

WOONSOCKET POLICE DEPARTMENT

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CHIEF OF POLICE



| TYPE OF ORDER | NUMBER/SERIES | ISSUE DATE | EFFECTIVE DATE |
|---|---------------|---------------------------------|----------------|
| General Order | 250.08 | 7/2/2024 | 7/2/2024 |
| SUBJECT | | PREVIOUSLY ISSUED DATES | |
| Line of Duty Death | | 7/17/2019, 7/22/2014, 1/23/1995 | |
| ACCREDITATION | | RE-EVALUATION DATE | |
| CALEA Standards: 22.2.4 RIPAC Standards: 3.3 | | 6/7/2021, 5/20/2024 | |
| INDEX | | DISTRIBUTION | |
| Conditions & Benefits | | All Personnel | |

LINE OF DUTY DEATH

I. PURPOSE

To establish procedures that will ensure the proper support and emotional care for an officer's family following a line-of-duty death or serious injury.

II. POLICY

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It is the policy of this department to provide liaison assistance to the immediate survivors of any member who dies or is seriously injured in the line of duty. This assistance will be provided whether the incident was unlawful or accidental (automobile accident, hit by a passing vehicle during a traffic stop, training accident, etc.) while the officer was performing a public safety-related function either on or off duty and while the officer was an active member of the department. The Chief of Police may institute certain parts of this order for cases of an officer's natural death. The department will also provide clarification and a comprehensive study of survivor benefits as well as other tangible and intangible emotional support during this traumatic period of readjustment for the surviving family. Funeral arrangements of the deceased officer are to be decided by the **FAMILY** with their wishes taking precedence over the department's.

III. DISCUSSION

Coordination of events following the line-of-duty death of an officer is an extremely important and complex responsibility. Professionalism and compassion must be exhibited at all times as an obligation to the officer's survivors and the law enforcement community. To provide the best possible services and support for the officer's family, specific tasks may be assigned to selected members of the department. Their titles are:

- Notification Officer
- Hospital Liaison Officer
- Family Liaison Officer
- Department Liaison Officer
- Benefits Coordinator

An explanation of each of these responsibilities is contained in this order. An officer may be called upon to perform more than one role.

IV. PROCEDURE

A. Notification

1. It shall be the responsibility of the Chief of Police or designee to properly notify the next of kin of an officer who has suffered severe injuries or died. The Chief of Police or designee may personally make the notification or designate a Notification Officer to inform the survivors. As soon as possible, the Officer in Charge (OIC) shall notify the Chief of Police and appropriate command staff members of the death or injury.
2. **The name of the deceased officer MUST NEVER be released by any member of the department before the immediate family is notified.**
3. If there is knowledge of a medical problem with an immediate survivor, medical personnel should be available at the residence to coincide with the death notification.
4. **Notification MUST ALWAYS be made in person and never alone.** The Chief of Police or a representative, chaplain, close friend, or another survivor could appropriately accompany the Notification Officer. However, if the aforementioned persons are not readily accessible, notification should not be delayed until these people can gather. If there is an opportunity to get to the hospital before the demise of the officer, DON'T wait for the delegation to gather. The family should learn of the death from the department FIRST and not from the press or other sources.
5. NEVER make a death notification on the doorstep. Ask to be admitted to the house. Inform family members slowly and clearly of the information that you have. If specifics of the incident are known, the Notification Officer should relay as much information as possible to the family. Be sure to use the officer's name

during the notification. If the officer has died, relay that information. Never give the family a false sense of hope. Use words such as "died" and "dead" rather than "gone away" or "passed away".

6. If the family requests to visit the hospital, they should be transported by police vehicle. It is highly recommended that the family NOT drive themselves to the hospital. If the family insists on driving, an officer should accompany them in the family car.
7. If young children are at home, the Notification Officer must arrange for babysitting needs. This may involve co-workers' spouses, transportation of children to a relative's home, or a similar arrangement.
8. Before departing for the hospital, the Notification Officer should notify the hospital staff and the Hospital Liaison (by telephone if possible) that a member(s) of the family is en route.
9. The deceased or severely injured officer's parents should also be afforded the courtesy of a personal notification if possible.
10. If immediate survivors live a significant distance beyond this department's jurisdiction, the Notification Officer will ensure that the Communications Center notifies the appropriate jurisdiction and requests a PERSONAL notification. Arrangements should be made to permit simultaneous telephone contact between the survivors and the department.
11. The Chief of Police or a high-ranking representative should respond to the residence or the hospital to meet with the family as quickly as possible.
12. In the event of an on-duty death, the external monitoring of police/fire frequencies may be extensive. Communications regarding notifications should be restricted to the telephone whenever possible. If the media has somehow obtained the officer's name, they should be advised to withhold the information pending notification of next of kin.

