POLICY & PROCEDURE

STURGEON BAY POLICE DEPARTMENT

SUBJECT: **LINE OF DUTY DEATH**

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SCOPE: All Department Personnel
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REFERENCE: WI State Statute: 66.0137
"Support Services to Surviving Families of Line of Duty Deaths," by Suzanne F. Sawyer

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PURPOSE: This Policy & Procedure establishes procedures for members of the Sturgeon Bay Police Department to ensure the proper support and emotional care for a member's family following a line-of-duty death.

This Policy & Procedure consists of the following numbered sections:

I. POLICY

II. DISCUSSION

III. PROCEDURES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

I. POLICY

A. It is the policy of the Sturgeon Bay Police Department to provide liaison assistance to the immediate survivors of a member who dies in the line of duty.

This assistance is provided whether the death was unlawful or accidental (i.e., automobile accident, hit by a passing vehicle during a traffic stop, training accident) while the member was performing a police-related function, either on or off-duty and while he or she was an active member of the Department.

The Chief of Police may institute certain parts of this Policy & Procedure for cases of a member's natural death. The Department will also provide a clarification and comprehensive study of survivor benefits as well as emotional support during this traumatic period of readjustment for the surviving family. Funeral arrangements of the deceased member are to be decided by the family, with their wishes taking precedence over the Department's.

II. DISCUSSION

A. Coordination of events following the line-of-duty death of a police officer is an extremely important and complex responsibility. Professionalism and compassion must be exhibited at all times as an obligation to the member's survivors and to the law enforcement community. In order to provide the best possible services and support for the member'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

An explanation of each of these responsibilities is contained in this Policy & Procedure. A member may be called upon to perform more than one role.

Members are encouraged to maintain an up-to-date "Confidential Line-of-Duty Death Information" form with the Chief. The information will be of extreme comfort to members' families and the Department in fulfilling the deceased officer's wishes.

III. PROCEDURES & RESPONSIBILITIES

A. NOTIFICATION

1. It is the responsibility of the Shift Supervisor to properly notify the next of kin of a member who has suffered severe injuries or died. The Shift Supervisor may personally make the notification or designate a NOTIFICATION OFFICER to inform the survivors.

2. The name of the deceased member <u>will not</u> be released by the Department before the immediate family is notified.

3. If there is knowledge of a medical problem with an immediate survivor, medical personnel should be available at the residence at the time of notification.

4. Notification will be made in person and never alone.

   The Chief of Police or his or her designee, close friend, or another police survivor could appropriately accompany the NOTIFICATION OFFICER.

   However, if the aforementioned persons are not readily accessible, notification should not be delayed until these people can gather. If there is an opportunity to get to the hospital prior to the demise of the member, do not wait for the delegation to gather.

5. The family should learn of the death from the Department first and not from the press or other sources.

6. Never make a death notification on the doorstep. Ask to be admitted to the house. Inform family members slowly and clearly of the information that you have. If specifics of the incident are known, the NOTIFICATION OFFICER should relay as much information as possible to the family. Be sure to use the member's name during the notification. If the member has died, relay that information. Never give the family a false sense of hope. Use words such as "died" and "dead" rather than "gone away" or "passed away."

7. If the family requests to visit the hospital, they should be transported by police vehicle. It is highly recommended that the family not drive themselves to the hospital. If the family insists on driving, a member should accompany them in the family car.

8. If young children are at home, the NOTIFICATION OFFICER must arrange for babysitting needs. This may involve coworkers' spouses, transportation of children to a relative's home, or similar arrangements.

9. Prior to departing for the hospital, the NOTIFICATION OFFICER should notify the hospital staff and the HOSPITAL LIAISON (by telephone if possible) that a member(s) of the family is en route.

10. The deceased or severely injured member's parents should also be afforded the courtesy of a personal notification whenever possible.

11. If immediate survivors live beyond the Sturgeon Bay area, the NOTIFICATION OFFICER will ensure that the Communications Division will fax the request for notification of death or serious injury of a police officer form to the appropriate jurisdiction, requesting a personal notification. The NOTIFICATION OFFICER may choose to call the other jurisdiction by telephone in addition to faxing the form. Arrangements should be made to permit simultaneous telephone contact between the survivors and the Department.

