

	HARRISONBURG POLICE DEPARTMENT General Orders	Policy Number: 315
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	Section: Line of Duty Deaths	Issue Date: 12/12/2024
	Issued By: Rod Pollard, Interim Chief of Police	Effective Date: 07/02/2021
	Replaces: All General Orders Previously Issued Relative to Subject	
VALEAC Standards: ADM.22.01 (a), ADM.22.01 (b), ADM.22.01 (c), ADM.22.01 (d), ADM.22.01 (d), ADM.22.01 (f), ADM.23.04 (a), ADM.23.04 (b)		

A. POLICY AND PURPOSE

It is the policy of the Harrisonburg Police Department to make appropriate notifications and to provide assistance and support to survivors and coworkers of an employee who dies in the line of duty.

The Chief of Police may also apply some or all of this policy in situations where employees are injured in the line of duty and the injuries are life-threatening.

The department will respect the requests of the survivors when they conflict with these guidelines, as appropriate.

Each officer shall fill out the appropriate documentation, titled Your Personal and Financial Diary, that describes their wishes for notification during these types of incidents. This document will be securely stored in the Personnel File room so that it can be made available only to the Chief of Police or senior commanding officer if necessary. The officer shall review and update, as needed, this form by January 31st each year and is allowed to make updates at any time.

B. ACCOUNTABILITY STATEMENT

All employees are expected to fully comply with the guidelines and timelines set forth in this policy. Responsibility rests with the supervisor to ensure that any violations of policy are investigated and appropriate training, counseling and/or disciplinary action is initiated. This directive is for internal use only and does not enlarge an employee's civil liability in any way. It should not be construed as the creation of a higher standard of safety or care in an evidentiary sense, with respect to third party claims. Violation of this directive, if proven, can only form the basis of a complaint by this department, and then only in a non-judicial administrative setting.

C. DEFINITIONS

Line-of-duty death - The death of a sworn officer during the course of performing law enforcement-related functions while on or off-duty, or a civilian officer during the course of performing their assigned duties.

Survivors - Immediate family members of the deceased employee, which can include spouse, children, parents, other next of kin or significant others. The determination of who should be considered a survivor for purposes of this policy should be made on a case-by-case basis given the individual's relationship with the employee and whether the individual was previously designated by the deceased employee.

Catastrophic injury - Any permanently and totally disabling injury that is a result of an injury received by an officer/civilian in the performance of his/her duties, which permanently prevents the officer from performing any gainful employment.

D. INITIAL ACTIONS BY COMMAND STAFF

- a. Upon learning of a line-of-duty death, the deceased employee's supervisor should provide all reasonably available information to the Patrol Commander and Emergency Communications Center.
 1. Communication of information concerning the employee and the incident should be restricted to secure networks to avoid interception by the media or others (see the Public Information Officer section of this policy).
 2. Should the media obtain the officer's name prematurely, the senior ranking officer or his/her designee should request that the information be withheld until proper notification of survivors can be made.
- b. The Patrol Commander should ensure that notifications are made in accordance with the Officer-Involved Shootings and Deaths and Major Incident Notification policies as applicable.
- c. If the employee has been transported to the hospital, the Patrol Commander or the authorized designee should respond to the hospital to assume temporary responsibilities as the Hospital Liaison.
- d. The Chief of Police or the authorized designee should assign personnel to handle survivor notifications and assign those to the roles of Hospital Liaison (to relieve the temporary Hospital Liaison) and the Department Liaison as soon as practicable (**NOTIFYING SURVIVORS** and Hospital Liaison in this policy).

E. NOTIFYING SURVIVORS

Survivors should be notified as soon as possible in order to avoid the survivors hearing about the incident in other ways.

The Chief of Police or the authorized designee should review the deceased employee's emergency contact information and make accommodations to respect the deceased wishes and instructions specific to notifying survivors. However, notification should not be excessively delayed because of attempts to assemble a notification team in accordance with the deceased wishes.

The Chief of Police, Patrol Commander or the authorized designee should select at least two department personnel to conduct notification of survivors, one of which may be the Department Chaplain.

The designated tracking software will allow for one emergency contact person.

