



Iowa State University Department of Public Safety

Directive: 1.5

SUBJECT: LINE OF DUTY DEATH

EFFECTIVE DATE: 05/21/2021

REVISED DATE:

REVIEWED DATE:

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POLICY:

The Iowa State University Department of Public Safety (DPS) shall establish a policy to guide the department in the event an officer is killed or critically injured. The department shall provide proper emotional care for a deceased officer's family through carefully planned procedures.

PROCEDURE:

1.5.1 GENERAL PROCEDURES

The following shall govern the procedures for the handling of a line of duty death.

- A. The department has the responsibility to provide liaison assistance to the immediate family of an officer who dies in the line of duty. This responsibility includes providing emotional support for the family during this traumatic period.
- B. A line of duty death includes any action, felonious or accidental, which claims the life of an officer who was performing law enforcement functions while on or off duty. The Chief of Police may activate all or part of this policy for cases in which an officer is critically injured while performing law enforcement functions or suffers death/critical injury when not performing law enforcement functions.
- C. If an officer with the department is killed in the line of duty, officers shall be assigned to stand constant guard with the body until funeral services are concluded. The Chief of Police may request a guard for officers who are critically injured in the line of duty or have died but not in the line of duty.
- D. Timely grief counseling shall be provided to members of the department, including additional counseling services as needed by the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or other services.
- E. The surviving family should hear of the death from a department representative first, not from the press or other sources. A notification team should be assembled as quickly as possible to deliver a line of duty death notification. The following procedures shall be used:
 - 1. The Chief of Police after reviewing the officer notification form shall determine who shall be on the notification team. The Chief of Police and another supervisor, such as the Assistant Chief or designee, should be assigned to the team. The station is the preferred place to gather and prepare for the notification. Timeliness of the notification is of the essence. If the Chief of Police or designee is not immediately available to make this designation, the responsibility shall remain with the ranking supervisor who has been notified of the death.
 - 2. Prior to notification, the notification team will review the information, so they all know the circumstance and the parties involved. The accuracy and completeness of the information will be verified at this time. The notification team shall familiarize themselves with essential details of the death, location of the body, personal effects, and other pertinent information.
 - 3. Determine who will do the sharing of information with the family. The Chief of Police or designee should make the notification to the family.

4. Emergency contact information on file with the department should dictate the first family member to be notified. If no emergency contact information is on file, efforts should be made to locate the closest family member starting with a spouse and followed by adult children, parents, brothers, sisters, and then minor children. Family dynamics such as estrangement and divorce may be considered when locating the closest family member. Only where substantial delays would be required to make contact with the family listed above should the order of notification be altered.
5. The Chief of Police shall decide when doubt exists concerning whom to notify.
6. Time is of the essence when making a notification. Delays in the notification process should not be made unless the information is not sufficient to make a proper notification or an emergency exists. The Chief shall approve any unusual delay in notification of Police.
7. If an officer is critically injured and not expected to survive, every effort will be made to get the family to the hospital before the officer's death. This will include expediting the notification process.

1.5.2 NOTIFICATION

The following shall govern the notification procedures of a line of duty death.

