



# Charleston County Sheriff's Office Policy and Procedures Manual

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**Sheriff Carl Ritchie**

14-02

## VICTIM / WITNESS ASSISTANCE

- NEW
- REVISED
- REVIEWED

ACA Standards Reference:

CALEA Standards Reference: 22.1.5, 55.1.1, 55.1.2, 55.2.1, 55.2.2, 55.2.3, 55.2.4, 55.2.5, 55.2.6

NCCHC Standards Reference:

SCLEA Standards Reference:

SC Minimum Standards:

*This policy dated 1/29/2025 replaces prior policies cited above and supersedes all previously issued directives.*

I. Purpose:

To establish procedures to protect and preserve the rights of all victims and witnesses; and to provide social assistance, referral, emotional support, and other help to victims and/or witnesses who are physically, financially, or emotionally harmed by crime.

II. Policy:

Charleston County Sheriff's Office is committed to assisting victims and witnesses of crime in a fair, compassionate, and dignified manner. Agency personnel will ensure that victims and witnesses of crime are afforded all the rights and entitlements provided by law.

III. Definitions:

A. For purposes of this procedure, the word "deputy" applies to all agency employees with a certification classification of Class I, Class II, Class III, or Reserve Deputy as defined by the South Carolina Criminal Justice Academy.

The following terms are used interchangeably; however, they carry guidance to specific employees based on usage of the term:

1. Deputy, deputy sheriff, detention deputy, sworn employee, uniformed sworn employee, sworn administrative employee, and
2. civilian, non-sworn employee.

B. *Employee:* When used without further clarification, the term employee is inclusive of all agency members (sworn and non-sworn).

C. *Victim:* An individual who suffers direct or threatened physical, psychological, and/or financial harm as the result of the commission or attempted commission of a criminal offense. Victim also includes any individual's spouse, parent, child, or the lawful representative of a victim who is:

1. deceased;
2. a minor;
3. incompetent; or

4. physically or psychologically incapacitated.

*Victim* does not include:

1. any individual who is the subject of an investigation for, who is charged with, or who has been convicted of or pled guilty or nolo contendere to the offense in question;
  2. any individual, including a spouse, parent, child or lawful representative who is acting on behalf of the suspect, juvenile offender, or defendant unless their actions are required by law; or
  3. any individual who was imprisoned or engaged in an illegal act at the time of the offense.
- D. *Witness*: A person who was, or is expected to be, summoned to testify for either the prosecution or defense, or who by reason of having relevant information is subject to call or likely to be called as a witness for the prosecution or defense, whether or not any action or proceeding has yet been commenced. Note: All victims are witnesses.
- E. *Victim Advocate*: An individual authorized by the Charleston County Sheriff's Office to assist victims in specified ways. Advocates may be non-sworn agency personnel or volunteers (i.e., unpaid trained citizens, see [Policy 9-31 Auxiliaries](#)).

#### IV. Procedure

- A. The Charleston County Sheriff's Office recognizes the rights of victims and witnesses consistent with state statute. Victims and witnesses have the right:
1. to be treated with dignity, respect, fairness, and sensitivity; and to be free from intimidation, harassment, or abuse throughout the criminal and juvenile justice process;
  2. to be informed of their constitutional rights as provided by statute;
  3. to be reasonably informed when the accused or convicted person is arrested, released from custody, or has escaped;
  4. to be informed of and present at all criminal proceedings which are dispositive of the charges where the defendant has the right to be present;

