

LINE OF DUTY DEATHS AND SERIOUS INJURIES

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I. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS AND GUIDELINES

This policy applies to sworn police officers and civilian employees who are killed, seriously injured, or become seriously ill in the performance of their duties.

Line-of-duty deaths and serious injuries, whether felonious or accidental, are a sad and too frequent reminder of the dangers inherent in police work. While the loss to the department and the community is serious, each death leaves family, friends, and coworkers with the emotional trauma of a devastating loss.

Many mistakenly believe that the spouses, children and parents who survive police deaths are somehow more prepared for their losses than are other people. But knowing that the job can be dangerous does not prepare an individual for the actual experience of losing a loved one.

Police survivors often endure prolonged psychological stress because they do not seek help. They are hurt by the misconception that, because they are part of the police community, they should somehow be stronger emotionally and better prepared for such a tragedy. Too often, when police survivors do seek help, it isn't available.

The immediate and continuing response of all members of this police department when an officer is killed has a definite impact on the well-being of survivors.

This policy is designed to prepare this department for the event of an active duty employee's death in the line of duty and to direct the agency in providing proper support for the deceased officer's family. These procedures may apply to other employees involved in line-of-duty deaths or serious injuries.

II. **POLICY**

It is the policy of this police department to:

- A. Make prompt, accurate, and compassionate notifications to family members of employees;
- B. Provide liaison assistance to the immediate survivors of an active duty officer who dies in the line of duty; and,
- C. Provide tangible emotional support during this traumatic period of readjustment for the surviving family and members of this department.

III. **DEFINITIONS**

- A. *Line-of-Duty Death*: The death of an active duty officer by felonious or accidental means during the course of performing police functions while on- or off-duty.
- B. *Survivors*: Immediate family members of the deceased officer, to include spouse, children, parents, siblings, fiancé and/or significant others.

IV. **PROCEDURES**

A. ***Preparing for Notification***

- 1. These procedures should be followed whenever possible with the understanding that the wishes of the family take precedence over the desires of the agency.
- 2. Positive identification of the officer must be confirmed prior to making a notification.
- 3. No employee shall contact the family or friends of the officer until a department notification can be made.
- 4. Secure communications (cell phones, land lines, etc.) should be used in communicating the condition or identity of the officer to avoid release of this information before family member and employees can be notified.
- 5. Should the media obtain the officer's name prematurely, the ranking officer should request that the information be withheld until proper notification of survivors can be made.

6. The notifying officers should clearly understand the facts available that are relevant to the officer's death. These should be committed to memory before the notification, so the officer will not be required to refer to notes.
7. The names of surviving family members should also be memorized, if necessary, by the notifying officer, together with any other information about the family that would be of value to the task.
8. If members of the family are in poor health and may require medical attention, a paramedic should be alerted to stand by in case of an emergency.
9. If time permits, a clergy member or department chaplain may accompany the notification party.
10. If the family has infants or small children that will require attention while the adult members of the family are taken to the hospital, additional assistance should be provided for their care prior to arriving at the residence.
11. If an employee is a close personal friend or member of the officer's family, it may be appropriate for the employee to assist with making the notification.

B. *Making a Notification*

1. GENERALLY
 - a. An officer's immediate family must be contacted before the officer's name is released to the media.
 - 1) If the family is not immediately available, every reasonable effort should be made to locate them and to inform them of the condition of the officer and the circumstances surrounding the officer's injury or death.
 - 2) If the family is out of the area, the local police of jurisdiction in the family's area should be contacted and requested to make the notification. However, an in-person notification by members of this department is preferred.
 - b. Death or serious injury notifications should never be given over the telephone. Notification should be made in person whenever possible so that personal needs and situations can be properly addressed.
 - c. Notification of the immediate family should be made as soon as possible and, if possible, coincidental with command notifications.
 - d. The actual notification should be made by the Chief, a ranking superior officer, or an officer designated by the officer in charge,

accompanied by at least one other officer and other employees, as appropriate.