- A. All line of duty death notifications shall be delivered in person to the family.
- B. In the event of a line of duty death, external monitoring of the police radio frequencies will be extensive. Communications regarding notifications should be restricted to the telephone or person to person whenever possible. The name of the deceased officer must never be released to the media before the immediate family living in the region are notified. If the media already has the officer's name, they should respond to a request to withhold this information pending notification of the next of kin.
- C. The notification team shall use the following procedures when making a line of duty death notification:
 1. Go to the residence or place of employment of the family member to be notified. Check the accuracy of the location to ensure you are at the correct address.
 2. Identify yourselves and ask to be admitted to the residence. If this is a place of employment, ask for a room where you can have privacy. Request to speak to the person to whom notification is to be made. If the slightest doubt exists, ensure you have the correct person by verifying the relationship of the survivor to the deceased.
 3. Every reasonable effort shall be made to make the death notification in the privacy of the family's home or another location away from public scrutiny.
 4. Before making the notification, the supervisor should, when possible, bring members of the family together who may be in the house or otherwise on hand. If possible, have family members seated for the notification to avoid any injuries. In calm, direct, adequate but not lurid detail, explain what has happened (e.g., "There was an accident at... and ... was involved. Their injuries were so severe that they were killed). If we say, "They did not survive," the family may not grasp what we are trying to say in the emotion of the moment. Team members should be cognizant not to use police terms or jargon when making the notification. Team members should refer to the deceased using their first name or terms reflecting the deceased's relationship to the survivor (i.e., son, daughter, etc.).
 5. Wait for the information to sink in and then be ready to answer as many questions as possible. Most families will inquire for more details on exactly what happened, where it occurred, if they can go to the scene, where their family member is now, etc.
 6. In many incidents, it will be necessary to say that we are not sure exactly how the incident occurred, that a full investigation is ongoing, and that we will let them know as soon as possible.
 7. Tell them, "... is at the Medical Examiner's office in Ankeny," not "The body is at the Medical Examiner's office." Let them know that the medical examiner will do a full examination to determine the cause of death and that they may obtain a copy of that report if they wish.

8. Ask if they have a clergy or support person we may contact, if there are family and friends we can call for them, or if there are neighbors they would like us to contact. Our goal is to serve the family and give them support in this very difficult time.
9. Stay with the family until you are confident they are emotionally stable and that they have some support system with them. The Chief of Police may assign an officer to stay with the family based on the situation. Under normal circumstances, no family member should be left alone. Family, friends, co-workers, neighbors, clergy, crisis counselors or other community social service agencies may also relieve the notification team (If a family member leaves the room, keep track of them. In this emotional time, we do not want anyone to harm themselves in their immediate grief.) In gauging the need for assistance, the notification team shall consider the following:
 - a. The emotional reaction and physical condition of the survivor.
 - b. The availability of other adults in the home.
 - c. Responsibility for infants or small children.
 - d. Availability of a support system (e.g., including friends, family, close friends, access to clergy, etc.).
- D. If the incident dictates the need to go to the hospital, the department shall provide transportation. If the family refuses this service and insists on driving themselves, a representative from the notification team should ride with the family. Other members of the notification team should follow the family to the hospital. The notification team shall notify the ranking officer at the hospital that the family is in route (by phone if possible).
- E. Personal effects of the deceased officer shall not be delivered to the family at the time of death notification.
- F. Notification team members should be prepared for unexpected responses from family to include hysteria and possible verbal or physical attack.
- G. Notification team members should remain alert to the possible need for medical assistance. When officers are aware of serious medical conditions in advance of notification, they should place a local medical response unit on alert. This includes, but is not limited to, whether families are elderly, disabled, visually or hearing impaired, or have medical problems. If possible, obtain the names of the survivor's closest relative, friend, family doctor, and clergy.
- H. Similar procedures shall be used to make notifications regarding a critical injury.
- I. When able, the notification team should regroup at the station following notification to debrief and decompress.
- J. A member of the notification team shall make written documentation of the notification.

1.5.3 REQUESTING NOTIFICATION FROM ANOTHER AGENCY

The following shall govern the procedures when requesting notification from another agency in a line of duty death.

- A. Only when it is impossible to make timely notification of a line of duty death to a family shall another agency be requested to assist.
- B. When another agency must be contacted to notify the family of a line of duty death for the department, supervisors should:
 1. Speak to the agency directly and, preferably, to the personnel from the other agency that will make the notification. This will decrease the chance of miscommunications or errors being made in the notification.
 2. Request that the notification be made in person.
 3. Request immediate verification when notification has been accomplished.
 4. Provide as much information as possible based on the incident being mindful of the confidentiality of certain investigations.
 5. Exchange contact information with the agency you are requesting to do the notification, such as the name, address, and phone number.