B. Assistance for Affected Officers

1. Officers who were on the scene or who arrived moments after an officer was critically injured or killed should be relieved as quickly as possible.
2. Public safety witnesses and other officers who may have been emotionally affected by the serious injury or death of another officer will attend a Critical Incident Debriefing.

C. Assisting the Family at the Hospital

1. The first officer, other than the Chief or representative, to arrive at the hospital becomes the Hospital Liaison Officer. The Hospital Liaison Officer is responsible for coordinating the activities of hospital personnel, the officer's family, officers, the press, and others. These responsibilities include:

- a. Arrange with hospital personnel to provide an appropriate waiting facility for the family, the Chief of Police, the Notification Officer, and only those others requested by the immediate survivors.
 - b. Arrange a separate area for fellow officers and friends to assemble.
 - c. Establish a press staging area.
 - d. Ensure that medical personnel relay pertinent information regarding an officer's condition to the family on a timely basis and before such information is released to others.
 - e. Notify the appropriate hospital personnel that all medical bills relating to the injured or deceased officer be directed to the municipality or the department. The family should not receive any of these bills at their residence. This may require the Hospital Liaison Officer to re-contact the hospital during normal business hours to ensure that proper billing takes place. The officer should notify the insurance carrier of the incident.
 - f. Ensure that the family is updated regarding the incident and the officer's condition upon their arrival at the hospital.
 - g. Arrange transportation for the family back to their residence.
2. If it is possible for the family to visit the injured officer before death, they should be afforded that opportunity. A public safety official should "prepare" the family for what they might see in the emergency room and should accompany the family into the room for the visit if the family requests it. Medical personnel should advise the family of visitation policies and, in the event of death, explain why an autopsy is necessary.
 3. The Notification Officer(s) should remain at the hospital while the family is present.
 4. Do not be overly protective of the family. This includes the sharing of specific information on how the officer met his demise as well as allowing the family time with the deceased officer.

D. Support of the Family During the Wake and Funeral

1. The Chief of Police, or designee, will meet with the officer's family at their home to determine their wishes regarding departmental participation in the preparation of the funeral or services. All possible assistance will be rendered.
2. With the approval of the family, the Chief will assign a Family Liaison Officer. The Chief will also designate a Department Liaison Officer and a Benefits Coordinator.

E. Family Liaison Officer

1. The selection of a Family Liaison Officer is a critical assignment. An attempt should be made to assign someone who enjoyed a close relationship with the officer and his family.

2. This is not a decision-making position. This is the role of "facilitator" between the family and the department.
3. Responsibilities of the Family Liaison Officer:
 - a. Ensure that the needs of the family come before the wishes of the department.
 - b. Assist the family with funeral arrangements and make them aware of what the department can offer if they decide to have a public safety funeral. If they choose the latter, brief the family on the funeral procedure (i.e. 21-gun salute, presenting the flag, playing of taps).
 - c. Apprise the family of information concerning the death and the continuing investigation.
 - d. Provide as much assistance as possible, including overseeing travel and lodging arrangements for out-of-town family members, arranging for food for the family, meeting childcare and transportation needs, etc.
 - e. Be constantly available to the family.
 - f. Determine what public safety, church, fraternal, and labor organizations will provide in terms of financial assistance for out-of-town family travel, food for funeral attendees following the burial, etc.
 - g. Be accessible to the family at all times, (i.e. cell phone, etc.).

F. Department Liaison Officer

1. This position is normally assigned to a member of the Command Staff because of the need to effectively coordinate resources throughout the department.
2. Department Liaison Officer Responsibilities:
 - a. Work closely with the Family Liaison Officer to ensure that the needs of the family are fulfilled.
 - b. Handle the news media throughout the ordeal. If the family decides to accept an interview, an officer should attend to "screen" questions presented to the family so as not to jeopardize subsequent legal proceedings.
 - c. Meet with the following persons to coordinate funeral activities and establish an itinerary:
 - 1) Chief of Police;
 - 2) Funeral Director;
 - 3) Family priest or minister;
 - 4) Cemetery Director; and
 - 5) Honor Guard.
 - d. Direct the funeral activities of the department and any visiting police agencies according to the wishes of the family.
 - e. Issue a teletype message to include the following:

- 1) Name of deceased;
 - 2) Date and time of death;
 - 3) Circumstances surrounding the death;
 - 4) Funeral arrangements (state if the service will be private or a public safety funeral);
 - 5) Uniform to be worn;
 - 6) Expressions of sympathy in place of flowers; and
 - 7) Contact person and phone number for visiting departments to indicate their desire to attend and to obtain further information.
- f. Obtain an American Flag. If the family wishes a flag presentation by the Chief, notify the Chief's Office.
 - g. If the family desires a burial in uniform, select an officer to obtain a uniform and all accouterments (except weapons) and deliver them to the funeral home.
 - h. Assign members for usher duty at the church.
 - i. Arrange for the delivery of the officer's personal belongings to the family.
 - j. Brief the Chief and staff concerning all funeral arrangements.
 - k. Ensure that the surviving parents are afforded recognition and that proper placement is arranged for them during the funeral and procession.
 - l. Arrange for a stand-by doctor for the family, if necessary.
 - m. Coordinate traffic management with other jurisdictions if necessary, during the viewing, funeral, and procession. Arrange for a tow truck to be available along the procession route.
 - n. Assign an officer to remain at the family home during the viewing and funeral.
 - o. Maintain a roster of all departments sending personnel to the funeral, including:
 - 1) Name and address of responding agency;
 - 2) Name of the Chief Executive Officer;
 - 3) Number of officers responding;
 - 4) Number of officers attending the reception after the funeral;
 - 5) Number of vehicles.
 - p. Assist in making the necessary accommodations (food, lodging, etc.).
 - q. Acknowledge visiting and assisting departments.
 - r. Arrange for routine residence checks by the Patrol Division of the survivor's home for 6-8 weeks following the funeral. This service is necessary since large amounts of money are passing through the residence and the survivors will be spending much time away from the home dealing with legal matters.

G. Benefits Coordinator

1. The Benefits Coordinator will gather information on ALL benefits/funeral payments available to the family. The Benefits Coordinator has the department's full support to fulfill this responsibility to the survivors and is completely responsible for filing the appropriate benefit paperwork and following through with the family to ensure that these benefits are being received.
2. The Benefits Coordinator is responsible for:
 - a. Filing Worker's Compensation claims and related paperwork.
 - b. Contacting the appropriate Municipal Offices without delay to ensure that the beneficiary receives death and retirement benefits, the officer's remaining paychecks, and payment for remaining annual and compensatory time.
 - c. Gathering information on all benefit/funeral payments that are available to the family.
 - d. Setting up any special trust funds or educational funds.
 - e. Notifying police/fire organizations such as the police union(s), etc., of the death and ensuring that all entitlements are paid to the beneficiary(s). These agencies may also offer legal and financial counseling to the family at no cost.
 - f. Preparing a printout of the various benefits/funeral payments that are due to the family, listing named beneficiaries, contacts at various benefits offices, and when they can expect to receive payment.
 - g. Meet with the surviving family a few days after the funeral to discuss the benefits they will receive. A copy of the prepared printout and any other related paperwork should be given to the family at this time.
 - 1) If there are surviving children from a former marriage, the guardian of those children should also receive a printout of what benefits the children may be receiving.
 - 2) Attention should be given to the revocation of health benefits. The majority of health benefit providers allow a 30-day grace period before canceling or imposing monthly payments upon survivors.
 - h. Meeting again with the family in about six months to make sure that they are receiving benefits.

H. Continued Support for the Family

1. Members of the department must remain sensitive to the needs of the survivors long after the officer's death. The grief process has no timetable and survivors may develop a complicated grief process. More than half of the surviving spouses can be expected to develop a post-traumatic stress reaction to the tragedy.
2. Survivors should continue to feel a part of the "public safety family". They should be invited to department activities to ensure continued contact.
3. Members of the department are encouraged to keep in touch with the family. Close friends, co-workers, and officials should arrange with the family to visit the

home from time to time so long as the family expresses a desire to have these contacts continue.

4. The Chief of Police should observe the officer's death date with a short note to the family and/or flowers on the grave.
5. Holidays may be especially difficult for the family, particularly if small children are involved. Increased contact with the survivors and additional support is important at these times.
6. The Family Liaison Officer acts as a long-term liaison with the surviving family who ensures that close contact is maintained between the department and the survivors and that their needs are met for as long as they feel the need for support.
7. If no court proceedings surround the circumstances of the officer's death, the Family Liaison Officer will relay all details of the incident to the family at the earliest opportunity.
8. If criminal violations surround the death, the Family Liaison Officer will:
 - a. Inform the family of all new developments before the press release;
 - b. Keep the family apprised of legal and parole proceedings;
 - c. Introduce the family to victim assistance specialists of the court;
 - d. Encourage the family to attend the trial and accompany them whenever possible; and
 - e. Arrange for investigators to meet with the family at the earliest opportunity following the trial to answer all their questions.

Per order,

Thomas F. Oates, III

Chief of Police

Written directives published within PowerDMS are in full force and effect on the referenced dates and have been approved by the Chief of Police