



<b>DEATH OR SERIOUS INJURY OF OFFICE PERSONNEL</b>						
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**I. PURPOSE**

The purpose of this General Order is to establish guidelines for compassionate and effective assistance to be rendered to the family and dependents of any employee killed or seriously injured while engaged in the performance of duty.

**II. POLICY**

It is the policy of the Tompkins County Sheriff's Office to provide assistance to the family of any Sheriff's Office employee who dies or is seriously injured in the line of duty. This assistance is provided whether the employee was killed, feloniously or accidentally, while an active member of the Sheriff's Office. We view our responsibilities to include the clarification and comprehensive study of survivor benefits, to provide tangible and intangible emotional support during this traumatic period, and continuation of contact and care after the funeral, until so indicated by the survivors.

In order to provide support for shift personnel and/or personnel involved in the same incident or with the same duties, the Sheriff's Office will require those members to participate in a debriefing at the end of the tour of duty and will make continuing support available.

**III. EMERGENCY NOTIFICATION FORM**

- A. Each member of the office may complete an optional [Employee Emergency Notification Form](#) to be kept on file in case the member is seriously injured, killed, in the line-of-duty.
  - 1. Members should designate the individual(s) to be notified (i.e. wife, husband, significant other, parent(s), children, former spouse, etc.)
  - 2. Members should designate at least one (1) member of the office to assist the Sheriff, or designee, in making such notification. If no designation is made, or the individual(s) is unavailable, death notifications will be made in person by the Sheriff or designee and another member of the office.
  - 3. Members may elect to have a civilian present during the notification (i.e., clergy, friends, other family members, etc.)

- B. Copies of completed Emergency Notification Forms will be maintained by the Undersheriff.
- C. Each member is responsible for ensuring the Emergency Notification Form is kept up to date with current names, addresses, and other pertinent information. The Sheriff may designate personnel to administer the notification process.

#### IV. PROCEDURES & RESPONSIBILITIES

##### A. Personal Notification of a Family in a Timely Manner

1. When a member of the office is killed or seriously injured as set forth in this Order, an on-duty supervisor shall immediately cause the Sheriff and Undersheriff to be notified.
2. The on-duty supervisor or Undersheriff will retrieve the Emergency Notification Form of the affected personnel. The necessary arrangements will be made to have the persons list on the form respond to the Sheriff's Office to be briefed on the incident prior to making the notification. If the persons list on the Emergency Notification Form are not readily accessible, notification should not be delayed until these people can assemble. If the member has not yet died, all attempts will be made to get the family to the hospital. Transporting the family to the hospital will be the first priority.
3. The name of the deceased or seriously injured personnel will not be released to the media before immediate survivors have been notified. The name of the involved personnel shall never be transmitted over the radio system

##### B. Once the necessary personnel have been assembled and briefed, the following procedures will be followed:

1. When most public safety families see a Sheriff's Office representative at the home or place of work, they will know something is wrong. Never make a death notification or serious injury notification on the doorstep. Ask to be admitted to the home or place of work. Inform family members slowly and clearly of the information that you have. Be sure to use the member's first name during the notification. If there is knowledge of a medical problem with an immediate survivor, medical personnel will be dispatched to the residence to coincide with the notification.
2. If the member has died, relay that information. Never give the family a false sense of hope. Use words such as "died" rather than "gone away" or "passed away."
3. If the family requests to visit the hospital, they should be transported in an unmarked 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.
4. If young children are at home, the personnel should arrange for babysitting needs.
5. Prior to departing for the hospital, the personnel should notify the hospital staff by telephone that a member(s) of the family is en-route.
6. Surviving parents will also be afforded the courtesy of personal notification if they live in

the same geographic area. If the employee is married, notification will be at the request of the deceased employee's spouse.

7. If immediate survivors live out of the geographic area, a personal death notification request from the law enforcement agency in that area will be made. Logistical arrangements should be made to permit simultaneous telephone contact between the survivors and the office.
8. 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 the next of kin.

#### C. 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. Emergency responders and other office members who may have been emotionally affected by the serious injury or death of another member will attend a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing held by a trained mental health professional. Additional emotional support may be necessary and will be coordinated by the office.

#### D. Assisting the Family at the Hospital

1. The first supervisory personnel, other than the Sheriff or representative, to arrive at the hospital is responsible for coordinating the activities of hospital personnel, the member's family, police officers, the media and others. These responsibilities include:
  - a. Arranging with hospital personnel to provide an appropriate waiting facility for the family, the Sheriff and others requested by the immediate survivors.
  - b. Arranging a separate area for fellow employees to assemble.
  - c. Establishing a media staging area.
  - d. Ensuring that the family is updated regarding the incident and the member's condition upon their arrival at the hospital.
  - e. 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.
  - f. Arranging transportation for the family back to their residence or other desired location.
  - g. If it is possible for the family to visit the injured member before death, a police official should "prepare" the family for the condition and/or appearance of the member and should accompany the family into the room for the visit if the family so requests.



2. Members of the office will remain sensitive to the needs of the survivors long after the member's death, or during the period of rehabilitation in the case of a serious injury.
3. Members of the office 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 (or the injured member) expresses a desire to have these contacts continue.
4. The Sheriff should observe the member's death date with a short note to the family, flowers on the grave and/or wreath placement at the New York State Police Officers Fallen 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. If no court proceedings surround the circumstances of the member's death, the Sheriff, or designee, will relay all details of the incident to the family at the earliest opportunity.
7. If criminal violations surround the death or injury, the Sheriff, or designee, will:
  - a. Inform the family of all new developments prior to a press release;
  - b. Assist with and keep the family apprised of legal proceedings;
  - c. Act as a liaison as required or requested between the member's family and the District Attorney's Office;
  - d. Encourage the family to attend the trial, and accompany them whenever possible; and
  - e. Arrange for investigators and/or prosecutors to meet with the family.

Attachments:

- A. [Employee Emergency Notification Form](#)

By Order Of



Derek Osborne  
*Sheriff*