Subject: **Media Responses and Publicity Requests**

Approved:

Date: 11/08/11

I. PURPOSE

To provide uniform guidelines for responding to the media and ensuring that Media Contact Reports are completed and distributed in a timely manner, as required, and to provide a process for submitting proposed Press Releases for the Social Services Agency (SSA).

II. POLICY

Employees receiving media inquiries for any information and/or statistical data regarding any or all SSA employees, clients, activities and/or operations are required to refer such inquiries, including but not limited to written, electronic, and/or verbal requests from reporters, newscasters, journalists, callers, editors, etc., to the SSA Public Information Officer (PIO), and to notify their respective District, Program, or Regional Managers. The SSA PIO will collaborate with appropriate SSA subject matter experts, executives, deputies, managers, custodians of record, and/or other employees as may be required, to identify the appropriate information and/or individual needed to respond to all media requests.
All proposed SSA press releases should be routed through the appropriate chain-of- command for approval, and then routed to the PIO prior to release and/or posting. Additionally, any new information that requires posting on the SSA Internet and/or any social media sites is required to be similarly routed to the PIO, in accordance with the established procedure contained in Administrative Services Division Policy and Procedures I 2, Online Media. The PIO will review and edit the material in consultation with the Chief Deputy Director, who will provide the final recommendation or authorization to issue the Press Release and/or post the information to the appropriate websites as requested.

III. PROCEDURE

A. Press/Media Releases

All proposed releases shall be in writing on Agency memo (see http://ssa/docs/memo_internal.doc) sent to the PIO via electronic mail attachment. The following information shall be provided:

1. For Date of Release or Proposed Date of Release: Fill in date of release.
2. Contact: List name, title, and telephone number of the County/Agency person the PIO may contact for additional information. The PIO is the primary contact for the Agency – but the PIO may need to contact the individual who is requesting the Press Release and/or posting to a website.
3. Headline: (Brief and descriptive headline.)
4. Text: Be brief, descriptive, and use active verbs in the narrative. Where appropriate, use quotations from Agency personnel.
5. Press Releases should be double-spaced and never more than two pages in length. The purpose is to promote the event in a way that will compel the media to want to find out more about the event.

Note: Press Releases are not just issued in advance of events; they may be issued to announce something or otherwise inform the public of something. Ideally, press releases should be limited to one page, whenever possible. The author of the Press Release should collaborate with the PIO in drafting the press release.

6. Processing: Press Releases should be sent to the PIO two weeks prior to the actual event to ascertain that the information is accurate and approved by the designated Manager. Last minute Press Release requests cannot be accommodated. The PIO will distribute the release to the appropriate media and forward copies to other County employees designated to receive such information via the Media Distribution List prior to the scheduled event. The Media Distribution List includes the SSA Executive Team, the County Executive Office (CEO), and the Board of Supervisors (BOS). The individual(s) requesting the Press Release should also provide the names and contact information for anyone they might specifically request to be added to the distribution list for a specific Press Release. Similarly, individuals requesting Press Releases should also provide the names (and contact information if possible) for any specific media outlets that should be included in the distribution of a specific Press Release.

B. Press Conference

The Chief Deputy Director and/or the Agency Director in collaboration with the PIO shall schedule all press conferences. The PIO or the PIO's designee(s) may be asked to provide a script or talking points for the individual(s) who will be conducting and/or participating in the press conference. The PIO or the alternate PIO will be present during all press conferences to assist Agency staff as may be requested or required in ensuring the accuracy of information as it is delivered by the speaker(s) and to make any corrections as may be required, if any. Under the direction of the Chief Deputy Director and/or Agency Director, the PIO will also follow-up with the media regarding any information that might have been misreported by the media following a press conference or press release.

C. Press/Media Inquiries

1. Contact

Media calls received by Central Reception at 888 N. Main St., Santa Ana, and/or all other Agency Central Reception sites shall be referred to the SSA PIO or Agency designee(s). The PIO (or PIO designees) shall respond to all media requests and collaborate with SSA staff as may be required to ensure an appropriate Agency response.

2. Responsiveness

Media inquiries are frequently time-sensitive and many reporters who call have reporting deadlines they must meet. Therefore, the PIO or PIO designee(s) shall be notified immediately regarding all media contacts/requests. Additionally, the person most knowledgeable about the matter, and/or deputy directors or directors shall brief the PIO in advance, whenever possible or as soon thereafter as feasible, regarding all situations, personnel, events, and/or client-related issues that could potentially become sensitive media issues. Often, returning media calls and/or responding to media requests the following day may be too late to meet the needs of the media and/or to encourage collaboration with the media to facilitate accurate reporting.

3. Confidentiality

Client confidentiality shall be maintained at all times pursuant to all relevant laws, regulations and codes, including but not limited to, Welfare and Institutions Code, Sections 10850, 11478, 17006.5, and 18300, Penal Code 11167.5, and Juvenile Court Policy re: Confidentiality and Release of Information.

4. Documentation

All contact between SSA employees and the media must be documented by completing a Media Contact form (Attachment A) immediately following all media contacts. Documentation includes information discussed as well as any Agency information, data and/or statements provided to the media. Completed Media Contact forms shall be e-mailed to the PIO immediately. The PIO or PIO designee(s) will review and distribute all Media Contact Forms via the Media Distribution List, as required. The CEO and BOS shall be notified of all media contacts and the dates the contacts occur. Additionally, the CEO and BOS shall be notified in advance of publication and/or airing of all pre-planned media events, contacts, stories, etc. It is not acceptable to send the Media Contact form a few days after the contacts occur. Media Contact forms are to be sent via e-mail so that they may be electronically forwarded to the appropriate parties the same dates they are received.

Those employees who have access to the SSA public drive (P: drive or the equivalent division's public root drive directory) can access the Media Contact form at "P:\Agency Forms\Media Contact Form", or they may call or e-mail the PIO directly to request an electronic form. The form should be completed and saved electronically (or on-line) on the same day the media contacts occur. Employees shall save the electronic documents as follows:

a. On their PC's hard drive, giving it a new name in order to save the new document and retain the original blank form.

b. E-mail the document to the PIO on the same date the media contact occurs.

Any media inquiries regarding safely surrendered babies should be referred to SSA's PIO. Specific or identifying information of clients or SSA employees shall never be disclosed to anyone, especially on matters regarding safely surrendered babies.

SSA Data/information released to the media, including postings on the Internet, should be consistent with the information that has been officially released and approved by the Executive Team, such as the Business Plan. Any other data/information that is not available in SSA's official publications should be validated by the SSA Administrative Services Division Research Unit and approved through the chain-of-command prior to providing said information to the media and prior to completing and sending the completed Media Contact form to the PIO. All requests for information (e.g. policies and procedures, business operations, etc.) must be carefully evaluated to assess whether the information requested falls within the Public Records Request Act (PRA). Administrative Division Policy and Procedures E 6, Subpoena and Public Records Request Act (PRA), shall be followed for any information that comes within the Public Records Act.

IV. REFERENCES

• Welfare and Institutions Code Sections 10850, 11478, 17006.5, and 18300

• Penal Code 11167.5

• Juvenile Court Policy re: Confidentiality of Release of Information

• Orange County Fire Service Operational Area Annex Procedures for Accepting a Newborn under the California Safely Surrendered Baby Law, Item #8, Additional Notifications and Media Concerns

• Administrative Services Division Policy and Procedures E 6, Subpoena and Public Records Act (PRA) Requests

• Administrative Services Division Policy and Procedures I 2 Online Media

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V. ATTACHMENT

A. News Media Contact Form