

## DEATH OR INJURY NOTIFICATION

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| WILLIAMSTOWN<br>POLICE DEPARTMENT<br>POLICY & PROCEDURE NO.<br><br><b>4.05</b> | EFFECTIVE<br>DATE: 02/28/2022 |
|  | REVISION<br>DATE: 02/22/2023  |
|  | REVIEW<br>DATE: 02/22/2024    |

### I. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS AND GUIDELINES

This policy applies to notifications made to non-police department employees of a death, serious injury, or serious illness.

One of the most unpleasant duties for a police officer is making a notification that a loved one has been killed or seriously injured. The presence of a police officer arriving in the middle of the night to make a notification is every parent's nightmare.

Upon hearing such terrible news, people react in many different ways. Often, the persons receiving the news are in disbelief and have trouble comprehending what they are being told. Reactions include denial, anger, hysteria, and silence.

Police officers may provide comfort and help the recipients obtain the support of other friends, family, and clergy. Persons with medical conditions may need the support of family members or paramedics.

Death notifications involving young children or teenagers can be particularly traumatic, not only for the parents, but for the officers as well. Police officers may be haunted for years with the memories of delivering such terrible news. A debriefing with a counselor may be appropriate in some cases and should be sought, if needed.

## **II. POLICY**

It is the policy of this department that the next-of-kin of deceased, seriously injured, or seriously ill persons shall be promptly and considerately notified if circumstances warrant such notification.

## **III. PROCEDURE**

### **A. Preparing for Notification**

#### RECEIVING THE REQUEST

These procedures should be followed whenever possible.

- Positive identification of the victim must be confirmed prior to making a notification.
- If the request is made by an outside agency or person unknown to the department, the legitimacy of the request must be confirmed.
- The employee taking the request should obtain the name of the agency, as well as the name of the person making the request.
- The following information should be recorded:
  - The identity and address or location of the person(s) to be notified;
  - The identity of the deceased, injured or sick person;
  - Any other information or instructions from the requesting agency; and
  - The nature of the notification:
    - Instruction to call a hospital or police department;
    - Death;
    - Injury; or
    - Sickness.

#### OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- Should the media obtain the deceased or injured person's name prematurely, the ranking officer may request that the information be withheld until proper notification of survivors can be made.
- If members of the family are in poor health and may require medical attention, a paramedic should be alerted to stand by in case of an emergency.
- If time permits, a family friend, family member or clergy member may be asked to accompany the notification party.

### **B. Making a Notification**

#### GENERALLY

- The immediate family must be contacted before the name is released to the media.
- Death or serious injury notifications should never be given over the telephone. Notification should be made in person whenever possible.

### LOCATING THE PERSONS TO BE NOTIFIED

- The address of the family should be identified.
- If the family is not immediately available, an attempt should be made to identify where they are located.
- If the family is out of the area, the local police with jurisdiction in the family's area should be contacted and requested to make the notification.
- If the request was made by another police agency and the family is not presently in this department's jurisdiction, the requesting agency should be advised of the family's location, if known, so that arrangements for notification can be made with another department.

### MAKING A NOTIFICATION TO CALL OR GO TO A HOSPITAL

- A request of the immediate family to call or to go to a hospital should be made as soon as possible.
- If the person is deceased, the officer should advise the persons being notified that their loved one was in an accident, or is sick or injured, as appropriate, but offer no more information.
- If the person is still alive, the family should be told the extent of injuries as known.
- The family should be advised as to which hospital their loved one was taken.
- The name of the hospital should be written down and given to the persons being notified, along with the telephone number for the hospital and police station.
- Transportation may be offered with the authorization of a supervisor if the hospital is close by.

### MAKING A DEATH NOTIFICATION

- Notification of a death should be made to the immediate family as soon as possible.
- The actual notification should be made by at least two officers where feasible.
- Notification should never be made on the doorstep. The notifying officers should attempt to gain admission to the home, gather the appropriate persons together, and inform them slowly and clearly of the situation.
- In giving notification, officers should be as straightforward as possible about the condition of the loved one and not make statements or use language that is ambiguous or gives false hope.
- The survivors should be told that the person is dead rather than using euphemistic expressions such as "passed on" or "passed away."
- While notifying officers should attempt to maintain composure in order to better provide assistance to members of the surviving family, they should recognize that a show of emotion on their part is simply a natural expression of anguish and empathy and is not a sign of weakness.
- Notifying officers should be aware of and prepared for a range of possible reactions from surviving family members. Hysteria, shock, physical violence,

anger and rage, silence or stoicism, fainting or screaming are some of the more common reactions.

- Notifying officers should be prepared to give whatever solace and comfort seem appropriate, but should avoid trite phrases or clichés that, although intended to provide comfort, may be counterproductive.
- In many cases, the best reaction of the notifying team is simply to stand by quietly until members of the family have regained some composure and are prepared to ask additional questions.
- Officers should be prepared to:
  - Provide information regarding the circumstances surrounding the person's death, as appropriate.
  - Give instructions to the family as to where the deceased person was taken.
  - Provide contact information for other agencies as appropriate.