

I. **PURPOSE**

To provide guidance in the event of a line of duty death of an employee of the Fairfax County Sheriff's Office.

II. **POLICY**

It is the policy of the Fairfax County Sheriff's Office that agency resources shall be made available and utilized in order to provide assistance to family members in incidents involving a line of duty death of an employee.

III. **DEFINITIONS**

**Line of Duty Death** - Any action, felonious or accidental, which claims the life of a Deputy Sheriff who was performing law enforcement functions either on or off duty. The Sheriff may utilize all or parts of this directive in the case of natural death of a deputy or the death of a civilian member of this agency.

**Survivors** - Include the immediate family members of the deceased; spouse, children, parents, siblings and significant others.

IV. **PROCEDURE**

A. Death Notification

1. The ranking supervisor on the scene of the death is responsible for the notification to the Sheriff. The Sheriff or her designee shall determine which deputies will comprise the notification team for the surviving family.
2. Timeliness takes precedence over protocol in the death notification process. Upon confirmation of death, a death notification must be made to the immediate survivors shortly after command notifications. The initial notification to family members or significant others shall be provided by Sheriff's Office representatives and not from the press or other sources.
3. Notification must always be made in person and never alone. If available and if time allows, a staff psychologist should accompany the notification team.
4. Death notifications must never be made on the doorstep. The notification team should seek admittance to the house prior to informing the surviving family.
5. If the family wants to go to the hospital, they should be transported in an agency vehicle. It is highly recommended that family members do not drive themselves to the hospital. Should there be serious resistance and the family insists on driving, a deputy shall accompany them in the family car.
6. The notification team must notify the ranking deputy at the hospital that the family is en route (by phone if possible).
7. Deputies are to be mindful that in the event of a line of duty death, the external monitoring of radio frequencies may be extensive, particularly by the news media. Communications regarding notifications should be restricted to the telephone whenever possible. The name of the deceased shall not be released to the media until all known immediate survivors living in the region are notified. If the media is in possession of the decedent's name, an official request will be made to withhold this information, pending notification of the next of kin.

**FAIRFAX COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE  
STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE**

**SOP NUMBER: 029  
SUBJECT: LINE OF DUTY DEATH**

8. Any notification of immediate survivors beyond the Washington, DC area shall be made through personal death notification by the local law enforcement agency in that area. The notification team shall obtain the names of those to be contacted from the immediate survivors previously notified of the death. This information shall be passed on to the Department of Public Safety Communications (DPSC). DPSC will then send a teletype message to the appropriate jurisdiction and request a personal death notification be made. The notification team will stay in contact with the other jurisdiction coordinating notification activities and ensure all appropriate notifications are made.

**B. Hospital Liaison**

1. The first ranking deputy to arrive at the hospital becomes the Hospital Liaison. This deputy is responsible for coordinating the arrival of immediate survivors, agency officials, the press, and others. Duties include:
  - a. Arranging for segregated waiting areas for the immediate survivors, fellow deputy sheriffs, and the press.
  - b. Ensuring that medical personnel provide pertinent information on the deputy's condition to the family first.
  - c. Notifying appropriate hospital personnel that all billing for medical services shall be directed to Fairfax County, Risk Management. The family should not receive any of these bills at their resident address.
  - d. Arranging transportation for the immediate survivors and others from the hospital back to their residence.
  - e. The Hospital Liaison or his/her designee shall remain with the family at the hospital and provide assistance to the family as needed.

**C. Additional Support**

1. Within 24 hours of the death, the Sheriff shall designate a Funeral Liaison, a Benefits Coordinator, a Family Support Advocate and an Agency Liaison (usually the applicable Division Commander). These selections will be based on specific training they may have received through the Concerns of Police Survivors, Inc. (C.O.P.S.). These designations will be announced to the agency in a memorandum and all referrals shall be made in accordance with the designated areas of responsibility.
2. The Sheriff will personally notify the surviving family of the designated Coordinators and Liaisons.
3. Within 24 hours of the death, the Sheriff or her designee shall make appropriate referrals to the Peer Support Coordinator for initial contact to be made with employees close to the incident. Additional referrals to the Peer Support Program and/or the Employee Assistance Program shall also be made available for members of the surviving family.

**D. Agency Liaison**

1. This position shall be filled by a Division Commander because of the need to delegate tasks, and make expedient use of agency resources.
2. The Agency Liaison shall work closely with the Funeral Liaison in order to ensure the needs and requests of the family are fulfilled regarding funeral arrangements.

3. The Agency Liaison coordinates the funeral activities for the Sheriff's Office and participating agencies, according to the wishes of the family. The Agency Liaison is also responsible for:
  - a. Oversight of arrangements for travel and lodging for out of town family members.
  - b. A comprehensive survey of alternate places of worship and reception halls with seating capacities large enough 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 choice remains with the family.
  - c. Coordinating all law enforcement notifications and arrangements for a law enforcement funeral, including honor guards, pallbearers, traffic control, and liaison with visiting law enforcement agencies.
  - d. Serving as the liaison with media relations. In the unlikely event that the family decides to accept an interview, the liaison or his/her designee shall attend any scheduled interviews and attempt to prescreen all questions presented to the family. This shall be done so as not to jeopardize any upcoming legal proceedings or investigations. Specific recommendations on what information may be released shall be provided for the family prior to any scheduled interviews being conducted.

