



SYKESVILLE POLICE DEPARTMENT

Line of Duty Deaths and Serious Injuries

General Order 2-19 Effective: 08/31/17

Authorized by: *Michael A. Spaulding* Chief of Police

I. PURPOSE

This policy is designed to prepare this department for the line-of-duty death or serious injury of an active duty officer and to direct the department in providing proper support for the officer's family.

II. POLICY

It is the policy of the Sykesville Police Department to provide assistance to the immediate survivors of an active duty officer who dies or is seriously injured in the line of duty and to provide them with support during this traumatic period of readjustment.

III. DEFINITIONS

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.

Next of Kin: The closest relative of the deceased officer – for example, spouse, parents, siblings, or children.

Survivors: Immediate family members of the deceased officer to include spouse, children, parents, siblings, fiancée or significant others.

Serious Injury: any injury requiring admission into a medical facility. Injuries not included are those requiring treatment and release from a medical facility.

IV. PROCEDURES

The following procedures should be adhered to in cases of line-of-duty deaths and in cases of seriously injured officers. These procedures should be followed whenever possible with the understanding that the wishes of the family take precedence over the desires of the department. 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 officers are not sure can be met.

A. Death Notification

1. Notification of the individual(s) listed on the officer's emergency notification form (if available), followed by those to the next of kin, should be made as soon as possible and, if possible, coincidental with command notifications.

2. The name of the deceased officer shall not be released to the media or other parties before survivors are notified. If the media has already obtained information related to the death, they should be asked to withhold the information until after the notifications have been completed.
3. All notifications should be made by at least two individuals, to include members of the department, chaplains, or other support personnel.
4. Whenever possible, line-of-duty death notifications should be made in person by the Chief of Police, or his or her designee, and another member of the department, preferably an individual with personal knowledge of the deceased officer and his or her family, such as a partner or close friend. In addition and where feasible, the police chaplain or other crisis intervention specialist should be present during the notification.
5. Where available, unmarked police vehicles should be used for transport to the location of the survivors.
6. Prior to contacting the next of kin, notifying officials shall do the following:
 - a. Gather and familiarize themselves with essential details concerning the deceased, to include full name, age, race and home address, as well as details of the death, location of the body and personal effects and other pertinent information.
 - b. Ensure that the deceased has been positively identified.
 - c. Gather readily available information concerning the survivors that may aid in the notification. This includes, but is not limited to, whether survivors are elderly, disabled, visually or hearing impaired, have medical problems or do not speak English, in which case a translator or officer who speaks the particular language should be provided. If possible, officers should obtain the names of the survivor's closest relative, friend, family doctor, and clergyman.
7. Whenever the health of immediate survivors is a concern, emergency medical services personnel shall be requested to stand by.
8. Upon arrival at the residence or place of business, officials shall:
 - a. check the accuracy of the location;
 - b. identify themselves by name, rank ,and departmental affiliation;

- c. ask permission to enter the residence or, in the case of a business or other location, move to a place of privacy;
 - d. request to speak to the immediate survivor; and
 - e. verify the relationship of the survivor to the deceased.
9. Every reasonable effort shall be made to make the death notification in the privacy of the survivor's home or in another location away from public scrutiny.
10. Prior to making notification, officials should determine if other members of the family are in the residence. Officials may wish to bring them together for the notification, but should defer to the wishes of the immediate survivor.
11. Notifying officials should address the survivor(s) in a straightforward manner and use easy-to-understand language to briefly explain the circumstances of the incident and the fact that the individual is dead.
- a. Officials should not use euphemisms such as "passed away" or "no longer with us" in order to avoid using the term "dead," as these expressions may create confusion or false hope.
 - b. Officials should not provide graphic aspects of the incident or the individual's death. Police jargon should be avoided.
 - c. Officials should refer to the deceased using terms reflecting the deceased's relationship to the survivor (e.g., son, daughter).
12. Notifying officials should be prepared for unexpected responses from survivors to include fainting, hysteria, and possible verbal or physical assault.
13. Survivors should be provided with sufficient time to regain composure following delivery of the death notice. Notifying officials should avoid attempts in the interim to provide comfort by using simple platitudes or trite phrases (e.g., "I know how you feel," "I know how hard this is for you.").
14. Before leaving, the notifying officials shall provide the family with contact information for the various department personnel who will assist them in the coming days, weeks, or months.
15. Officials should not leave a lone survivor unattended until all reasonable efforts have been made to garner first-hand support from the survivor's

family, friends, coworkers, neighbors, family clergy, crisis counselors, or other community social service agency. Officers should provide or arrange for transportation of essential individuals where necessary.

16. 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 en route. In such cases, immediate transportation should be provided for survivors. During transportation, all police radios should be turned off.
17. If necessary, arrangements for childcare or care for elderly relatives shall be made by notifying officers.
18. Communication of information concerning the officer and the incident shall, whenever possible, be restricted to the telephone or other secure means of communication to avoid interception by the media or others.
19. The notification officer shall be responsible for 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.
20. The notification officer shall submit a written report to the chief of police specifying the identity, time, and place of survivors notified.

