I. PURPOSE

The professional appearance of law enforcement employees furthers the goals of their agencies by projecting a positive image to the public and reflecting employees’ sense of pride and self-confidence. In the case of officers, a professional appearance can also contribute to their command presence, which may enhance overall effectiveness. Agencies should also be aware of how an employee’s general physical appearance, to include fitness level, may impact the public’s perception of the individual.¹

This document is intended to provide agencies with items for consideration when developing their policies regarding grooming and appearance standards for their employees. Agencies should take into account community norms and collective bargaining agreements when developing their policies on this topic.

II. POLICY

Agencies should develop a policy statement to briefly and concisely explain to agency personnel and the public the agency’s policy on employee grooming and appearance.

Sample: It is the policy that employees, through their dress and appearance, shall present themselves in a manner that reflects the integrity and level of professionalism required by this law enforcement agency.

III. DEFINITIONS

Gender Expression: An individual’s external manifestations and appearance of gender identity, frequently expressed through one’s name, behavior, pronouns, clothing, hair, voice, or body characteristics, are referred to as “gender expression.” Gender expression may or may not conform to socially defined behaviors and characteristics typically associated with being either masculine or feminine.

Gender Identity: One’s innermost sense of being as male, female, a blend of both, or neither. Gender identity may or may not correspond with the assigned sex at birth.

Transgender: Individuals who typically experience their gender identity or expression as different from cultural expectations associated with their assigned sex at birth.

IV. PROCEDURES

When developing their policies related to employee grooming and appearance, law enforcement agencies should take officer safety into account and should specifically consider the following:

A. Differences in standards for sworn versus civilian employees.

B. Whether exceptions should be made to the policy, and the necessary approval process for these exceptions, for employees who are
   1. working undercover assignments;
   2. selected for specialized assignments; and
   3. are in non-uniformed positions.

C. Who has final authority in determining acceptable standards, such as the agency’s chief executive or their designee.

D. Whether there will be any exceptions for religious accommodations.

E. Creation of basic standards for hygiene and procedures to follow when these are not met. For instance,
   1. officers should be well groomed and clean and should maintain personal hygiene while on duty; and
   2. if incidents result in soiled clothing, unsanitary conditions, or a disheveled appearance, officers should take measures to correct this as soon as reasonably possible.

¹ See the IACP Fitness Program Development Considerations document available at https://www.theiacp.org/resources/fitness-considerations-guide.
F. Uniform standards, such as
   1. overall uniform appearance, to include that they are
      • well-fitting,
      • clean, and
      • satisfactory in appearance based on agency standards;
   2. uniform replacement, including who is responsible;
   3. seasonal uniforms; and
   4. wearing of uniform hats.

G. The standards that will be followed by transgender employees.

H. Guidelines regarding
   1. body art and modification, to include specific guidance on
      • intentional, non-medical body modifications that cannot be concealed or eliminated, such as split tongues, gauged piercings, and facial implants; and
      • piercings that cannot be concealed by clothing, such as those in the tongue, nose, and lip.
   2. tattoos, brandings, or intentional scarring. This may include whether
      • officers will be required to cover any visible tattoos on certain parts of the body, such as the forearm or leg;
      • these items are prohibited on certain parts of the body, such as the face, neck, ears, scalp, or hands;
      • exceptions will be made for permanent makeup, such as eyeliner or lip-liner, that conforms to the agency’s makeup guidelines; and
      • there are any prohibitions against the content depicted in these items, such as imagery that
        o is gang-related;
        o conveys sexual, racial, religious, ethnic, or related intolerances;
        o promotes a partisan political statement or expression; or
        o portrays derogatory or offensive characterizations contrary to the values of the agency.
   3. head hair, to include
      • requiring that hair be neat, clean, and trimmed and that it does not interfere with the proper wearing of the uniform hat;
      • what hair coloring is permitted;
      • standards for wigs and hairpieces;
      • specific requirements regarding
        o length;
        o acceptable hairstyles;
        o approved manners of styling for officers with longer hair, such as a bun;
        o restrictions on braids, ponytails, or similar styles; and
        o limitations on ribbons or ornaments, with possible exceptions for inconspicuous bobby pins, bands, and barrettes necessary to secure hair.
   4. facial hair, which should include guidelines addressing
      • the approved lengths and styles of mustaches, beards, and sideburns; and
      • whether a medical waiver identifying a medical condition that prohibits shaving is required.
   5. fingernails, to include approved
      • length,
      • nail polish colors, and
      • jewelry or ornamentation on fingernails.
   6. eyewear, which should consider
      • allowable designs;
      • encouragement of impact-resistant lenses;
      • prohibitions on mirrored sunglasses; and
      • when and where sunglasses are permitted, such as indoors or while in formation, and whether this is affected by transition lenses.
   7. jewelry, to include
      • restrictions regarding potentially offensive jewelry;
      • number of rings and restrictions on their size and location, for instance, rings, especially those on the trigger finger(s) should not interfere with the safe and proficient operation of weapons;
      • bracelets, if allowed, to include acceptable sizes and appearance and whether charms or other attachments are approved; note that medical bracelets should always be allowed;
      • necklaces and neck chains, to include
        o acceptable diameters,
        o whether multiple or lengthy attachments are allowed,
        o whether they must be worn under the officer’s uniform, and
        o restrictions based on safety concerns; and
- earrings, to include
  - acceptable number;
  - acceptable design, such as studs, hoops, or other styles that extend below the earlobe;
  - those that are in parts of the ear other than the earlobe; and
  - whether male employees will be allowed to wear earrings of any style.

8. cosmetics/makeup, to include
   - specific guidelines for acceptable colors of eyeshadow and lipstick,
   - whether male employees are allowed to wear makeup of any kind, and
   - whether false eyelashes are permitted.

9. dental ornamentation, to include possible restrictions on
   - visible gold, platinum, or silver caps; and
   - unnatural shaping of teeth.

10. odors that may be offensive to the public or coworkers, to include
    - perfumes or colognes, or
    - body odor.

Every effort has been made to ensure that this document incorporates the most current information and contemporary professional judgment on this issue. Readers outside of the United States should note that, while this document promotes procedures reflective of a democratic society, its legal basis follows United States Supreme Court rulings and other federal laws and statutes.

Law enforcement administrators should be cautioned that each law enforcement agency operates in a unique environment of court rulings, state laws, local ordinances, regulations, judicial and administrative decisions and collective bargaining agreements that must be considered, and should therefore consult its legal advisor before implementing any policy.

This document is not intended to be a national standard.