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## **Purpose**

This policy recognizes that the spirit of the Bemidji Police Department is one of helping people and providing assistance at every opportunity. This includes assistance to the department's police family and especially during the time when an active or retired member of the department suffers a serious injury, illness or death.

The purpose of this order is to offer impartial assistance to all members of the department's police family. It must be understood that the services provided to the police family are dependent upon a number of factors. These include such things as the family's personal wishes, the availability of the department's resources and the department's primary role of providing public safety to our community. The Bemidji Chief of Police may approve deviations from this order depending upon those factors.

## **Policy**

It shall be the policy of the Bemidji Police Department to provide liaison assistance to the immediate survivors of any active peace officer that suffers a serious injury, illness or death in the line-of-duty; to the immediate survivors of any active peace officer that suffers serious injury, illness or death not in the line-of-duty; or the death of a retired member of this department. The department will coordinate the funeral services with the surviving family. The family's wishes will take precedence over the departments.

The Bemidji Police Department will provide a comprehensive list of survivor benefits as well as other tangible and intangible emotional support during this traumatic period of readjustment for the surviving family.

## **Scope**

Coordination of events following the death of the peace 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 to the law enforcement community. In order 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  
Police Chaplain

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

## Procedures & Responsibilities

### I. Officer Line of Duty Death Document

- a. Every officer of the Bemidji Police Department is required to complete an Officer Line of Duty Death Policy and Protocol document. (Appendix A123)
- b. The document must be packaged in a proper envelope with the sealed signed by the officer.
- c. The sealed envelope will be retained by the chief of police and will be returned to the officer upon retirement or separation from the Bemidji Police Department.
- d. Officers are encouraged to update their documents periodically, especially when major life changes occur.
- e. Officers may include a copy of their Will or Health Care Directive if desired.
- f. The Officer Line of Duty Death Policy and Protocol document is located in the appendix section of this policy manual.

### II. Notification to Family–

**(Information to properly notify family will come from the Officers line of duty death packets which is retained by the chief of police)**

- a. It shall be the responsibility of the Chief of Police to designate a Notification Officer whose responsibility is to inform the survivors.
- b. The name of the deceased officer **MUST NEVER** be released by the department before the immediate family is notified.
- c. 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.
- d. Notification **MUST ALWAYS** be made in person and in pairs. The Chief of Police or a representative, police chaplain, close friend or another police officer should appropriately accompany the **Notification Officer**. However, notification should not be delayed in order to get all these people together. Particularly if there is an opportunity to get to the hospital prior to the demise of the officer.
- e. The notification will never be made from a door step. Information to family members will be given in plain language, while being very clear and concise, so as not to give the family false hopes ("died" or "dead" rather than "gone away" or "passed away").
- f. The Police Department will provide transportation to the hospital for the family. It is highly recommended that the family not drive in by themselves.
- g. If the officer's family involves young children, the notification officer will need to make babysitting arrangements.
- h. Prior to going to the hospital with the survivors, the notification officer should call the hospital and let them know and how many members are enroute.
- i. The family members to be considered for personal notification includes spouse, significant others, children, parents, and step parents. Or others as requested by the family.
- j. If the immediate survivors live beyond the City of Bemidji, or happen to be out of town for some reason, it may require notification assistance from a local law

enforcement agency. This should be done by phone and/or teletype. Arrangements should be made to permit simultaneous telephone contact between the survivors and the Bemidji Police Department.

- k. It is most reassuring to the family when the Chief or other high ranking official responds to the home or hospital.
- l. In the event of on-duty death, remember that external monitoring of police frequencies is extensive. Communications regarding notifications should be restricted as much as possible, particularly by cell phone and radio. If the media has somehow obtained the name of the officer, advise them to withhold the information, pending notification of next of kin.

### **III. Notification & Assistance for Bemidji Officers**

- a. Officers who were on the scene or who arrived moments after the officer was critically injured or killed should be relieved as quickly as possible.
- b. Police witnesses and other officers who may have been emotionally affected by the serious injury or death of another officer will attend a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) held by a trained mental health professional.
- c. The Bemidji Police Department recognizes that spouses, family members and/or significant others of department members may well be the ones who have to deal with a majority of department members grief and frustrations. With this in mind, the Chief of Police will examine on a case by case issue, a CISD for spouses, family members and/or significant others of department members. The purpose being, to assist spouse, family member and/or significant other, in getting the department member through this extremely difficult period.

