

	POLICY & PROCEDURE	SERIES # 510	PAGE 1 OF 5
	SUBJECT		EFFECTIVE DATE
	VICTIM / WITNESS ASSISTANCE		02/05/2021
			OVERSIGHT Investigations
DISTRIBUTION ALL MANUALS	AMENDS/SUPERSEDES/CANCELS P&P # 510 dated 09/20/10.		

I. PURPOSE:

The purpose of this policy is to establish procedures for responding to the immediate needs of crime victims and coordinating assistance for victims with the Office of the Commonwealth’s Attorney Victim/Witness Program.

II. POLICY:

It is the policy of the Hampton Police Division to treat crime victims with fairness, compassion and dignity. Furthermore, it is the policy of the Division to work with the Commonwealth’s Attorney’s Coordinator of Victim/Witness Assistance Programs to ensure continuation of appropriate victim/witness assistance programs and activities.

III. DISCUSSION:

Law enforcement officers, through the nature of their work, provide the initial response to the immediate needs of victims and witnesses of crimes and other traumatic events. The officer’s demeanor towards victim/witnesses can have long-term implications on their emotional recovery and willingness to cooperate with the Criminal Justice System in securing successful prosecutions. Consequently, the Division will provide on-going training for sworn personnel so that they can provide the immediate support and necessary information to victims. The Division also will provide training to all other personnel who most likely may have contact with a victim/witness so that they too can provide the necessary support and help to these individuals.

Furthermore, this policy considers families of Division personnel as victims when incidents occur that result in line of duty death or serious injury.

This policy establishes a Victim/Witness Liaison within the Police Division. The Liaison will maintain contact with other criminal justice agencies and organizations concerned with victim/witness needs and rights.

IV. PROCEDURE:

A. Responsibility of officers:

1. Officers are responsible for securing the crime scene or incident scene to protect lives and ensure safety.

APPROVED:
CHIEF OF POLICE



2. Officers shall render emergency aid to individuals who have suffered physical injuries, and shall, as soon as possible, summon any necessary medical assistance.
3. Where physical injuries are not apparent, victims shall be asked if they are injured and whether medical attention is required.
4. In order to reduce fright and promote victim communication, victims should be informed as soon as appropriate that they are no longer in immediate danger.
5. Recognizing that victims often suffer physical and/or emotional shock, officers shall assist them in making decisions and keep them informed of police actions and requirements.
6. When possible, police officers should not leave a distraught victim alone. Arrangements should be made to have a relative, friend or family clergyman join the victim for emotional support and comfort, or arrange for transportation of the victim to a friend, family or clergyman join the victim for emotional support and comfort, or arrange for transportation of the victim to a friend, family member or other appropriate service provider.
7. In order to calm and assist the victim in regaining composure, officers shall:
 - a. Allow the victim a reasonable period of time in which to express feelings and emotions while describing what happened during the incident;
 - b. Express empathy for the victim and recognition and understanding for emotional reactions;
 - c. Provide reassurance that the victim's feelings are normal and understandable;
 - d. Not be overly judgmental of the victim's feelings and emotions or the apparent lack thereof, or of victim judgments or actions related to the incident;
 - e. Help redirect any self blame and responsibility for the criminal act from the victim to the perpetrator; and emphasize your commitment and that of the Police Division to assist and work with the victim.
8. Before leaving the scene, it is important that officers take the steps necessary to meet the victim's needs for support and information. These include:
 - a. Providing a brief overview of what actions will be taken shortly

thereafter, and answering questions.

- b. Providing materials provided by the Commonwealth's Attorney describing the Victim/Witness Assistance Program and materials provided by other community service agencies as appropriate; and
- c. Providing the telephone number of the Police Division's Victim/Witness Assistance Liaison and communications; and
- d. Providing the victim with a case number.
- e. Advising the victim/witness on what to do if they feel threatened or intimidated by the suspect or the suspects friends or family.

B. Police Division's Victim/Witness Liaison

1. The Violent Crimes Sergeant in the Crimes Against Persons Unit will serve as the Division's Victim/Witness Liaison. This position requires administrative direction of the Victim/Witness Assistance Program within the Police Division and coordination with the Commonwealth's Attorney's Victim/Witness Assistance program. In cases of domestic violence, the Domestic Violence Coordinator will serve as the Victim/Witness Liaison.
2. Investigative Services will provide copies of crime reports to the Victim/Witness coordinator on a weekly basis.
3. The Police Liaison will interact with the Commonwealth's Attorney's Victim/Witness Coordinator as needed until the adjudication process is complete.
4. The Commonwealth Attorneys Victim/Witness Coordinator provides the Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) a quarterly progress report of services rendered to Victim/Witnesses in the City of Hampton. The analysis contains information pertaining to:
 - a. The numbers of victims & witnesses served and the type of service provided.
 - b. Victim compensation provided
 - c. Information on programs and assistance available to victims/witnesses.
 - d. Examples of case studies of those assisted by the Victim/Witness Program.
5. Investigative Services will conduct a documented review of victim/witness assistance needs and available services within the service area at least once every two years. This review is done to identify

victim/witness services that HPD can provide without duplicating services offered elsewhere in the Victim/Witness Program.

6. The Police Division Liaison will assess training needs within the Police Division and keep police personnel informed on any changes in community agencies that provide services to the victim/witness.
7. The Police Division Liaison will coordinate victim/witness transportation issues with the Victim/Witness Coordinator.
8. The Police Division Liaison will work with the Division's Public Information Officer and Victim/Witness Coordinator to release information to the public and media about victim/witness services available.

C. Investigator

1. Once assigned to a case, the investigator will ascertain the victim's need for assistance from outside agencies and specifically the Victim/Witness Assistance Program. The investigator will report these needs to the Police Victim/Witness Liaison and work with the Liaison to obtain help for the victim.
2. The investigator will provide the victim with a telephone number where he/she may be reached during regular business hours.
3. The investigator will make routine call-backs to victims to determine whether the victim has new information concerning the case, and to relay information.
4. When feasible, the investigating officer should promptly return victim/witness property held as evidence (except for contraband, disputed property, and weapons used in a crime) where permitted by law or rules of evidence.
5. When possible, the investigator will keep the victim/witness informed concerning the arrest and detention of suspects and their pretrial release status. Also, any court orders which may have been issued.
6. If not an endangerment to the successful prosecution of the case, the investigator should explain to victim/witnesses the procedures involved in the prosecution of their case, and their role in those procedures.
7. The investigator should explain the operations of the Division and the Criminal Justice System. If possible, line-ups, interviews and other required appearances should be scheduled at the convenience of the victim/witness.

D. Communications

The Communications Unit will provide the Victim/Witness with a single point of contact 24 hours a day.

1. Communications supervisors will provide on-going training to their staff concerning the Victim/Witness Assistance Program.
2. When Communications receives a call from a victim requesting help, they should obtain the following information:
 - a. The name of the investigator who is handling their case; and
 - b. Whether they have been in contact the Victim/Witness Coordinator in the Commonwealth's Attorney's Office.
 - c. If the victim has had no contact with the Victim/Witness Assistance Program Coordinator, then refer the victim to the appropriate agency or contact the coordinator the next working day. The Division's Victim/Witness Liaison should be informed through the phone mail system of the Victim" request for help.
 - d. If the victim/witness is being threatened or expresses fear, an officer will be dispatched to the individual's location immediately. Once the officer is on the scene, an assessment will be made by the officer and, if necessary, the investigating officer and/or liaison will be notified immediately.

E. Public Information

The release of victim/witness information will be governed by the confidentiality in the Division Public Information Policy.