12. The Chief or a high-ranking representative should respond to the residence or the hospital to meet with the family as quickly as possible.

13. In the event of an on-duty death, the external monitoring of police frequencies may be extensive.

    Whenever possible, communications regarding notifications should be restricted to the telephone. If the media has obtained the member's name, they will be advised to withhold the information, pending notification of next of kin.

B. ASSISTANCE FOR AFFECTED MEMBERS

1. Members who were on the scene or who arrived moments after a member was critically injured or killed should be relieved as quickly as possible.

2. Police witnesses and other members who may have been emotionally affected by the serious injury or death of another member will attend a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing arranged by the Department.

C. ASSISTING THE FAMILY AT THE HOSPTIAL

1. The first official, other than the Chief or his/her representative, to arrive at the hospital becomes the HOSPITAL LIAISON. The HOSPITAL LIAISON is responsible for coordinating the activities of hospital personnel, the member's family, police officers, the press and other. These responsibilities include:

   a) Arranging with hospital personnel to provide an appropriate waiting facility for the family, the Chief of Police, the NOTIFICATION OFFICER, and others requested by the immediate survivors.

   b) Arranging a separate area for fellow law enforcement officers to assemble.

   c) Establishing a press staging area; also refer to Policy & Procedure 8.01: Public Information.

   d) Ensuring that medical personnel relay pertinent information regarding a member's condition to the family on a timely basis and before such information is released to others.

   e) Notifying the appropriate hospital personnel that all medical bills relating to the injured or deceased member are directed to the Sturgeon Bay Police Department. The family should not receive any of these bills at their residence. This may require the HOSPITAL LIAISON to re-contact the hospital during normal business hours to ensure that proper billing takes place.

f) Ensuring that the family is updated regarding the incident and the member's condition upon their arrival at the hospital.

g) Arranging transportation for the family back to their residence.

h) If the member is transported to a hospital outside the jurisdiction of the Department, the local law enforcement agency shall be notified by the Department or the Door County Communications Center and requested to respond to the hospital to provide additional security or any other assistance needed.

2. If it is possible for the family to visit the injured member before death, they should be afforded that opportunity.

A police official should "prepare" the family for what they might see in the emergency room and should accompany the family into the room for the visit if the family requests it. Medical personnel should advise the family of visitation policies and, in the event of death, explain why an autopsy is necessary.

3. The NOTIFICATION OFFICER(S) should remain at the hospital while the family is present.

4. Do not be overly protective of the family. This includes sharing specific information as to how the member met his or her demise, as well as allowing the family time with the deceased member.

D. HONOR GUARD

1. The Sturgeon Bay Police Department Honor Guard should be contacted for members to stay with the deceased member from the time of his or her death until the burial, unless the family requests otherwise.

2. In lieu of Honor Guard members, other Department members may volunteer for this assignment. Officers should be in Department uniform for this assignment.

E. SUPPORT OF THE FAMILY DURING THE WAKE AND FUNERAL

1. The Chief of Police, or designee, will meet with the member's family at their home to determine their wishes regarding Departmental participation in the preparation of the funeral or services. All possible assistance will be rendered.

2. With the approval of the family, the Chief will assign a FAMILY LIAISON OFFICER. The Chief will also designate a DEPARTMENT LIAISON OFFICER and a BENEFITS COORDINATOR.

F. FAMILY LIAISON OFFICER

1. The selection of a FAMILY LIAISON OFFICER is a critical assignment. An attempt should be made to assign someone who enjoyed a close relationship with the member and his or her family. When possible, male/female "teams" should be utilized as FAMILY LIAISON OFFICERS, thus preventing bonding between the survivor(s) and member during a vulnerable time in the survivor's life.

