



CHATHAM COUNTY POLICE DEPARTMENT

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

SOP # OPS-027
VICTIM-WITNESS ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

EFFECTIVE DATE: 08/07/23

PURPOSE

This Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) establishes procedures for providing victim-witness support, information, and guidance, as well as meeting the needs of victim-witnesses of criminal and non-criminal incidents.

POLICY

Employees of the Chatham County Police Department (CCPD) will treat victims and witnesses of crimes with dignity, respect, courtesy, and compassion, as well as treat their situation with fairness and confidentiality. The CCPD is committed to developing, implementing, and continuing appropriate Victim-Witness Assistance programs and activities.

The CCPD will comply with the Official Code of Georgia Annotated (OCGA) Title 17, Chapter 17 Crime Victim's Bill of Rights as it applies to arresting and/or investigating law enforcement agencies and will strive to meet the needs of victims and witnesses of criminal and non-criminal incidents by providing support, information, guidance, and assistance in seeking protection from further victimization. The CCPD will cooperate fully and assist in any way possible with the existing Victim-Witness Assistance Program of the Chatham County District Attorney's Office.

PROCEDURE

I. GENERAL RESPONSIBILITIES

- A. Assistant Chiefs and Captains/Commanders shall be responsible for implementing and coordinating CCPD victim-witness assistance activities for their assigned Divisions and Units.
- B. All employees are responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of records and files of victim-witnesses consistent with applicable case law, state statutes, the Freedom of Information and Privacy Acts, and departmental policies.
- C. CCPD personnel shall cooperate with the Victim-Witness Assistance Program in their effort to inform the public and media of available services.
- D. All employees are expected to cultivate and maintain a cooperative relationship with other criminal justice agencies, governmental and non-governmental agencies, and other organizations concerned with victim-witness needs and rights.
- E. CCPD and Communications personnel will have access to a list of resources for crime victims.

1. This list will include the 24-hour telephone number for the Victim-Witness Assistance Program and telephone numbers for organizations that can help those in need of medical attention, counseling, and emergency financial assistance.
2. In the event an emergency response is required, Communications personnel will enter the caller's information into the computer dispatch system.

II. PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION ASSISTANCE

- A. Officers conducting the preliminary investigation will provide victim-witnesses with a CRN Card Pamphlet that lists Case Report Number (CRN) and the officer's name and employee number. This pamphlet will include:
 1. List of services available to assist them in our area.
 2. Subsequent steps in the processing of the case.
 3. Procedure to follow for intimidation and/or threats made by the suspect, the suspect's companions, or the suspect's family.
 4. The victim-witness may call to report additional information about the case, contact the Detective's office for information about the status of the case, and/or to receive information regarding services offered in Chatham County.
- B. When CCPD Officers come into contact with citizens who are in need of assistance, which is not within the scope of the services provided by the Department, they should refer the citizen to the appropriate service provider.
- C. Employees can be assisted in finding the appropriate agency by:
 1. Calling First Call for Help (Phone # 211 - the information and referral service that links persons who have problems to appropriate community services).
 2. Consulting a Department Supervisor.
- D. When CCPD Officers come into contact with violators, they may refer them to be more effectively dealt with in a diversion or social service program due to age, addiction, or limited involvement in criminal activity. These programs will include but are not limited to, Pretrial Intervention, Youthful Offender, and mental health counseling.
- E. The CCPD will cooperate with the prosecutor in cases that the District Attorney's Office deems more appropriately handled by a diversion program.
- F. The following are some of the victim-witness assistance services available in Chatham County:
 1. Chatham County District Attorney's Victim-Witness Assistance Program.
 2. Victim-Witness Savannah Area Family Emergency Shelter (Safe).
 3. Rape Crisis Center.
 4. Parent and Child Family Center.
 5. Helpline/First Call for Help.
 6. Chatham County Department of Family and Children Services.
 7. Chatham County DA's Office
 8. Georgia Legal Services.

9. Crime Stoppers.
10. Alcoholics Anonymous.
11. State Probation.
12. Chatham County Juvenile Court.
13. Coastal Children Advocacy Center.
14. Suicide and Crisis Lifeline
15. CCPD Telephone Numbers.

III. FOLLOW-UP INVESTIGATION ASSISTANCE

- A. CCPD will provide appropriate assistance to victims/witnesses who have been threatened or who express specific, credible reasons for fearing intimidation or further victimization.
- B. CCPD Officers will refer victim-witnesses to the Victim-Witness Assistance Program for a continued update regarding the prosecution of their case and their role in those procedures.
- C. Detectives conducting follow-up investigations will, if feasible, schedule interviews and other required appearances at the convenience of the victim/witness and, if necessary, provide transportation.
- D. If possible, the CCPD Property Custodian will promptly release property taken as evidence (except for contraband, disputed property, and weapons used in the course of a crime), as permissible by Georgia Law and departmental policies.
- E. As timely as possible, the Investigator assigned to a case will notify the Victim-Witness upon the apprehension of a suspect and will keep them updated as to the progression of the prosecution procedure.
- F. If the case reaches Superior Court, the Victim-Witness Assistance Program will assign a Victim Advocate to the Victim-Witness during a follow-up investigation.
- G. Regardless of prosecution, in the event of unusually severe crimes, Victim-Witness Assistance Program personnel may re-contact the Victim-Witness periodically to determine whether their needs are being met.

BY ORDER OF:

Electronically Signed in PowerDMS on 08/07/2023

Jeffrey M. Hadley
Chief of Police