1.5.4 ASSISTANCE AT THE HOSPITAL

The following shall govern the procedures for assisting at the hospital.

- A. The first ranking officer to arrive at the hospital becomes the hospital liaison officer. This officer is responsible for coordinating the arrival of immediate family, police officials, the press, and others.
- B. The responsibilities of the hospital liaison officer shall include:
 - 1. Arrangements with hospital personnel for appropriate waiting facilities. There should be segregated areas reserved for family.
 - 2. Ensure the waiting room for the family is restricted to family, the Chief of Police, notification team members and others as requested by the family.
 - 3. Arranging for a separate area or room for fellow officers and friends.
 - 4. Designating a press staging area.
 - 5. Ensure that medical personnel communicates pertinent information on the officer's condition to the family first.
 - 6. Arrange transportation for the immediate family and others from the hospital to their residence.
 - 7. When possible, the family should be allowed to see the officer before imminent death. Medical personnel should make the family aware of hospital policy about visiting a trauma patient or viewing the body of the deceased. Medical personnel should also explain why an autopsy is required.
 - 8. A representative from the department should be present with the family the entire time at the hospital to arrange assistance for the family.

1.5.5 FAMILY SUPPORT DURING THE WAKE AND MEMORIAL SERVICE

The following shall govern the procedures for providing family support during a wake or memorial service.

- A. Within twenty-four (24) hours of death, the Chief of Police shall designate a funeral liaison officer, a benefits coordinator, a family support advocate, and a department liaison (usually the appropriate Captain). These designations shall be announced to employees in writing. All referrals will be made according to areas of responsibility. The Chief of Police will personally notify the surviving family of the designated choices.
- B. The department liaison is normally filled by a Captain and shall have the following responsibilities:
 - 1. The department liaison shall direct the funeral activities of the department and visiting law enforcement agencies, according to the wishes of the family.
 - 2. The department liaison will work closely with the memorial service liaison officer to ensure the needs and requests of the family are fulfilled regarding the funeral arrangements.
 - 3. Expedient application of all needed department resources.
 - 4. A comprehensive survey of alternate houses of worship and reception halls with seating capacities able to accommodate attendance of a law enforcement funeral. This information is given to the family as soon as possible to help them decide on a location. The final choice remains with the family.
 - 5. Coordinating all official law enforcement notifications and arrangements for the funeral, including honor guards, pallbearers, traffic control, and liaison with visiting law enforcement agencies.
 - 6. Liaison with the media through the public information officers. Based on the media attention, an officer may be posted at the family's residence for security and to control the media. In the unlikely event that the family decides to accept an interview, with the families' permission, a ranking officer should attend and "SCREEN" all questions presented to the family.