5. to be reasonably informed of and be allowed to submit either a written or oral statement at all hearings affecting bond or bail;
  6. to be heard at any proceeding involving a post-arrest decision, a plea, or sentencing;
  7. to be reasonably protected from the accused or persons acting on behalf of the accused throughout the criminal justice process;
  8. to confer with the prosecution, after the crime against the victim has been charged, before the trial, or before any disposition;
  9. to have reasonable access after the conclusion of the criminal investigation to all documents relating to the crime against the victim before trial;
  10. to receive prompt and full restitution from the convicted person or persons of the criminal conduct that caused the victim's loss or injury including both adult and juvenile offenders;
  11. to be informed of any proceeding when any post-conviction action is being considered and be present at any post-conviction hearing involving a release decision; and
  12. to a reasonable disposition and prompt and final conclusion of the case. (Ref: CALEA 55.1.1 item e)
- B. The Victim Assistance Program is a component of the Criminal Investigation Division (CID).
1. Victim/witness advocates report to the Victim Advocate Coordinator.
  2. The Victim Advocate Coordinator reports directly to the CID Captain.
  3. Cases will be assigned through the CID Captain or designee. (Ref: CALEA 55.1.1 item a)
- C. The Victim Assistance Program will serve victims:
1. of all crimes as governed by state statute; and
  2. of non-criminal related serious injury or crisis situations.

D. Program Operations:

1. Information regarding the Victim Assistance Program is available 24 hours per day. Emergency numbers and referral services are available from the victim advocates during normal business hours (i.e., 0830-1700 hrs). Victim advocates are available on a rotational call out, notified through the CID on-call supervisor. Referral information will include:
  - a. basic needs;
  - b. crisis hotlines;
  - c. legal assistance;
  - d. shelters and safe houses;
  - e. medical assistance;
  - f. counseling; and
  - g. emergency financial assistance.

(Ref: CALEA 55.2.1 item *b*)
2. Victim advocates will render appropriate assistance to victims and witnesses of crime, with particular attention to the needs of violent crime victims.
3. Support and assistance will be provided in a timely manner to assist the emotional and physical recovery of victims and witnesses.
4. To accomplish these objectives, minimize duplication of services, and enhance efficiency, victim advocates must ensure a high degree of cooperation between the Sheriff's Office and other governmental and private entities providing victim services. This cooperation is essential and will be maintained through personal interaction with other victim advocates, membership in professional organizations, and participation in community functions. (Ref: CALEA 55.1.1 item *d*)
5. The Victim Services Office will maintain a confidential records system of all victims/witnesses served by the Victim Assistance Program. Records will be maintained within the Victim Services Office and will be accessible only to victim advocates in accordance with applicable state statutes. (Ref: CALEA 55.1.1 item *b*)

- E. Services Rendered To Victim/Witness During Preliminary Investigation:
1. Deputy sheriffs will inform the victim/witness of services provided by the agency during their initial contact. Deputy sheriffs will provide the victim/witness with agency brochures which contain the agency's emergency response phone number and emergency phone numbers for counseling, compensation programs and medical attention.  
(Ref: CALEA 55.2.1 item a; and 55.2.3 item a)
  2. Information provided the victim/witness will include action to be taken should the victim/witness be threatened or intimidated by the suspect, suspect's family, or suspect's companion(s).  
(Ref: CALEA 55.2.3 item b)
  3. Victims/witnesses will be given the assigned agency OCA/report number and other information needed to pursue the case (e.g., name and telephone number of the investigating detective, if known, and telephone number of the Victim Services Office). Victims/witnesses will be instructed to notify the reporting deputy sheriff, investigating detective, or victim advocate of any changes in information or additional information regarding the case.  
(Ref: CALEA 55.2.3 items c and d)
  4. In those situations where the needs of the victim/witness cannot be addressed by law enforcement, the Victim Services Office will serve as a referral center, directing those in need to the appropriate sources of assistance. Victim advocates will document all advocate referrals. The Victim Services Office will act as liaison and referral for victims and witnesses regarding applicable services to include:
    - a. professional counseling;
    - b. victim compensation;
    - c. medical assistance;
    - d. emergency financial assistance;
    - e. victim advocacy; and
    - f. other sources of victim assistance that may be available.

