# SECTION: 200.680

# SUBJECT: LINE-OF-DUTY DEATH

**POLICY:**

The Agency will 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, on duty, and while he or she was an active member of the Agency. The Sheriff may institute certain parts of this policy for cases of an employee’s natural death. The Agency will also provide a 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 employee are to be decided by the family, and while implementation of this policy will serve as a guide, the wishes of the family shall take precedence over that of the Agency’s.

**PURPOSE:**

The Dane County Sheriff’s Office (the Agency) recognizes that a Line-of-Duty Death of a deputy sheriff will affect the entire agency, and will require a response that will be rapidly evolving, but that is effective, efficient, and sensitive to both the Agency’s needs as well as the employee’s survivors. This policy establishes procedures to ensure the proper support and emotional care for the employee’s family, and shall serve as a guideline for the Agency response.

**Law Enforcement Death Response Team (LEDR):** Activated by contacting the local Wisconsin State Patrol Regional Post. Team contact information is also located at [www.wichiefs.org](http://www.wichiefs.org).

**Wisconsin Honor Guard Association:** Activated through contact with the LEDR Team.

**DEFINITIONS:**

LINE-OF-DUTY DEATH:

Any action, felonious or accidental, which claims the life of a Dane County Sheriff’s Office Sworn Employee while on duty. This definition is for the purposes of this policy only.

SURVIVORS:

Primary family members of the deceased employee, including spouse, children, grandchildren, parents, grandparents, siblings, fiancé, and/or significant others.

**PROCEDURES:**

Coordination of events following the line-of-duty death of a deputy sheriff is an extremely delicate and complex responsibility. Professionalism and compassion must be exhibited at all times as an obligation to the employee’s survivors and to the law enforcement community. In order to provide the best possible services and support for the survivors, specific tasks may be assigned to selected members of the Agency.

Immediately upon notification of a line-of-duty death, the Sheriff or a designee shall make notification to the **Law Enforcement Death Response Team (LEDR)**. This notification can be made by contacting the Wisconsin State Patrol Regional Post, where all contact information for the LEDR Team is maintained.

Some of the following defined roles may be designated in the *Employee’s Death Notification Packet*, which must be viewed before the following assignments are made:

* Notification Officer – The Sheriff and/or a designee of the Sheriff, or as designated by the employee in his/her Critical Incident Packet.
* Hospital Liaison Officer – The first supervisor to arrive at the hospital becomes the Hospital Liaison Officer. This role may be assigned to someone else as long as the responsibilities are adequately communicated.
* Family Liaison Officer – This person is someone who enjoyed a close relationship with the employee and his or her family. This person(s) will serve as a “facilitator” between the survivor family and the Agency. It is important to recognize that if this person is someone so close to the survivor family that they wouldn’t be able to handle the responsibilities of this role, that an assistant be assigned. This person(s) will report directly to the Department Operations Officer.
* Department Operations Officer – A Division Commander or his/her designee to coordinate agency resources and communication related to this tragedy. This person should also not be in charge of any investigation related to the line-of-duty death. This person will be the sole point of contact for the Family Liaison Officer and the Honor Guard Coordinator.
* Honor Guard Coordinator – This person will oversee and coordinate the planning and implementation of all aspects of the funeral arrangements. This person will report directly to the Department Operations Officer.
* Benefits Coordinator – This person will gather information on applicable benefits available to the survivor family. This person’s responsibilities will continue well after the immediate event.

An explanation of each of these responsibilities is contained in this policy. A member may be called upon to perform more than one role; however, the emotional toll of these responsibilities must be recognized and monitored. The LEDR Team is an excellent outside resource to help manage the emotions of the members of the Agency.