2. This is not a decision-making position, but a "facilitator" between the family and the Department.

3. Responsibilities of the FAMILY LIAISON include:

a) Ensuring that the needs of the family come before the wishes of the Department.

b) Assisting the family with funeral arrangements and making them aware of what the Department can offer if they decide to have a police funeral. If they choose the latter, briefing the family on funeral procedure (i.e. presenting the flag, playing of taps, firing party).

c) Apprising the family of information concerning the death and the continuing investigation.

d) Providing as much assistance as possible, including overseeing travel and lodging arrangements for out-of-town family members, arranging for food for the family, meeting child care and transportation needs, etc.

e) Being constantly available to the family.

f) Determining what public safety, church, fraternal and labor organizations will provide in terms of financial assistance for out-of-town family travel, food for funeral attendees following the burial, etc.

g) Notifying Concerns of Police Survivors (C.O.P.S.) 573-346-4911 or www.nationalcops.org Members are available to provide emotional support to surviving families.

h) Carrying a cell phone at all times.

G. DEPARTMENT LIAISON OFFICER

1. This position is normally assigned to a Department supervisor because of the need to effectively coordinate resources throughout the Department.

2. Responsibilities of the DEPARTMENT LIAISON OFFICER include:

a) Working closely with the FAMILY LIAISON OFFICER to ensure that the needs of the family are fulfilled.

b) Handling the news media throughout the ordeal. If the family decides to accept an interview, a member should attend to “screen” questions presented to the family so as not to jeopardize subsequent legal proceedings.

c) Meeting with the following persons to coordinate funeral activities and establish an itinerary:

1) Chief of Police
2) Funeral Director
3) Family priest or minister
4) Cemetery Director
5) Police Honor Guard

d) Directing the funeral activities of the Department and visiting police departments according to the wishes of the family.

e) Issuing a teletype message to include the following:

1) Name of deceased
2) Date and time of death
3) Circumstances surrounding the death

4) Funeral arrangements (state if service will be private or a police funeral)
5) Uniform to be worn
6) Expressions of sympathy in lieu of flowers
7) Contact person and phone number for visiting departments to call to indicate their desire to attend or to obtain further information

f) Establishing a command center, if necessary, to coordinate information and response to the tragedy.

g) Developing a policy for the wearing of badge memorial ribbons and use of patrol vehicle memorial sashes.

i) Obtaining an American flag. If the family wishes a flag presentation by the Chief, notify the Chief’s Office.

j) Determining if the family desires a burial in uniform and selecting a member to obtain a uniform and all accouterments (except weapons) and deliver them to the funeral home.

k) Assigning members for usher duty at the church.

l) Arranging for the delivery of the member's personal belongings to the family.

m) Briefing the Chief and staff concerning all funeral arrangements.

n) Ensuring that the surviving parents are afforded recognition and that proper placement is arranged for them during the funeral and procession.

o) Arranging for a stand-by doctor for the family, if necessary.

p) Coordinating traffic management, with other jurisdictions during the viewing, funeral and procession, and arranging for a tow truck to be available along the procession route.

q) Assigning a member to remain at the family home during the viewing and funeral.

r) Maintaining a roster of all Departments sending personnel to the funeral, including:

1) Name and address of responding agencies
2) Name of the Chief of Police
3) Number of officers attending
4) Number of officers attending the reception after the funeral
5) Number of vehicles

s) Assisting in making the necessary accommodations for food, lodging.

t) Acknowledging visiting and assisting Departments.

u) Arranging for routine residence checks of the survivor's home by the Patrol Division for 6-8 weeks following the funeral. This service is necessary since large amounts of money are passing through the residence and the survivors will be spending time away from the home dealing with legal matters.

v) Document all emails, letters and news articles received and any other related information concerning the death of the officer.

H. BENEFITS COORDINATOR

1.The BENEFITS COORDINATOR will gather information on benefits/funeral payments available to the family.

The BENEFITS COORDINATOR has the 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.