5. Victim advocates will respond to on-scene calls at the discretion and approval of a CID or Patrol shift supervisor.
6. Support services available from victim advocates during an investigation will include:
  - a. advising victims as to their rights and remedies pursuant to the Victim's Bill of Rights and the Victim's Compensation Program;
  - b. assistance, as needed, with the completion of compensation applications;
  - c. employer, landlord, and/or creditor intervention, as needed;
  - d. information regarding safe houses and shelters, as needed;
  - e. specific information regarding the criminal justice system to include preparation for and an explanation of court proceedings;
  - f. accompaniment to physical lineups and court when requested; and
  - g. transportation to and from court when needed and/or requested.
7. Any report of a victim or witness being threatened or intimidated will be referred to the CID Captain, or designee, for criminal investigation. In those instances where the victim/witness articulates specific, credible reasons for fearing intimidation or further victimization, the agency shall render appropriate assistance to address their concerns. After normal business hours, the Patrol shift supervisor will assess the threat and determine whether an investigative supervisor needs to be apprised. (Ref: CALEA 55.2.2)
8. Victim advocates will provide appropriate assistance to victims/witnesses who have been threatened or who, in the judgment of the agency, express specific, credible reasons for fearing intimidation or further victimization. The victim advocates are available to:
  - a. contact the Solicitor's Office and Central Bond Hearing Court regarding bond revocation or other criminal proceedings; and



- b. an inventory of information and service needs of victims/witnesses in general and for special victims, etc. (special victims include, but are not limited to, victims of domestic violence, assault, sexual crimes, and child or elderly abuse/neglect);
  - c. a review of related governmental and private sector assistance programs for victims/witnesses available in Charleston County; and
  - d. the identification of all unfilled needs and recommendations as to the appropriate agency that should address the identified needs.
2. This analysis will be forwarded through the Victim Services Unit's chain-of-command to the Sheriff. (Ref: CALEA 55.1.2)

H. Notification of Next of Kin:

1. Local Notification
  - a. Death notifications of next-of-kin for incidents occurring within Charleston County will be coordinated through the Coroner's Office. Patrol shift supervisors (or their designees), the Coastal Crisis Chaplaincy, and agency victim advocates are available to assist the Coroner's Office. Victim advocates are also available for follow-up procedures after the incident.
  - b. Victim advocates are available to assist with all serious injury notifications. Initial contact with the next of kin will be accomplished in a timely manner and may be accomplished by the Patrol shift supervisors (or their designees), the Coastal Crisis Chaplaincy, and/or victim advocates. Victim advocates will continue follow-up procedures following the incident.

2. Out-Of-Town Notification

The Patrol shift supervisor (or designee), the Coastal Crisis Chaplaincy and/or victim advocate will coordinate with outside agencies via telephone and teletype to arrange notification of next-of-kin for incidents occurring outside Charleston County. The victim advocate will continue follow-up procedures after the incident.

(Ref: CALEA 55.2.6)

- I. Victim/Witness Services to Agency Personnel:
1. In the event an agency employee is killed or seriously injured as the result of a line-of-duty incident, the Victim Services Office will extend all possible aid and assistance to employees and their families for as long as a need exists. In all such incidents, a victim advocate will be notified in a timely manner and will provide the following:
    - a. emotional and moral support;
    - b. assistance to the family at the hospital;
    - c. support and assistance to family when making funeral arrangements as well as at the funeral;
    - d. assistance in benefits and legal matters;
    - e. updated information concerning any new developments in any court proceedings;
    - f. support to family during any criminal proceedings; and
    - g. long-term contact with the family after-the-fact to keep informed of their needs. (Ref: CALEA 22.1.5)
- J. Public Information Regarding Victim/Witness Assistance:
- The Victim Advocate Coordinator will work closely with the agency's Public Information Officer in keeping the public and media informed concerning agency's victim/witness assistance services. Additionally, victim advocates will represent the agency and distribute victim/witness service related literature and agency brochures at assigned community functions.  
(Ref: CALEA 55.1.1 item c)
- K. The agency's Victim Advocate Coordinator will be responsible for the recruitment, selection, and training of all volunteer personnel assigned to the Victim Assistance Program, as outlined in [Policy 9-31 Auxiliaries](#).
- L. Training:
1. It is the responsibility of the Victim Advocate Coordinator to ensure all agency personnel are informed of the existence, purpose, and activities of the Victim Assistance Program.

2. The Victim Services Office will assist Training to ensure all sworn personnel receive appropriate training in the role of law enforcement in meeting the needs and addressing the rights of victims and witnesses.
3. Whenever possible, victim advocates will attend seminars and training sessions offered to victim advocates.