Notifying personnel should:

- a. Make notifications in a direct and compassionate manner, communicating as many facts of the incident as possible, including the current location of the deceased. Information that is not verified should not be provided until an investigation has been completed.
- b. Determine the method of notifying surviving children by consulting with other survivors and taking into account factors such as the child's age, maturity and current location (e.g., small children at home, children in school).
- c. Plan for concerns such as known health concerns of survivors or language barriers.
- d. Offer to transport survivors to the hospital, if appropriate. Survivors should be transported in department vehicles. Notifying personnel shall inform the Hospital Liaison over a secure network that the survivors are on their way to the hospital and should remain at the hospital while the survivors are present.
- e. Actively seek information and follow leads from neighbors, other law enforcement, postal authorities and other sources of information in order to accomplish notification in as timely a fashion as possible when survivors are not at their residences or known places of employment. Notifying personnel shall not disclose the reason for their inquiries when contacting others, other than it is family emergency.
- f. Ask a workplace supervisor for the use of a quiet, private room to meet with the survivor if making notification at a survivor's workplace. Department personnel shall not inform the workplace supervisor of the purpose of their visit other than to indicate that it is a family emergency.
- g. Offer to call other survivors, friends or clergy to support the survivors and to avoid leaving survivors alone after notification.
- h. Assist the survivors with meeting childcare or other immediate needs.
- i. Provide other assistance to survivors and take reasonable measures to accommodate their needs, wishes and desires. Care should be taken not to make promises or commitments to survivors that cannot be met.
- j. Inform the survivors of the name and phone number of the Survivor Support Liaison (see the Survivor Support Liaison section of this policy), if known, and the Department Liaison.
- k. Provide their contact information to the survivors before departing.
- l. Document the survivor's names and contact information, as well as the time and location of notification. This information should be forwarded to the Department Liaison.
- m. Inform the Chief of Police or the authorized designee once survivor notifications have been made so that other Harrisonburg Police Department employees may be apprised that survivor notifications are complete.

a. **OUT OF AREA NOTIFICATIONS**

The Department Liaison should request assistance from law enforcement agencies in appropriate jurisdictions for in-person notification to survivors who are out of the area.

- The Department Liaison should contact the appropriate jurisdiction using a secure network and provide the assisting agency with the name and telephone number of the department representative that the survivors can call for more information following the notification by the assisting agency.
- The Department Liaison may assist in making transportation arrangements for the employee's survivors, but will not obligate the Department to pay travel expenses without the authorization of the Chief of Police.

F. NOTIFYING DEPARTMENT EMPLOYEES

Supervisors or personnel designated by the Chief of Police are responsible for notifying department employees of the line-of-duty death as soon as possible after the survivor notification is made. Notifications and related information should be communicated in person or using secure networks and should not be transmitted over the radio.

Notifications should be made in person and as promptly as possible to all employees on-duty at the time of the incident. Those reporting for subsequent shifts within a short amount of time should be notified in person at the beginning of their shift. Employees reporting for duty from their residence should be instructed to contact their supervisor as soon as practicable. Those employees who are working later shifts or are on days off should be notified by phone as soon as practicable.

Employees having a close bond with the deceased employee should be notified of the incident in person. Supervisors should consider assistance (e.g., peer support group, modifying work schedules, approving sick leave) for employees who are especially affected by the incident. Supervisors should direct employees not to disclose any information outside the Department regarding the deceased or the incident.

G. LIAISONS AND COORDINATORS

The Chief of Police or the authorized designee should select personnel to serve as liaisons and coordinators to handle responsibilities related to a line-of-duty death, including, but not limited to:

- a. Department Liaison
- b. Hospital Liaison
- c. Survivor Support Liaison
- d. Peer Support Coordinator
- e. Funeral Liaison
- f. Mutual aid coordinator
- g. Benefits Liaison
- h. Finance Coordinator

Liaisons and coordinators will be directed by the Department Liaison and should be given sufficient duty time to complete their assignments. Employees may be assigned responsibilities of more than one liaison or coordinator position depending on available department resources. The Department Liaison may assign separate liaisons and coordinators to accommodate multiple family units, if needed.

a. DEPARTMENT LIAISON

The Department Liaison should be a Commander or of sufficient rank to effectively coordinate department resources and should serve as a facilitator between the deceased employee's survivors and the Department. The Department Liaison reports directly to the Chief of Police. The Department Liaison's responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

