an election.

True Threats and Unlawful Violence

A true threat of unlawful violence, unlawful intimidation, or content that otherwise constitutes a criminal threat. Political rhetoric, figurative language, generalized anger, or hyperbole is not a true threat merely because it is harsh or alarming.

Incitement or Criminal Conduct

Content directed to inciting or producing imminent lawless action and likely to produce such action, or content that itself constitutes solicitation, extortion, fraud, witness intimidation, unlawful stalking, unlawful harassment, or other speech integral to criminal conduct.

Commercial Solicitation

Content whose primary purpose is unrelated commercial advertising, solicitation, promotion, or sale of goods or services.

Automated, Repetitive, or Disruptive Content

Automated postings, bot-generated content, substantially duplicative postings, flooding, or repetitive content that materially interferes with the normal operation of the forum or the ability of others to participate.

Malware and Cybersecurity Threats

Links, files, code, or other content reasonably identified as malware, phishing, credential theft, malicious code, or another objectively identifiable cybersecurity threat.

Confidential, Exempt, or Legally Protected Information

Information whose public disclosure is prohibited by federal or state law, including confidential or exempt information, protected personal identifying information, or other information that PCSO is legally required to withhold from public dissemination.

Public Safety and Operational Security

Specific information that unlawfully or materially compromises the safety of the public, officers, victims, witnesses, confidential sources, security systems, tactical plans, or an active law-enforcement operation. This provision does not authorize removal of criticism or discussion merely because it concerns an ongoing investigation or public-safety matter.

Intellectual Property

Content that a court, the platform, or appropriate legal review determines infringes a legally enforceable copyright, trademark, or other intellectual-property right. PCSO personnel should not remove material merely because it is copyrighted where lawful use, permission, quotation, or fair use may apply.

Impersonation, Fraud, or Evasion

Content or accounts used to fraudulently impersonate PCSO, a PCSO employee, or another person or entity; to commit fraud; or to evade a lawful account restriction imposed under this policy.

Security & Safety: External Links

To protect our community members from phishing, malware, spam, and malicious third-party websites, external links are strictly prohibited in comments, posts, and messages on this page.

What is prohibited: Any URL, domain name, or shortened link (e.g., bit.ly) pointing outside of this official social media platform. If you need to share a legitimate reference related to the post, please describe the source or title in text rather than posting a clickable link.

MODERATION OF CONTENT

PCSO intends its official social media sites to remain appropriate for broad public use. When available, PCSO may use platform-provided content moderation or filtering tools to limit content prohibited by this policy. PCSO may remove or hide content that violates these Terms of Use, including profane or vulgar language, discriminatory content, political-campaign or candidate content, and the other categories stated above. Moderation personnel should identify the specific policy provision supporting the action rather than rely solely on a generalized conclusion that content is inappropriate or objectionable. Moderators will not engage in viewpoint discrimination.

RECONSIDERATION OF A MODERATION DECISION

A person whose content has been removed or whose account access has been restricted may request reconsideration by contacting the PCSO Office of Communications at PIOs@polksheriff.org.

The request should identify the social media platform, the account name, the content or restriction at issue, and the reason the person believes the moderation action does not fall within this policy.

The request should be reviewed by a person other than the original moderator when reasonably practicable. Matters presenting a material First Amendment, public-records, defamation, threat, privacy, or other legal question may be referred to Legal Affairs.

The Social Media Administrator or other designated official should issue a written or electronic decision as promptly as practicable and, absent unusual circumstances, within five business days after receipt of a complete request. The response should state whether the moderation action is affirmed, modified, or reversed and identify the basis for the decision.

DENIAL OF ACCESS

PCSO may immediately restrict or block an account without prior notice when reasonably necessary to address a true threat, criminal conduct, malicious cybersecurity activity, automated flooding, fraudulent impersonation, repeated circumvention of an existing restriction, or comparable serious misconduct.

For other violations, removal of a comment will not ordinarily result in an immediate extended or indefinite account restriction. PCSO may consider the seriousness and frequency of violations, prior warnings, disruption to the forum, and whether lesser moderation measures are adequate.

Any extended or indefinite account restriction shall identify the policy provision violated, be documented, and be subject to reconsideration under this policy.

ADDITIONAL SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDANCE

Practical, legal, investigative, privacy, evidentiary, personnel, or litigation considerations may limit PCSO's ability to respond publicly to particular topics. The absence of a PCSO response does not imply agreement, disagreement, or admission concerning a comment.

PCSO may use platform-provided filtering, moderation, or safety tools only to the extent those tools are configured and used consistently with this policy and applicable law.

PCSO may disable commenting on a particular post or discontinue a social media account where doing so is based on operational, legal, technical, safety, security, or resource considerations rather than disagreement with a particular viewpoint.

ENDORSEMENTS

A follow, friend request, like, share, repost, tag, mention, or similar interaction by an official PCSO account does not, standing alone, constitute an official endorsement of a person, organization, product, service, viewpoint, or cause.

Comments and other submissions by members of the public reflect the views of the individual users and do not necessarily reflect the views, policies, or positions of PCSO.

PLATFORM COMMUNITY STANDARDS

Users remain subject to the rules, terms of service, community standards, and enforcement mechanisms of the third-party social media platform. PCSO may report content to the platform when PCSO reasonably believes the content violates the platform's rules. Any action taken independently by the platform is separate from a PCSO moderation decision.

PCSO's reporting of content to a platform does not expand PCSO's authority to remove constitutionally protected speech from a limited public forum.

CHILDREN'S PRIVACY

PCSO does not use its public social media sites for the purpose of soliciting personal information from children under 13 years of age. Users should not submit personally identifying information about a child through a public comment.

Questions concerning information involving a child should be directed to PCSO through an appropriate secure or official communication channel.

OWNERSHIP AND USE OF PCSO CONTENT

Nothing in this policy grants permission to falsely represent a PCSO-created image, seal, badge, logo, or account as an official PCSO communication when it is not.

USE OF PCSO NAME, BADGE, SEAL, OR LOGO

Use of PCSO names, badges, seals, logos, or other official identifiers in a manner that falsely implies official sponsorship, authorization, or endorsement is prohibited to the extent permitted by law.

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY AND CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION

PCSO personnel shall not knowingly post information that is confidential, exempt from disclosure, attorney-client privileged, protected by law, or otherwise prohibited from public dissemination.

A person who believes material appearing on an official PCSO social media site infringes a legally protected intellectual-property right may notify the Office of Communications at PIOs@polksheriff.org.