7. Arranging routine residence checks of the family's home for 6-8 weeks following the tragedy. This service is necessary since large amounts of money may pass through the residence, and the family may be spending much time away from home with legal matters. This may require outside liaison with other jurisdictions. Family members shall be made aware of the increased presence around their residence.
- C. The memorial service liaison officer acts as a facilitator between the surviving family and the department during the wake and memorial service. The position requires the officer to have a good knowledge of the family relationships, but not be so emotionally involved with the loss that they would become ineffective. The memorial service liaison officer need not be a ranking officer.
- D. The memorial service liaison officer shall report to the department liaison and shall have the following responsibilities:
1. Being constantly available to the family throughout the wake and memorial service.
 2. Ensure the needs of the family come before the wishes of the department.
 3. Meet with the family and memorial service director regarding arrangements. Since most officers have not prearranged their wishes for the handling of their memorial service, these decisions should remain with the family. The memorial service liaison officer should only make the family aware of what the department may offer in the way of assistance and resources based on information from the department liaison.
 4. Relay all available information to the surviving family concerning the circumstances of death and any continuing investigation. Law enforcement is traditionally hesitant to release this type of information, particularly in sensitive homicide cases. The memorial service liaison officer should coordinate with investigating officers and prosecutors to ensure that the family receives as much allowable information during the first few days as possible. Being "kept in the dark" is a common complaint of surviving families.
 5. Determining the travel arrangements needed for out-of-town family members or other special needs during the memorial service. This information must be forwarded to the department's liaison.
 6. Ensure the family is fully aware of any law enforcement memorial service procedure and obtaining family approval (e.g., twenty-one gun salute, presentation of the flag, playing of taps, etc.)
- E. The Chief of Police will designate a ranking officer to act as a benefits coordinator who will also liaison with the university benefits office. The benefits coordinator is responsible for:
1. Notifying the appropriate hospital personnel that billing for medical services concerning in line of duty death shall be directed to Iowa State University. The family should not receive any of these bills at their residence. The benefits coordinator should contact the hospital during normal business hours to ensure that proper billing takes place. If death is a result of off-duty enforcement action, a determination will be made as to where billing for such services should be forwarded.
 2. Filing worker's compensation claims and related paperwork.
 3. Gathering information and assisting the family in applying for any benefits/funeral payments available to the family, including the Public Safety Officer's Benefits Act provided by the Justice Department.
 4. Fielding all phone calls and inquiries regarding the establishment of any special trust funds or educational funds.
 5. Communicating the distinction between benefits (which are financial payments made to the family to ensure financial stability following the loss of a loved one) and funeral payments (which are funds specifically earmarked for funeral expenses).
 6. Preparing a comprehensive document of the benefits/payments due to the family, listing named beneficiaries, contacts at various benefits offices, and when they can expect to receive the benefit.
 7. At the family's request, filing all benefit related paperwork and following through with the family to ensure that these benefits are being received. Offer information as to a potential need for consultants or attorneys and assist the family in working with benefit providers.

8. Special attention should go to the possible loss of health benefits. The family will be assisted in securing health insurance/benefits working with the Iowa State University Human Resources.
 9. Advising the surviving family of the role of law enforcement associations and organizations such as Heroes, Inc. in making their attorney/financial counselor available to the surviving family for whatever legal/financial counseling is necessary (e.g., establishing trust funds, educational funding, etc.) This attorney should not be affiliated with Iowa State University and should work as an advocate for the family.
 10. Captains may serve as a benefits coordinator in addition to being the department liaison.
- F. The Chief of Police shall designate a family support advocate from the department to act as a long-term liaison with the surviving family. The family support advocate should have extensive experience dealing with crime victims and witnesses. The family support advocate's responsibilities include:
1. Constant contact with the surviving family to keep them abreast of criminal proceedings. The family should never learn of developments in the case from the press before learning them from the department.
 2. Accompanying the surviving family to any criminal proceedings. Introducing them to prosecutors and answering any questions they may have concerning the criminal trial.
 3. Ensuring the family has referral and contact information to all appropriate outside peer groups specific to a line of duty death. The family support advocate shall facilitate any family request to contact or join these support groups.
 4. Ensuring that the surviving family does not feel isolated by the department and is keep abreast of any activities honoring their family member or other department activities after the funeral.
 5. Encouraging others to make visits or help with the needs of the surviving family. Care should be taken that promises are not made to the surviving family that cannot be honored.
 6. The family support advocate shall not have a set time limit for assisting the family. Each case will depend on the surviving family and how they "recover" from this traumatic event. The grief process has no timetable. Families may experience a complicated grief process.
 7. Family members should continue to feel like they are part of the "Law Enforcement Family" for which the officer gave their life. The family support advocate should keep in touch with the family with phone calls through the first year. The needs of the family usually dictate the frequency of contact.
 8. The Chief of Police, family support advocate and others will ensure that the anniversary date of the officer's death is observed including appropriate contact to the family (e.g., visit, phone call, card, etc.) and that adequate support is given to the family during the holidays particularly during the first year.