- a. Directing the other liaisons and coordinators in fulfilling survivors' needs and requests. Consideration should be given to organizing the effort using the National Incident Management System (NIMS).
- b. Establishing contact with survivors and providing them with contact information.
- c. Advising survivors of the other liaison and coordinator positions and their roles and responsibilities.
- d. Identifying locations that will accommodate a law enforcement funeral and presenting the options to the appropriate survivors, who will select the location.
- e. Coordinating all official law enforcement notifications and arrangements.
- f. Making necessary contacts for authorization to display flags at half-mast.
- g. Ensuring that department employees are reminded of appropriate information-sharing restrictions regarding the release of information that could undermine future legal proceedings.
- h. Coordinating security checks of the employees' residence as necessary and reasonable.
- i. Serving as a liaison with visiting law enforcement agencies during memorial and funeral services.

b. HOSPITAL LIAISON

The Hospital Liaison should work with hospital personnel to:

- a. Arrange for appropriate and separate waiting areas for:
 1. The survivors and others whose presence is requested by the survivors.
 2. Department employees and friends of the deceased.
 3. Media personnel.
- b. Ensure, as much as practicable, that any suspects who are in the hospital and their families or friends are not in close proximity to the employee's survivors or Harrisonburg Police Department employees (except for those who may be guarding the suspect).
- c. Ensure that survivors receive timely updates regarding the employee before information is released to others.
- d. Arrange for survivors to have private time with the deceased, if requested.
 1. The Hospital Liaison or hospital personnel may need to explain the condition of the deceased to the survivors to prepare them accordingly.
 2. The Hospital Liaison should accompany the survivors into the room, if requested.
- e. Stay with survivors and ensure that they are provided with other assistance as needed at the hospital.
- f. If applicable, explain to the survivors why an autopsy may be needed.
- g. Ensure hospital bills are directed to the Department, that the survivors are not asked to sign as guarantor of payment for any hospital treatment and that the employee's residence address, insurance information and next of kin are not included on hospital paperwork.

Other responsibilities of the Hospital Liaison include, but are not limited to:

- a. Arranging transportation for the survivors back to their residence.
- b. Working with investigators to gather and preserve the deceased employee's equipment and other items that may be of evidentiary value.
- c. Documenting his/her actions at the conclusion of his/her duties.

c. SURVIVOR SUPPORT LIAISON

The Survivor Support Liaison should work with the Department Liaison to fulfill the immediate needs and requests of the survivors of any employee who has died in the line of duty and serve as the long-term department contact for survivors. The Survivor Support Liaison should be selected by the deceased employee's Commander. The following should be considered when selecting the Survivor Support Liaison:

- a. The liaison should be an individual the survivors know and with whom they are comfortable working.
- b. If the survivors have no preference, the selection may be made from names recommended by the deceased employee's supervisor and/or coworkers. The deceased employee's partner or close friends may not be the best selections for this assignment because the emotional connection to the deceased or survivors may impair their ability to conduct adequate liaison duties.
- c. The liaison must be willing to assume the assignment with an understanding of the emotional and time demands involved.

The responsibilities of the Survivor Support Liaison include, but are not limited to:

- a. Arranging for transportation of survivors to hospitals, places of worship, funeral homes and other locations, as appropriate.
- b. Communicating with the Department Liaison regarding appropriate security measures for the family residence, as needed.
- c. Providing assistance with instituting methods of screening telephone calls made to their residence after the incident if requested by the survivors.
- d. Providing assistance with travel and lodging arrangements for out-of-town survivors.
- e. Returning the deceased employee's personal effects from the Department and the hospital to the survivors. The following should be considered when returning the personal effects:
 1. Items should not be delivered to the survivors until they are ready to receive the items.
 2. Items not retained as evidence should be delivered in a clean, unmarked box.
 3. All clothing not retained as evidence should be cleaned and made presentable (e.g., items should be free of blood or other signs of the incident).
 4. The return of some personal effects may be delayed due to ongoing investigations.
- f. Assisting with the return of department-issued equipment that may be at the deceased employee's residence.
 1. Unless there are safety concerns, the return of the equipment should take place after the funeral at a time and in a manner considerate of the survivors' wishes.

- g. Working with the Peer Support Coordinator to ensure that survivors have access to available counseling services.
- h. Coordinating with the department's Public Information Officer (PIO) to brief the survivors on pending press releases related to the incident and to assist the survivors with media relations in accordance with their wishes (see the Public Information Officer section of this policy).
- i. Briefing survivors on investigative processes related to the line-of-duty death, such as criminal, internal and administrative investigations.
- j. Informing survivors of any related criminal proceedings and accompanying them to such proceedings.
- k. Introducing survivors to prosecutors, victim's assistance personnel and other involved personnel as appropriate.
- l. Maintaining long-term contact with survivors and taking measures to sustain a supportive relationship (e.g., follow-up visits, phone calls, cards on special occasions, special support during holidays).
- m. Inviting survivors to department activities, memorial services or other functions as appropriate.