2. MAKING THE NOTIFICATION

- a. Notification should never be made on the doorstep. The notifying officers should attempt to gain admission to the home, gather the adult members of the household together and inform them slowly and clearly of the situation.
- b. In giving notification, officers should be as straightforward as possible about the condition of the officer and not make statements or use language that is ambiguous or gives false hope.
- c. If the officer has died, the survivors should be told that [s]he is dead rather than using euphemistic expressions such as “passed on” or “passed away.”
- d. Officers should not fear their own reaction to the suffering of survivors. While notifying officers should attempt to maintain composure in order to better provide assistance to members of the surviving family, they should recognize that a show of emotion on their part is simply a natural expression of anguish and empathy and is not a sign of weakness.
- e. Notifying officers should be aware of and prepared for a range of possible reactions from surviving family members. Hysteria, shock, physical violence, anger and rage, silence or stoicism, fainting or screaming are some of the more common reactions.
- f. Notifying officers should be prepared to give whatever solace and comfort seems appropriate but should avoid trite phrases or clichés which, although intended to provide comfort, may be counterproductive.
- g. In many cases, the best reaction of the notifying team is simply to stand by quietly until members of the family have regained some composure and are prepared to ask additional questions.

3. AFTER NOTIFICATION

- a. Officers providing services and assistance to family members and survivors shall take all possible measures to accommodate their needs, wishes and desires, but should not make promises to family members that they are not sure can be met.
- b. After the immediate family is notified, the notification officer shall be responsible for the identification of additional survivors outside the area and shall make any notifications as desired by the immediate family. Such notifications shall be made by contacting the law enforcement agency in that jurisdiction and requesting that a personal notification be made.

- c. The notification officer shall submit a written report to the Chief of Police specifying the time, place, and identity of survivors notified.

C. *Notifying Employees*

1. Off-duty employees should be notified by the department rather than having them hear about the death or injury from the media.
2. One or more supervisors or other employees shall be assigned to notify off-duty personnel. A message should be left for the employee to call the police station rather than leaving a notification on an answering machine.

D. *Assisting the Family*

1. AT THE TIME OF NOTIFICATION
 - a. If the opportunity to get the family to the hospital exists prior to the officer's death, notification officers shall inform the hospital liaison officer that the family is on its way.
 - b. In such cases, immediate transportation should be provided for survivors rather than waiting for any other members of the department delegation to arrive.
2. ASSISTING SURVIVORS AT THE HOSPITAL
 - a. Whenever possible, the Chief of Police shall join the family at the hospital in order to emphasize the agency's support.
 - b. The next highest ranking officer to arrive at the hospital shall serve as or designate a hospital liaison officer who shall be responsible for the following tasks:
 - 1) Coordinating the arrival of immediate survivors, department personnel and others;
 - 2) Arranging for waiting facilities for immediate survivors. The desires of the surviving family members should be followed with regard to their accessibility to other officers and friends;
 - 3) Ensuring that medical personnel provide pertinent medical information on the officer's condition to the family before any other parties;
 - 4) Assisting family members, in accordance with their desires, in gaining access to the injured or deceased officer;
 - 5) Providing hospital personnel with all necessary information on billing for medical services. The liaison officer should ensure that all medical bills are directed to the appropriate departmental authority and that they are not forwarded to the officer's family or other survivors;

- 6) Arranging transportation for the family and other survivors upon their departure from the hospital; and
- 7) Ensuring that immediate family members are provided with any other appropriate assistance at the hospital.

E. *Appointment of Department Coordination Personnel*

1. GENERALLY: Department personnel designated by the Chief or his/her designee shall be assigned to department coordination positions. These assignments will be made in writing to department personnel, and the surviving family members will be informed of those designated.
2. DEPARTMENT LIAISON
 - a. The department liaison officer will serve as a facilitator between the family and the department. This individual will normally be a commanding officer in order to expedite the tasks of employing departmental resources and the delegation of assignments.
 - b. This officer will work closely with the funeral liaison officer to ensure that the needs and requests of the family are fulfilled. This includes, but is not necessarily limited to, the following tasks:
 - 1) Make additional personnel assignments to assist, with permission of the family, at the family dwelling, either until the time of emergency has passed or until the funeral. Members assigned to the deceased officer's residence may ensure that malicious calls do not reach the family and that the family's privacy will be protected. In addition the officers shall be responsible for:
 - a) Providing security to the family;
 - b) Greeting visitors; and
 - c) Answering the telephone. The telephone will be answered, "(Member's) residence. Officer (name) speaking."
 - 2) Ensure that the Employee Assistance Program services, if available, is contacted to assist surviving family members and emphasize the family's right to psychological services.
 - 3) Provide oversight of travel and lodging arrangements for out-of-town family members.
 - 4) Identify alternative churches and reception halls that will accommodate the law enforcement funeral. These alternatives will be presented to the family, who will make the final determination.

