POLICY AND PROCEDURE NO. 475

Victim and Witness Assistance

Massachusetts Police Accreditation Standards:
55.1.1, 55.1.2, 55.2.2

Date Issued: January 4, 1994
Date Effective: July 6, 2026
Review Date: July 6, 2027 3 Pages

1. PURPOSE:

The purpose of this policy is to describe the assistance the Worcester Police Department extends to victims and witnesses of crime and to ensure that they are informed of their rights and of the services available to them.

2. POLICY:

It is the policy of the Worcester Police Department to treat victims and witnesses with dignity and respect, to inform them of their rights and of available services, and to provide appropriate assistance throughout their contact with the Department and the criminal justice process.

3. SCOPE:

This policy applies to all personnel who have contact with victims or witnesses. Assistance rendered during the preliminary and follow-up investigation is governed by Policy 503 (Criminal Investigations); the detailed procedures for death notification are set out in Policy 535 (Deceased Persons).

4. DEFINITIONS:

Victim:

A person who has suffered direct or threatened physical, emotional, or financial harm as the result of the commission of a crime, and, where the victim is deceased or incapacitated, a family member or dependent as provided by law.

Witness:

A person who has knowledge of the commission of a crime and who may be called to provide information or testimony.

5. ASSISTANCE EXTENDED TO VICTIMS AND WITNESSES:

The Department extends the following assistance to victims and witnesses, as appropriate to the circumstances: information about their rights and about the victim and witness services available to them; referral to victim service and advocacy agencies; information relevant to their safety, including what to do if they are threatened or intimidated; the case number, where known, and information about the subsequent steps in the case; and a point of contact for

reporting additional information and obtaining the status of the case. Assistance during the investigation is governed by Policy 503 (Criminal Investigations). MPAC 55.1.1

6. DEPARTMENT ROLE AND CONFIDENTIALITY:

The Worcester Police Department's role in victim and witness assistance is to identify victims and witnesses, inform them of their rights and of the services available to them, render immediate assistance within the Department's capacity, and refer them to victim service and advocacy agencies for ongoing support. Services provided directly by Department personnel are the information, notifications, referrals, and safety guidance described in this policy, together with the investigative assistance described in Policy 503 (Criminal Investigations); specialized counseling, shelter, and sustained advocacy are provided through outside victim service agencies to which personnel shall refer. Personnel shall safeguard the confidentiality of victim and witness information, including a victim's or witness's identity and their role in the development of a case, and shall release such information only to the extent permitted or required by applicable law. MPAC 55.1.2

7. ASSISTANCE TO THREATENED OR INTIMIDATED VICTIMS AND WITNESSES:

Personnel shall provide appropriate assistance to any victim or witness who has been threatened or who, in the judgment of Department personnel, expresses specific and credible reasons for fearing intimidation or further victimization. Such assistance may include safety planning, directed patrols or other protective measures, assistance in obtaining a protective order, and referral to the District Attorney's Office for additional protective resources. Officers should seek appropriate criminal charges, including intimidation of a witness under M.G.L. c. 268, §13B, where the facts support them. Threats against a victim or witness shall be documented in an incident report and brought to the attention of the officer's supervisor and any assigned investigator. MPAC 55.2.2

8. NEXT-OF-KIN NOTIFICATION:

Next-of-kin notifications shall be made promptly and, where practicable, in person. The Department makes next-of-kin notifications in the following circumstances: the death of a person; the serious illness of a person; the serious injury of a person; and at the request of another law enforcement agency. The detailed procedures for death notification are set out in Policy 535 (Deceased Persons). For a notification requested by another law enforcement agency, personnel shall verify the requesting agency's information, make the notification promptly, and advise the requesting agency when it has been completed. The officer making a notification shall document it in the incident report.

Per:

Paul B. Saucier
Chief of Police

Revisions:

July 6, 2026–

Complete rewrite of the 1994 Notification to Victims of Crimes policy, retitled Victim and Witness Assistance to reflect its expanded scope. Anchors MPAC 55.1.1 (the type of assistance extended to victims and witnesses) and 55.1.2 (the Department's role in providing victim and witness assistance, the services provided by Department personnel, and the confidentiality of victims and witnesses, including their role in case development). The prior policy addressed only victim compensation; this policy extends coverage to witnesses. Victim compensation is administered externally under a separate statute and is not restated in this policy. Investigative victim and witness assistance during the preliminary and follow-up investigation (55.2.2, 55.2.3, 55.2.4) is governed by Policy 503 (Criminal Investigations); next-of-kin notification (55.2.6) is governed by Policy 535 (Deceased Persons); these are cross-referenced rather than duplicated. Reformatted to the Department's ADA-compliant policy template. Updated signing authority.

Original Issue Date: January 4, 1994