**RESPONSIBILITIES:**

1. Notification
2. It is the responsibility of the Sheriff or designee, along with the County Medical Examiner’s Office, to properly notify the next of kin of an employee who has died in the line of duty. The Sheriff or designeemay personally make the notification or designate a Notification Officerto inform the survivors. The employee’s *Death Notification Packet* must first be consulted. Prompt notification must be balanced with carrying out the wishes of the employee, if noted in their packet.
3. The name of the deceased employee will not be released to the media by the Agency before the immediate family is notified. If the media obtains the employee’s name prematurely, the Sheriff or designee will request the name to be withheld until proper notification can be made to the survivors.
4. 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.
5. Notification will be made in person and never alone. The Sheriff or designee, police chaplain, close friend, or another police survivor could appropriately accompany the Notification Officer, along with the County Medical Examiner and/or the Director of Operations from the County Medical Examiner’s Office. (At least two vehicles should be used so someone can stay with the family the entire time until the Family Liaison is in place.) However, if the aforementioned persons are not readily accessible, notification should not be delayed until these people can gather. If there is an opportunity for the family to get to the hospital prior to the death of the employee, do not wait for the delegation to gather. Expedience is of the utmost concern in consideration of instant social media, instant messaging, and other means in which the survivor family could learn of the tragedy before proper notification can take place.
6. Never make a death notification on the doorstep. Ask to be admitted into the house. Gather all family members together and ask them to sit down.
   1. Inform family members slowly and clearly of the information that you have.
   2. If specifics of the incident are known, the Notification Officer should relay as much information as possible to the family.
   3. Be sure to use the member’s name during the notification. If the member has died, relay that information immediately without delay.
7. Never give the family a false sense of hope. Use words such as “died” and “dead” rather than “gone away” or “passed away.” Experience has shown that survivor family members want and need straight-forward talk. State the facts as known. Be clear on what information is known and what is not yet known.
8. If the family requests to visit the hospital, they should be transported by police vehicle.
   * + 1. It is highly recommended that the family not drive themselves to the hospital.
       2. If the family insists on driving, someone should accompany them in the family car.
9. If young children are at home, and the family decision is for those children to remain at the home, the Notification Officer should arrange for babysitting needs. This may involve a co-worker’s spouse, transportation of children to a relative’s home, or similar arrangements.
10. Prior to departing for the hospital, the Notification Officer should notify the hospital staff and the Hospital Liaison Officer (by telephone, if possible) that a member(s) of the family is (are) en route so that arrangements can be made for their arrival**.**
11. The deceased or severely injured employee’s parents should also be afforded the courtesy of a personal notification whenever possible and practical. Be aware of any medical problems of the parents that may exist.
12. If immediate survivors live beyond the Dane County area:

The Notification Officer will ensure that a teletype message is sent to the appropriate jurisdiction, requesting a personal notification.

The Notification Officer may choose to call the other jurisdiction by telephone, in addition to the teletype message.

3. Arrangements should be made through the notifying agency to facilitate a conference call with the Notification Officer, so details of the incident can be relayed directly from the Notification Officer to the survivor family.