**E. Funeral Liaison**

1. The Funeral Liaison works closely with, and reports to, the Agency Liaison.
2. The Funeral Liaison need not be a ranking deputy but the assignment is critical.
3. The Funeral Liaison is not a decision-making position. He/she acts as a facilitator between the decedent's family and the agency during the wake and/or the funeral. The position requires a good understanding of the decedent's family makeup. The Funeral Liaison is responsible for:
  - a. Meeting with the family and explaining the responsibilities of the Funeral Liaison.
  - b. Being readily available to the family throughout the wake and funeral.
  - c. Ensuring that the needs of the family come before the wishes of the agency.
  - d. Meeting with the family and funeral director regarding funeral arrangements. Since most deputies have not prearranged their wishes for the handling of their own funeral, the family will most likely need to decide all aspects of the funeral. These decisions shall remain with the family. The Funeral Liaison shall only make the family aware of what the agency may offer in the way of assistance and resources, per the Agency Liaison.
  - e. Relaying all available information to the surviving family concerning the circumstances of death and any continuing investigation. The Funeral Liaison should coordinate with investigating Law Enforcement Agencies and prosecutors to ensure the family receives as much information as is allowable during the investigation.
  - f. Determining the need for travel arrangements for out of town family

members or any other special needs during the funeral, and reporting this information to the Agency Liaison.

- g. Briefing the family on law enforcement funeral procedure (i.e. twenty-one-gun salute, presentation of flag, playing of taps, etc.)

**F. Benefits Coordinator**

- 1. The Sheriff designates a ranking deputy to act as Benefits Coordinator. Division Commanders may serve as Benefits Coordinator in addition to the Agency Liaison. The Benefits Coordinator is responsible for:
  - a. Filing the workers' compensation claim and related paperwork.
  - b. Gathering and providing documentation on all information concerning benefits/funeral assistance available to the family, including but not limited to the Public Safety Officers Benefits Act provided by the Justice Department, and the Virginia Line of Duty Act.
  - c. Contacting the Fairfax County Office of Personnel to coordinate County/State benefit processing.
  - d. Fielding all phone calls and inquiries regarding the establishment of any special trust or educational funds.
  - e. Making a clear 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).
  - f. Filing all benefit related paperwork and following through with the family to ensure that these benefits are being received. Private consultants/attorneys should not be recommended for this purpose if they intend to bill the family for services.
  - g. Visiting with designated beneficiaries within a few days following the funeral to discuss benefits. Documentation of benefits shall be made available to the family at that time, if not previously provided.
    - 1) If there are minor-age designated beneficiaries, the guardian of those children or child shall also receive benefit documentation.
    - 2) Coverage of health care benefits terminates at the end of the month in which the employee was compensated for hours worked, or paid leave.
  - h. Assisting the family with accessing legal/financial counseling offered by law enforcement associations such as C.O.P.S. and Heroes, Inc. (i.e. establishing trust funds, educational funding, etc.).

**G. Family Support Advocate**

- 1. The Family Support Advocate acts as a long-term liaison with the surviving family. Members of the notification team or the Funeral Liaison may also serve as the Family Support Advocate. This deputy shall not be a principle witness in the associated criminal trial (if applicable). The deputy's responsibilities include:
  - a. Maintain contact with the surviving family to keep them abreast of criminal

**FAIRFAX COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE  
STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE**

**SOP NUMBER: 029  
SUBJECT: LINE OF DUTY DEATH**

proceedings. The family should not learn of developments in the case from the press prior to learning them from the Sheriff's Office.

- b. Accompany the surviving family to any criminal proceedings. Introduce the family to prosecutors, and answer any questions they may have concerning the criminal trial.
  - c. Liaison with outside peer support groups.
  - d. Ensuring that the surviving family does not feel isolated from the agency.
  - e. Encouraging other employees to make visits or help with the needs of the surviving family.
2. The Family Support Advocate shall not set time limitations on when the family should recover from this traumatic event. The grief process has no timetable. Survivors may experience a complicated grief process.
  3. The Sheriff, Family Support Advocate, and others shall ensure that the anniversary date of the deputy's death is observed with a note to the family and/or flowers sent to the grave; and that appropriate support is given to the family during holidays, particularly during the first year.
  4. The Sheriff or her designee shall work with community groups and government leaders toward the establishment of any appropriate memorial, or other form of public recognition in honor of the decedent. The surviving family shall be consulted before the establishment of any public honor.
  5. The surviving family shall continue to receive support and invitations from the Sheriff to appropriate agency social activities.

1/01/00  
DATE APPROVED

5/21/99  
EFFECTIVE DATE



**STACEY A. KINCAID  
SHERIFF**

**Revised: March 2005, September 2014, December 2014, February 2018**