- 5) Coordinate all official law enforcement notifications and arrangements, to include the honor guard, pallbearers, traffic control and liaison with visiting law enforcement agencies.
 - a) A CJIS administrative message will be sent to New England States immediately following notification of family. It will briefly outline the facts surrounding the death.
 - b) As wake and funeral arrangements are made, additional messages will be sent to help coordinate other agencies wishing to send representatives.
- 6) Assist family members in dealing with general media inquiries and inform them of limitations on what they can say to the media specifically.
- 7) Provide liaison with the media to include coordination of any statements and press conferences. The department liaison shall also ensure that members of the agency are aware of restrictions regarding release of any information that might undermine future legal proceedings.
- 8) Ensure that security checks of the survivor's residence are initiated immediately following the incident and for as long as necessary thereafter.

3. FUNERAL LIAISON

- a. The funeral liaison officer acts as facilitator between the decedent officer's family and the department during the wake and funeral.
- b. The funeral liaison officer is responsible for:
 - 1) Meeting with family members and explaining his responsibilities to them;
 - 2) Being available to the family prior to and throughout the wake and funeral;
 - 3) Ensuring that the needs and wishes of the family come before those of the department;
 - 4) Assisting the family in working with the funeral director regarding funeral arrangements;
 - 5) Relaying any information to the family concerning the circumstances of the decedent officer's death and appropriate information regarding any investigation;
 - 6) Determining the need for travel arrangements for out-of-town family members and any other special needs of the family during the funeral and reporting this information to the department liaison; and

- 7) Briefing the family members on the procedures involved in the law enforcement funeral.

4. BENEFITS COORDINATOR

- a. The benefits coordinator aids the survivors by coordinating the delivery of municipal, state, federal and private benefits.
- b. The benefits coordinator is also responsible for:
 - 1) Filing injured-on-duty claims (if appropriate) and related paperwork;
 - 2) Presenting information on all benefits available to the family from:
 - a) The municipality,
 - b) State Government,
 - c) Federal Government, and
 - d) Private Foundations;
 - 3) Documenting inquiries and interest in public donations to the family and establishing a mechanism for receipt of such contributions, as appropriate;
 - 4) Preparing all documentation of benefits and payments due survivors, to include the nature and amount of benefits to be received by each beneficiary, the schedule of payments and the name of a contact person or facilitator at each benefit or payment office;
 - 5) Filing all benefits paperwork and maintaining contact with the family in order to ensure that benefits are being received. A copy of benefits documentation should be provided to all survivors affected and explained to each of them; and
 - 6) Advising the surviving family of the role of police associations and organizations and the nature of support programs that they sponsor for law enforcement survivors.

5. FAMILY SUPPORT ADVOCATE

- a. The family support advocate serves in a long-term liaison and support capacity for the surviving family.
- b. The duties of this individual include:
 - 1) Providing contact with surviving family members in order to keep them abreast of criminal proceedings relating to the death of their family member;

- 2) Accompanying surviving family members to criminal proceedings, explaining the nature of the proceedings and introducing them to prosecutors and other persons as required;
- 3) Identifying all support services available to family members and working on their behalf to secure any services necessary;
- 4) Maintaining routine contact with family members to provide companionship and emotional support, and maintaining an ongoing relationship between the department and the immediate family; and
- 5) Relaying the concerns and needs of the family to those individuals or organizations that may provide assistance, and encouraging others to visit and help as necessary.