### **IV. Assisting the family at the hospital**

- a. The first official, other than the Chief or his representative, to arrive at the hospital becomes the Hospital Liaison. The Hospital Liaison is responsible for coordinating the activities of hospital personnel, the officer's family, police officers, the press and others. These responsibilities include:
  - i. Arranging 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.
  - ii. Arranging a separate area for fellow police officers and friends to assemble.
  - iii. Arranging a press staging area.
  - iv. Arrange for medical personnel to discuss the officer's condition with the family on a timely basis and before it is released to others.
  - v. Notify the hospital personnel that all medical bills relating to the injured or deceased officer will be directed to the City Administrator's Secretary. They would then forward them on to the Workers Compensation Insurance carrier. The family should not receive any of these bills at their residence.
  - vi. Ensure the family is immediately updated regarding the incident and the officer's condition upon their arrival to the hospital.
  - vii. Arrange transportation for the family back to their residence.

- b. If it's possible for the family to visit the injured officer before death, they should be allowed this opportunity. The Hospital Liaison should "prepare" the family for what they might see in the emergency room and should accompany the family into the room for the visit only if the family requests it. Medical personnel would advise to hospital policies regarding visitation and in the event of death, explain why an autopsy is necessary.
- c. The Notification Officer(s) should remain at the hospital while the family is present.
- d. Do not be overly protective of the family. This is the worst thing that could happen to them, nothing you can tell them could make matters worse. Share with them the details surrounding the incident. There is a definite need to touch and hold the body while there is still life and being present when death occurs can be comforting to the family

## V. **Support of the family during the wake and funeral – (AppendixA123.2)**

- a. The Chief of Police or a designee will meet with the officer's family within 24 hours of the death to determine their wishes regarding departmental participation in the preparation of the funeral or services.
- b. With the approval of the family, the Chief will assign a Family Liaison. The Chief will also designate a Department Liaison and a Benefits Coordinator.
- c. The Funeral Protocol form is located in the appendix of this policy manual.

## VI. **Family Liaison Officer**

- a. The selection of the Family Liaison is a critical assignment. This officer should not be so emotionally involved with the loss that he/she would become ineffective. This is not a decision-making position; this is the role of "facilitator" between the family and the Police Department.
- b. Responsibilities of the Family Liaison are:
  - i. To ensure that the needs of the family come before the wishes of the department.
  - ii. Assist the family with funeral arrangements and make them aware of what the department can offer if they decide to have a police funeral. (I.e. 21-gun salutes, taps, honor guard etc.)
  - iii. To keep the family informed of the circumstances surrounding the death and updates on the investigation.
  - iv. Provide family assistance with travel and lodging arrangements for out-of-town family members, food for the funeral attendees following the burial, assistance with child care, transportation of relatives etc.
  - v. Being available 24 hours a day to the family.
  - vi. Determining what public safety, church, fraternal and labor organizations that may provide financial assistance for out-of-town family members.
  - vii. Notification to **Concerns of Police Survivors (C.O.P.S.)** at 1-573-346-4911.
  - viii. Notification to **Law Enforcement Memorial** at 1-202-737-3400
  - ix. Carry the department issued cell phone at all times.

