



Utah Department of Corrections

Executive Office

State of Utah

ROLLIN COOK
Executive Director

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To all Utah Department of Corrections employees,

We are receiving several inquiries from our staff wanting clarification regarding whether they can speak publicly about various topics, including the prison move, compensation, etc. and when they do what are they allowed to say and not allowed to say. As you can imagine, this is a very challenging topic to address and I want to ensure you are able to give your opinions and speak publicly within the policies and procedures that govern that activity. I am an advocate for and understand the importance of our employees' rights to voice their concerns, campaign for improved work-related benefits and to be active members of their communities. Therefore, I thought it would be helpful to provide you those specific policies along with my interpretation and clarification of its intent and our expectation.

AE02/02.03 Procedure: Professional Communication

- A. *Employees of the department are professionals and should treat those they work with respectfully. Employees shall interact and communicate professionally when at work or on duty. This includes but is not limited to:*
 1. *being respectful in verbal and written communication with those they interact with during the course of employment; and*
 2. *not publicly criticizing, speaking falsely of, or defaming the State of Utah, the department, other government agencies or their employees.*
- B. **Employees shall not speak on behalf of the department unless authorized by the Executive Director.**
- C. *Employees shall not provide information, in written or verbal communication, that violates GRAMA or other privacy laws.*

The specific policy most applicable to this situation is B. If employees are off duty and not in uniform, they should be able to speak in public forums. They should not indicate that they are speaking on behalf of the department, and if they are providing a perspective as a correctional employee, they should proactively announce that and remind others that they are not speaking on behalf of the department.

AE02/03.03 Procedure: Professionalism

1. *Not act or behave privately or officially in a manner that brings discredit or adversely affects the efficiency or effectiveness of the department or the state.*



I have been asked if our uniformed members could wear their uniforms while meeting with legislators or presenting information to the various government leaders and/or committees at the Capitol. The answer is yes, as long as they abide by our organization's policies and proactively state that they are not representing the department but are providing information from the perspective of a correctional officer, agent, corrections support staff, etc. You can do that by simply saying something such as, "I am here on my own time and I am not representing the department." I am personally very proud that I am a Correctional Officer and love to see our employees in their professional uniforms representing our important place within public safety. However, please remember we come under great scrutiny and therefore need to ensure we are aware of not only our safety and the safety of others, but also our professional attire and demeanor.

AG04/02.04 Procedure: Public Speaking

- A. *Public speaking requests from schools, civic organizations, church or other community groups shall be referred to the department's Public Information Officer. Such requests will only be fulfilled after approval has been received from the Executive Director/Designee.*
- B. *The department's Public Information Officer shall be notified prior to any public speaking engagements.*

For those that do not know, our Public Information Officer is Brooke Adams. These specific policies apply when you are on duty and representing our department or organization. However, it would be very helpful and appreciated if you would let Brooke know when you have attended or spoken publicly while off duty, because typically the media or these groups will contact her for further comments or for the department's official stance on a subject. Please keep in mind that this is only a courtesy and you are free to attend and express your views when off duty without contacting Brooke.

This information will not likely cover every situation, but I wanted to ensure you had our policies and additional interpretations that will allow you to navigate the many important topics we will be facing not only in the coming days, but in the foreseeable future. If you have any further questions or concerns, please consult with your chain of command and allow us to provide you the guidance you need to participate with peace of mind.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this matter and for your unwavering dedication to our responsibilities!

Sincerely,

Rollin Cook
Executive Director
Utah Department of Corrections