Survivor Support Liaisons providing services after an incident resulting in multiple employees being killed should coordinate with and support each other through conference calls or meetings as necessary.

The Department recognizes that the duties of a Survivor Support Liaison will often affect regular assignments over many years and is committed to supporting those in the assignment.

If needed, the Survivor Support Liaison should be issued a personal communication device (PCD) owned by the Department to facilitate communications necessary to the assignment.

d. PEER SUPPORT COORDINATOR

The Peer Support coordinator should work with the Chief of Police or the authorized designee, liaisons, coordinators, and other resources to make peer support and counseling services available to employees and survivors who are impacted by a line-of-duty death. The responsibilities of the peer support coordinator include, but are not limited to:

- a. Identifying employees who are likely to be significantly affected by the incident and may have an increased need for peer support and counseling services, including:
 - 1. Employees involved in the incident.
 - 2. Employees who witnessed the incident.
 - 3. Employees who worked closely with the deceased but were not involved in the incident.
- b. Ensuring that employees who were involved in or witnessed the incident are relieved of department responsibilities until they can receive peer support as appropriate and possible.
- c. Ensuring that peer support and counseling resources (e.g., debriefing, grief counselors) are available to employees as soon as reasonably practicable following the line-of-duty death.

- d. Coordinating with the Survivor Support Liaison to ensure survivors are aware of available peer support and counseling services and assisting with arrangements as needed.
- e. Following up with employees and the Survivor Support Liaison in the months following the incident to determine if additional peer support or counseling services are needed.

e. **MUTUAL AID COORDINATOR**

The mutual aid coordinator should work with the Department Liaison and the Funeral Liaison to request and coordinate any assistance from outside law enforcement agencies needed for, but not limited to:

- a. Traffic control during the deceased employee's funeral.
- b. Area coverage so that as many Harrisonburg Police Department employees can attend funeral services as possible.

The mutual aid coordinator should perform his/her duties in accordance with the Outside Agency Assistance Policy.

f. **BENEFITS LIAISON**

The Benefits Liaison should provide survivors with information concerning available benefits and will assist them in applying for benefits. Responsibilities of the Benefits Liaison include, but are not limited to:

- a. Confirming the filing of workers' compensation claims and related paperwork (see the Work-Related Disease, Injury and Death Reporting Policy).
- b. Researching and assisting survivors with application for federal government survivor benefits, such as those offered through the:
 - 1. Public Safety Officers' Educational Assistance (PSOEA) Program.
 - 2. Social Security Administration.
 - 3. Department of Veterans Affairs.
- c. Researching and assisting survivors with application for state and local government survivor benefits.
 - 1. Surviving spouse and children benefit ([VA Code § 51.1-815](#)).
 - 2. Virginia Line of Duty Act ([VA Code § 9.1-400](#) et seq.). Information about the benefits available under this Act should be provided to the survivors within 10 days.
- d. Researching and assisting survivors with application for other survivor benefits such as:
 - 1. Private foundation survivor benefits programs.
 - 2. Survivor scholarship programs.
- e. Researching and informing survivors of support programs sponsored by police associations and other organizations.
- f. Documenting and informing survivors of inquiries and interest regarding public donations to the survivors.
 - 1. If requested, working with the finance coordinator to assist survivors with establishing a process for the receipt of public donations.

- g. Providing survivors with a summary of the nature and amount of benefits applied for, including the name of a contact person at each benefit office. Printed copies of the summary and benefit application documentation should be provided to affected survivors.
- h. Maintaining contact with the survivors and assisting with subsequent benefit questions and processes as needed.

g. FINANCE COORDINATOR

The finance coordinator should work with the Chief of Police and the Department Liaison to manage financial matters related to the line-of-duty death. The finance coordinator's responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

- a. Establishing methods for purchasing and monitoring costs related to the incident.
- b. Providing information on finance-related issues, such as:
 - 1. Paying survivors' travel costs if authorized.
 - 2. Transportation costs for the deceased.
 - 3. Funeral and memorial costs.
 - 4. Related funding or accounting questions and issues.
- c. Working with the Benefits Liaison to establish a process for the receipt of public donations to the deceased employee's survivors.
- d. Providing accounting and cost information as needed.

H. PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER

In the event of a line-of-duty death, the department's PIO should be the department's contact point for the media. As such, the PIO should coordinate with the Department Liaison to:

- a. Collect and maintain the most current incident information and determine what information should be released.
- b. Ensure that department employees are instructed to direct any media inquiries to the PIO.
- c. Prepare necessary press releases.
 - 1. Ensure coordination with other entities having media roles (e.g., outside agencies involved in the investigation or incident).
 - 2. Ensure that important public information is disseminated, such as information on how the public can show support for the department and deceased employees' survivors.
- d. Arrange for community and media briefings by the Chief of Police or the authorized designee as appropriate.
- e. Respond, or coordinate the response, to media inquiries.
- f. Assist the employee's survivors with media inquiries, if requested.
 - 1. Brief the survivors on handling sensitive issues such as the types of questions that reasonably could jeopardize future legal proceedings.
- g. Release information regarding memorial services and funeral arrangements to department employees, other agencies, and the media as appropriate.
- h. Arrange for the recording of memorial and funeral services via photos and/or video, if desired by the survivors,

The identity of deceased employees should be withheld until the employee's survivors have been notified. If the media has obtained identifying information for the deceased employee prior to survivor notification, the PIO should request that the media withhold the information from release until proper notification can be made to survivors. The PIO should ensure that media are notified when survivor notifications have been made.

I. DEPARTMENT CHAPLAIN

The Department chaplain may serve a significant role in line-of-duty deaths. His/her duties may include, but are not limited to:

- a. Assisting with survivor notifications and assisting the survivors with counseling, emotional support or other matters, as appropriate.
- b. Assisting liaisons and coordinators with their assignments, as appropriate.
- c. Assisting department employees with counseling or emotional support, as requested and appropriate.

J. INVESTIGATION OF THE INCIDENT

The Chief of Police shall ensure that line-of-duty deaths are investigated thoroughly and may choose to use the investigation process outlined in the Officer-Involved Shootings and Deaths Policy.

Investigators from other agencies may be assigned to work on any criminal investigation related to line-of-duty deaths. Partners, close friends or personnel who worked closely with the deceased employees should not have any investigative responsibilities because such relationships may impair the objectivity required for an impartial investigation of the incident.

Involved department employees should be kept informed of the progress of the investigations and provide investigators with any information that may be pertinent to the investigations.

K. LINE-OF-DUTY DEATH OF A LAW ENFORCEMENT ANIMAL

The Chief of Police may authorize appropriate memorial and funeral services for law enforcement animals killed in the line of duty.

L. NON-LINE-OF-DUTY DEATH

The Chief of Police may authorize certain support services for the death of an employee not occurring in the line of duty.

M. AVAILABLE RESOURCES

Note: The list is not all inclusive

- Concerns of Police Survivors (COPS) – National program that coordinates National Police Week, assists survivors and departments with completing paperwork, obtaining resources, grief assistance, survivor support network, etc. www.concernsofpolicesurvivors.org
- Public Safety Officers' Benefit (PSOB) – Federal program provides death and education benefits to survivors <https://psob.bja.ojp.gov/>
- Commonwealth of Virginia Line of Duty Act – State program to assist survivors www.valoda.org
- Armed Forces Benefit Association - www.afba.com
- Southern States Police Benevolent Association – www.sspba.org/
- Wilbert Funeral Services, Inc. – Complimentary burial vaults and related services www.wilbert.com
- National Rifle Association – Provides death benefits for members that are LEO's killed in the line of duty (www.nra.org)
- Virginia State Comptroller - www.doa.virginia.gov
- Florian Foundation – Provides wills and other documents free of charge or low-cost www.florianfoundation.net
- Veteran's Administration
- Veterans of Foreign Wars
- Virginia Public Safety Foundation
- Social Security Administration (<https://www.ssa.gov/benefits/survivors/ifyou.html>)
- Life Insurance – City of Harrisonburg- 2 x salary for death, 4 x salary for accidental death
- Retirement Benefits – Survivors eligible to receive payments
- Harrisonburg Police Foundation

N. TRAINING

The Training Officer should ensure that employees are provided training on line-of-duty death benefits within 30 days of employment and every two years thereafter ([VA Code § 9.1-407](#)).

This training will be conducted in post academy classes for new officers and regularly thereafter for all sworn staff.

Each officer shall be provided access and encouraged to review the Concerns of Police Survivors website (www.concernsofpolicesurvivors.org), which provides a detailed listing of both the State of Virginia and Federal benefits available to officers of the Harrisonburg Police Department.