## **VII. Department Liaison Officer**

- a. This position is normally a supervisor because of the need to effectively coordinate information throughout the department.
- b. Department Liaison Officer Responsibilities include:
  - i. Working closely with the Family Liaison to ensure that the family's needs are met.
  - ii. Handle the media throughout the ordeal. If the family decides to accept an interview, the Department Liaison should attend to "screen" questions presented to the family that may jeopardize the subsequent legal proceedings.
  - iii. Meet with the following persons to coordinate the funeral activities and establish an itinerary: Chief of Police, Funeral Director, Family Priest or Minister, Cemetery Director and Honor Guard.
  - iv. Direct and coordinate the funeral activities of the department and visiting police departments according to the wishes of the family
  - v. Issue a teletype message to include the following:
    1. Name of Deceased Officer
    2. Date and Time of death
    3. Circumstances of death
    4. Funeral information – stating specifically if public or private
    5. Uniform that is to be worn by attending officers.
  - vi. Contact person and phone number for those wanting/needing more information
  - vii. Obtaining two American Flags. These flags are to be given to the spouse and parents of the deceased officer. Notify the Chief of the flag presentation wishes.
  - viii. If the family desires a burial in uniform, get these items together and send to the funeral home.
  - ix. Assignments of usher duty at church.
  - x. Arranging for the personal delivery of the officer's belongings to the family.
  - xi. Ensuring that the surviving parents are afforded recognition and proper placement at the funeral and procession.
  - xii. Arranging a stand-by doctor for the family if one is deemed necessary.
  - xiii. Coordinate traffic management for funeral procession - perhaps a tow truck on standby.
  - xiv. Security of officer's home during viewing and funeral.
  - xv. Maintenance of a roster that includes all departments present at the wake or funeral, to send notes of thanks (i.e. get their business card).
  - xvi. Sending the notes of thanks to those who came to the funeral.
  - xvii. Arrange for the routine patrol of the officer's residence for 6-8 weeks following the funeral. This service is necessary since large amounts of money are passing through the residence and much time may be spent away from home while survivors are tending to legal matters.

## **VIII. Benefits Coordinator**

- a. Benefits Coordinator will gather information on ALL benefits/funeral payments available to the family. The Benefits Coordinator has the Bemidji Police 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.
- b. The Benefits Coordinator is responsible for:
  - i. Meeting with the survivor family, a few days after the funeral and going through the booklet titled, "Benefits Available to Surviving Families of Minnesota Law Enforcement Officers Killed in the Line of Duty". It is an information packet, compiled by Concerns of Police Survivors, Inc.
  - ii. Contacting all the benefits offices and filing the appropriate claims. It is critical that this paperwork get done quickly in order to get payments to the survivors as soon as possible.
  - iii. Coordinating with the City of Bemidji personnel department for Worker's Comp Benefits, issuance of check(s) for accrued sick time, holiday time, vacation etc.
  - iv. Setting up any special trust funds or educational funds.
  - v. Meeting with the guardian of any children from a former marriage/relationship. They too should get benefit information that is available to them.
  - vi. Ensuring the continued family health care coverage is being provided as set up by the City of Bemidji.
  - vii. Following up with the family, about once a month after the death, to ensure they are receiving their benefits. And if necessary, assisting them with any appeal process, should one be required/requested. Then a six month follow-up, again to be sure the benefit payments are coming.

## **IX. Continued Support for the Family**

- a. Members of the Bemidji Police Department should be sensitive to the needs of the survivors long after the officer's death. The grief process has no timetable. Experience has shown that even up to five years later the survivors may develop symptoms of post-traumatic stress.
- b. Every effort should be made by the department to make the survivor family feel like they are still members of our department. Department members are encouraged to keep in contact with the family.
- c. The Chief of Police should observe the officer's death date with a short note to the family and/or flowers on the grave.
- d. Monthly phone calls to the family (don't forget the children from a previous relationship). The phone calls can become quarterly. Remember that holidays are especially painful.
- e. The Family Liaison is the long-term liaison with the family and police department. Remembering to invite them to staff parties and/or picnics etc.

- f. When co-workers stop or call and visit, don't be afraid to say the officer's name. The tears that follow are not tears of bad memories, but tears of appreciation for your concern.
- g. Memory books to the family, whether it is spouse, children or parents of the officer, are a perfect way for the department to help them remember the officer who died.
- h. It is the responsibility of the Family Liaison to keep in contact with the family about any and all court proceedings, parole hearings included. This information is to be given to the family prior to the media getting it.
- i. At their earliest opportunity after the trial, the investigators of the case should offer to meet with family to discuss the circumstances of the entire ordeal.
- j. Provide victim assistance people to the family, particularly throughout the court trial. The family should be encouraged to attend the trial. If physical evidence is going to be brought to the trial, warn the family of what they will be seeing.
- k. To show continued support to the family, the Bemidji Police Department will make every attempt to have a department member at all or most of the court proceedings. This support can come from management, the labor organization and co-workers from other departments.

**Reference or Revision Date(s):**

A. Hennepin County Chiefs of Police – Model Policy

B. REVISION DATE(S):