2. The BENEFITS COORDINATOR is responsible for:

a) Filing Worker's Compensation claims and related paperwork.

b) Contacting the appropriate offices without delay to ensure that the beneficiary receives death and retirement benefits, the member's remaining paychecks and payment for remaining annual and compensatory time.

c) Gathering information on all benefit/funeral payments, to include the Public Safety Officers Benefits Act that is available to the family.

d) Setting up any special trust funds or educational funds.

e) Notifying police organizations such as the State of Wisconsin LEEDER Team of the death and ensuring that any and all entitlements are paid to the beneficiary. These agencies may also offer legal and financial counseling to the family at no cost.

f) Preparing a printout of the various benefits/funeral payments that are due to the family, listing named beneficiaries and contacts at various benefits offices, and when they can expect to receive payment.

g) Meeting with the surviving family a few days after the funeral to discuss the benefits they will receive. A copy of the prepared printout and any other related paperwork should be given to the family at this time.

1) If there are surviving children from a former marriage, the guardian of those children should also receive a printout of what benefits the child(ren) may be receiving.

2) WI State Statute: 66.0137 provides, that if a city, village, or town, etc. pays health insurance premiums for its law enforcement officers, that entity must continue to pay the premiums for the surviving spouse and dependent children of an officer who dies in the line of duty (also refer to law enforcement officer definition that is covered in the statute). Premium payments on behalf of a surviving spouse terminate when a spouse remarries or reaches age 65. Premium payments on behalf of dependent children terminate when the child reaches age 26.

h) Meeting again with the family in about six months to ensure they are receiving benefits.

I. CONTINUED SUPPORT FOR THE FAMILY

1. Members of the Department must remain sensitive to the needs of the survivors long after the member's death. The grief process has no timetable. More than half of the surviving spouses can be expected to develop a Posttraumatic stress reaction to the tragedy.

2. Survivors should continue to feel a part of the "police family." They should be invited to Department activities to ensure continued contact.

3. Members of the Department are encouraged to keep in touch with the family. Close friends, co-workers and officials should arrange with the family to visit the home from time to time so long as the family expresses a desire to have these contacts continue.

4. The Chief of Police should observe the member's death date with a short note to the family, flowers on the grave and/or wreath placement at the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial.

5. Holidays may be especially difficult for the family, particularly if small children are involved. Increased contact with the survivors and additional support is important at these times.

6. The FAMILY LIAISON acts as a long-term liaison with the surviving family to ensure that close contact is maintained between the Department and the survivors and that their needs are met for as long as they feel the need for support.

7. If no court proceedings surround the circumstances of the member's death, the FAMILY LIAISON will relay all details of the incident to the family at the earliest opportunity.

8. If criminal violations surround the death, the FAMILY LIAISON will:

a) Inform the family of all new developments prior to press release.

b) Keep the family apprised of legal proceedings.

c) Introduce the family to the victims' assistance specialists of the court.

d) Encourage the family to attend the trial, and accompany them whenever possible.

e) Arrange for investigators to meet with the family at the earliest opportunity following the trial to answer all their questions.

J. FEDERAL DEATH BENEFITS

1. If an employee is a police officer and his/her death is the direct result of a traumatic injury sustained in the line of duty, the officer's eligible survivors may be able to collect a monetary benefit as stipulated in the Public Safety Officers Benefit Act. Inquiries or claims may be directed to the Bureau of Justice Assistance, Public Safety Officers Benefits Staff, 633 Indiana Avenue NW Room 1088, Washington, DC, or go to www.psob.gov for information.

K. WISCONSIN LAW ENFORCEMENT DEATH RESPONSE TEAM

1.The Wisconsin Law Enforcement Death Response Team (LEDR) is available to assist our department with any aspect of the Line of Duty Death. There is no cost for their assistance and all of their members volunteer their time and expertise. For more information go to www.wichiefs.org and click on the WI LEDR tab on the left side of the home page, call (608) 266-7633, or contact your local State Patrol Regional Post.

L. CONCERNS OF POLICE SURVIVORS (C.O.P.S.)

1. The C.O.P.S. mission is to rebuild shattered lives of survivors and co-workers affected by line-of-duty deaths through partnerships with law enforcement and the community. For more information go to www.nationalcops.org or call (573) 346-4911.

Clinton Henry
Chief of Police

This Policy & Procedure cancels and supersedes any and all written directives relative to the subject matter contained herein.

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