

CCAC Guidance for Journalists Covering the California Legislature and Newsom Administration

- ***Do not give a state agency or office questions in advance.*** Journalism ethics requires us to maintain our objectivity, and by giving these questions in advance you would be providing the office or agency an opportunity to rehearse for a basic function of their job and take control of the messaging. Feel free to give the office a general description of the information you're hoping to gather in your interview. If a state agency or office claims other media outlets have done this in the past, you can refer them to the guidelines provided here.

If an agency rejects an interview and sends you a statement instead, include both the rejection and the statement in your story.

- ***Information provided without attribution is not acceptable, especially in cases where a state agency is making an announcement or providing general information*** to a broad range of reporters. For example, when Governor Newsom's administration decided to announce when the COVID-19 state of emergency was ending, reporters on the teleconference were not allowed to attribute the announcement to Dr. Mark Ghaly, who was providing the information. Reporters objected. Obviously this guidance does not apply when journalists are working to confirm confidential information.

Attribution information should include a spokesperson's full name and their agency. If an agency or office refuses to provide attribution information, point it out in your story.

Example:

"A spokesperson for the Department of Industrial Relations, who provided this information, refused to be identified."

- ***Please let CCAC know when a state agency or office is not helpful.*** Communications offices should be responding to your inquiries and they should be providing you with information that can be attributed to someone. They also need to do this in a timely manner.
- ***Glossary of terms:***
 - On the record: reportable, attributable to the source
 - Off the record: not reportable
 - On background: a way to provide or receive information that is not for direct attribution
 - For planning purposes only: background information that is not ultimately reportable
 - Embargoed: not reportable until a specified time

NOTE: Because sources may understand this terminology differently, it is often preferable to specifically ask before an interview how they are willing to be identified in attribution.