B. Assisting Survivors at the Hospital

Whenever possible, the Chief of Police shall join the family at the hospital in order to emphasize the agency's support. An officer will be designated as the hospital liaison officer who shall be responsible for coordinating the arrival of immediate survivors, departmental personnel, the media, and others and assume the following responsibilities:

1. Arrange for waiting facilities and security for immediate survivors. The desires of the surviving family members should be followed with regard to their accessibility to other officers and friends.
2. Designate a separate press staging area and assign an officer as the primary point of contact for the media.
3. Ensure that medical personnel provide pertinent medical information on the officer's condition to the family before any other parties.
4. Assist family members, in accordance with their desires and hospital policy, in gaining access to the injured or deceased officer.

5. Avoid idle promises or false and misleading statements to the family, such as “We’ll retire his/her badge,” “We’ll promote him or her,” or suggesting medications such as sedatives.
6. Provide hospital personnel with all necessary information on billing for medical services. The hospital 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.
7. Take all personal effects of the deceased for return to the family at a later time.
8. Arrange transportation for the family and other survivors upon their departure from the hospital. As with notifications performed at the home, survivors should not be left unattended if their emotional stability is in question or where other assistance, such as the care of children or the elderly, is necessary.

C. Appointment of Department Coordination Personnel

The designated departmental officer(s) shall begin serving in the following capacities: department liaison, funeral liaison, benefits coordinator, and family support advocate. These assignments shall be made in writing to departmental personnel and the surviving family members shall be informed in writing of those designated. In addition, the chief of police or his designee shall:

1. Make additional personnel assignments to assist in handling incoming phone calls and inquiries and to direct the public to appropriate personnel; and,
2. Ensure that the employee assistance program is implemented to assist surviving family members and emphasize the family’s right to psychological services.

D. Department Liaison

The department liaison officer shall serve as a facilitator between the family and the law enforcement agency. This individual should normally be a supervisory or commanding officer in order to expedite the tasks of employing departmental resources and the delegation of assignments. This officer should 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:

1. Providing oversight of travel and lodging arrangements for out-of-town family members.

2. Identifying 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.
3. Coordinating all official law enforcement notifications and arrangements to include the honor guard, pallbearers, traffic control, and liaison with visiting law enforcement agencies.
4. Coordinating a response to the media, to include the following. If available, these duties may be assigned to the agency's public information officer.
 - a. Assisting family members in dealing with general media inquiries and informing them of limitations on what they can say to the media specifically.
 - b. Providing 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.
5. Ensuring that security checks of the survivor's residence are initiated immediately following the incident and for as long as necessary thereafter.
6. Providing agency personnel with updated information regarding the incident as it becomes available.
7. Preparing and disseminating the official departmental bulletin regarding the officer's death, to include the following:
 - a. The name of the deceased officer
 - b. Date and time of death
 - c. Summary of the incident
 - d. Officer's duty assignment
 - e. Funeral arrangements
 - f. Uniform to be worn by attending officers
 - g. Directions to funeral home or church
 - h. Telephone contact for additional information

E. Funeral Liaison

The funeral liaison officer acts as a facilitator between the decedent officer's family and the department during the wake and funeral. The funeral liaison officer is responsible for:

1. Meeting with family members and explaining his or her 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. 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;
6. Briefing the family members on the procedures involved in the law enforcement funeral;
7. Coordinating with the appropriate personnel to provide law enforcement specific funeral services (e.g., death watch, rifle team, color guard) as dictated by the family; and
8. Arranging for appropriate media coverage of the funeral, as decided by the family.

F. Benefits Coordinator

The benefits coordinator is responsible for:

1. Filing workers' compensation claims and related paperwork;
2. Presenting information on all benefits available to the family;
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 to 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 and explained to all survivors affected); 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.

G. Family Support Advocate

The family support advocate serves in a long-term liaison and support capacity for the surviving family. This individual should introduce him or herself to the family and explain his or her role in the process as soon as reasonably possible following the death. The duties of this individual include:

1. Assuring the family that their wishes with regard to the funeral will come before those of the department;
2. Relaying any information to the family concerning the circumstances of the decedent officer's death and appropriate information regarding any investigation;
3. providing contact with surviving family members in order to keep them abreast of criminal proceedings relating to the death of their family member;
4. Accompanying surviving family members to criminal proceedings, explaining the nature of the proceedings, and introducing them to prosecutors and other persons as required;
5. Identifying all support services available to family members and working on their behalf to secure any services necessary;
6. Maintaining routine contact with family members to provide companionship and emotional support and maintain an ongoing relationship between the department and the immediate family; and
7. 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.

H. Serious On-Duty Injury

1. Absent the officer's ability to make notifications him or herself, the officer's next of kin shall be notified of his or her serious injury by the commanding officer on duty at the time of the incident. This individual should be accompanied by at least one other individual, to include a close friend of the injured officer, the police chaplain, and/or other support personnel.
2. The same notification procedures as outlined above in section A shall be followed.
3. Department coordination personnel shall be assigned by the chief law enforcement executive or his or her designee as needed to provide support to the family depending on the nature and severity of the injury.

I. Support for Coworkers

The death or serious injury of a coworker in the line of duty can be one of the most traumatic events that an officer can experience. Following a line-of-duty death or serious injury, all officers shall be provided the opportunity to participate in psychological or peer support services through this department's employee assistance program or human resources department.

V. CANCELLATIONS

This General Order cancels and replaces the following policies: General Order 55.2.6, entitled Line of Duty Deaths and Serious Injuries, dated December 26, 2001.