1. In the event of a Line-of-Duty Death (LODD), the external monitoring of police frequencies may be extensive. Whenever possible, communications regarding notifications should be restricted to the telephone.
2. The Notification Officer should complete written details specifying the identity, time, and place of the survivor notifications.
3. Assistance for Affected Members of the Agency
4. Deputies who were on the scene or who arrived moments after a deputy was critically injured or killed should be relieved as quickly as possible.
5. A department-wide notification must be made as soon as possible, releasing factual information with confidential directives.
6. Police witnesses and other employees, who may be emotionally affected by the serious injury or death of another employee, will be afforded the opportunity to attend a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing held by a trained mental health professional.
7. Services of the LEDR Team, as well as the Agency’s contracted Employee Assistance Program (EAP) Provider should be brought in immediately.
8. Experience has shown that the LEDR Team is best positioned to be on-scene immediately and start Agency debriefings without delay. The Agency EAP Provider is best positioned for short-term and long-term follow-up with individual employees.
9. Assisting the Family at the Hospital
10. The DCSO first supervisor, other than the Sheriff 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, Agency personnel, the press, and others. It is essential this role is filled without delay in order to prevent loss of control at the hospital. These responsibilities include, but are not limited to, the following:
11. Arranging with hospital personnel to provide an appropriate, private waiting area for the family and others invited by the immediate survivors.
12. Arranging for a waiting area for the Sheriff, Command Staff, and other Officials (if needed).
13. Arranging a separate area for fellow deputies to assemble.
14. Establishing a press staging area.
15. Ensure that the family is updated regarding the incident and the employee’s condition upon their arrival at the hospital.
16. Ensuring that medical personnel relay pertinent information regarding an employee’s condition to the family on a timely basis and before such information is released to others.
17. Arrange transportation for the family back to their residence as needed. This should be coordinated with the Family Liaison.
18. If it is possible for the family to visit the critically injured employee before death, they should be afforded that opportunity. While it may be appropriate to prepare the family for what they are about to see, no attempt should be made to dissuade the family from that final visit due to worry of them witnessing trauma.
19. The Notification Officer(s) should remain at the hospital while the family is present until adequately relieved by the Family Liaison.
20. Do not be overly protective of the family. This includes sharing specific information as to how the employee died, as well as allowing the family time with the deceased employee.
21. Any promises, such as, "We'll promote him/her posthumously," or "We'll retire his/her badge,” shall not be made to the family by any person except the Sheriff, and even then, strong consideration should be made to withhold such promises and actions until the emotion of the incident is under control.
22. Initiation of Funeral Arrangement Planning
23. As soon as is feasible and practical, the Sheriff or designee, will meet with the employee’s family to determine their wishes regarding Agency participation in the preparation of the funeral or services. Any information in the employee packet shall be shared with the family at this time. The family shall be assured that the Agency is willing and able to coordinate all arrangements, but that no decisions will be made without their input and approval.
24. With the approval of the family, the Sheriff will assign a Family Liaison.The Sheriff will also designate a Department Operations Officer, Honor Guard Coordinator,and a Benefits Coordinator. The Family Liaison Officer will facilitate introduction of these key personnel and their roles, with special attention given to the role the Benefits Coordinator will play, as this can relieve a major source of stress for the family.
25. All movement of the deceased shall be done ceremoniously under the direction of the Honor Guard Coordinator.
26. Effective as soon as possible a 24-hour guard will be posted to stay with the fallen deputy. While this is a function of the Honor Guard, other sworn employees of the Agency can be assigned this role. This 24-hour-a-day posting should start at a minimum following the release of the deceased by the Medical Examiner. This posting shall be coordinated by the Honor Guard Coordinator in conjunction with the Operations Officer.
27. Should the family elect to not have a law enforcement funeral, the Sheriff must give careful consideration to holding an Agency memorial service in recognition of the need for co-workers to grieve and experience some closure to the line-of-duty death.
28. Family Liaison Officer
29. The selection of a Family Liaison Officer is a critical assignment. It is someone who enjoyed a close relationship with the employee and his or her family. This person(s) is a “facilitator” between the family and the Agency. It is important that this person not be someone so close to the survivor family that they wouldn’t be able to handle the responsibilities of this role. In that case, an assistant should be assigned.
30. This is not a decision-making position, but a **“**facilitator” between the family and the Agency. It is important that the person(s) assigned this role realize they are not to make decisions on behalf of the Agency. The Family Liaison Officer will have immediate access to the Department Operations Officer, Honor Guard Coordinator, and Benefits Coordinator so necessary decisions can be made without delay. Responsibilities of the Family Liaison Officer include the following:
    1. Ensuring that the needs of the family come before the wishes of the Agency. While these discussions are potentially delicate, there may be a need to educate the survivor family on why certain ceremonious functions are suggested, and how they are done. It is important to realize that most families have never experienced this before, and never thought through these decisions before. It is to be expected that the survivor family’s emotions, and potentially the circumstances around the incident, may cause confusion on what arrangements are proper.
    2. Assisting the family with funeral arrangements and making them aware of what the Agency can offer if they decide to have a law enforcement funeral. When discussing the pending funeral arrangements, the Family Liaison Officer would do well to bring the Honor Guard Coordinator into the discussion early, so that decisions made are based on an informed discussion.
    3. Assisting the family with contacting a funeral home and setting up a meeting to discuss arrangements. The Honor Guard Coordinator must be included in all meetings with the Funeral Director and religious entity from the onset.
    4. Apprising the family of information concerning the death and the continuing investigation. The Family Liaison Officer will exercise care in the information released to be sure only factual information is given to the family. The Family Liaison Officer will communicate directly with the Department Operations Officer for this information.
    5. 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 childcare and transportation needs, etc.
    6. Family Liaison Officer(s) should be constantly available.
    7. Carry a cell phone at all times.
    8. Provide phone numbers to all survivors.
    9. 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.
    10. Work with the Benefits Coordinator to obtain needed information from the family for benefit processing, as well as keeping the family apprised of the progress with the death benefits.
31. Department Operations Officer
    * 1. This position is normally assigned to a Division Commander or his/her designee to coordinate resources throughout the Agency. This person will be the sole point of contact for the Family Liaison Officer and the Honor Guard Coordinator. Responsibilities of the Department Operations Officer include the following:
32. Working closely with the Family Liaison Officer to ensure that the needs of the family are fulfilled.
33. Establishing and staffing an Agency command center, if necessary, to coordinate information and response to the tragedy.
34. Work with the Public Information Officer in 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, and to prevent them from being questioned on inappropriate issues.
35. Issuing a teletype message to formally announce the line-of-duty death. As soon as practical, an initial TTY may be distributed with the announcement and that arrangements are pending. Extreme care should be given to releasing a TTY with information that will need to be changed or withdrawn. A follow-up TTY shall include the following:
36. Name of deceased.
37. Date and time of death.
38. Circumstances surrounding the death.
39. Funeral arrangements (state if service will be private or a police funeral).
40. Expressions of sympathy in lieu of flowers.
41. Contact person and phone number for visiting departments to call to indicate their desire to attend or to obtain further information.
42. Information released through the TTY shall also be sent via email to the Wisconsin Honor Guard Association point of contact, who will be able to disseminate the email through the statewide listserv.
43. Coordinate deployment of outside law enforcement agencies to cover functions of Sheriff’s Office, if deemed necessary.
44. Direct the wearing of badge mourning bands and any other Agency memorials, including, but not limited to, a shadow box.
45. Work with the Honor Guard Coordinator to facilitate obtaining a department badge, if necessary, for family presentation.
46. Coordinate logistics needed, if the employee is to be buried in uniform.
47. Coordinate extra patrol of family residence throughout all phases of the planning, visitation, and funeral.
48. Arrange for the cleaning out of the employee’s workspace and/or locker, as well as the delivery of the employee’s personal belongings to the family at an appropriate time. This should be coordinated through the Family Liaison Officer.
49. Conduct daily Agency briefings to include at a minimum the Sheriff, Executive Staff, Family Liaison, Honor Guard Coordinator, and Investigative Services Bureau.
50. Honor Guard Coordinator
    * 1. The responsibilities of the Honor Guard Coordinator include the following:
51. Report directly to the Department Operations Officer.
52. Work closely with the Family Liaison Officer to determine family’s wishes in regards to a law enforcement funeral.
53. Work closely with the family-identified Funeral Director and Clergy to develop arrangements. Attention will be given to selecting venues that will be capable of accommodating the large law enforcement response, and in the absence of such venues, developing contingency plans, as needed.
54. In accordance with Honor Guard Policy 200.300, ceremonial aspects of the visitation and funeral arrangements will be planned by the Honor Guard Coordinator.
55. In recognition of the large scope of a line-of-duty funeral, the Wisconsin Honor Guard Association should be contacted for additional honor guard resources. While staffing limitations alone may dictate the need for outside assistance, careful consideration of the emotional toll on the members of the Agency Honor Guard should also be considered.
56. Work with the Department Operations Officer and the Family Liaison Officer in regards to timely release of initial information via TTY and email. Details of arrangements should be withheld until completely verified; once that happens, subsequent TTY and email release should be considered.
57. Designate a Logistics Lead whose responsibilities include the following:
58. Arrange for adequate water at each venue.
59. Arrange for portable restrooms, if needed.
60. If deemed necessary, arrange for bus transportation from alternate staging/parking locations to venues.
61. Responsible for copying and distribution of funeral instructions for visiting agencies.
62. Responsible for documenting all visiting agencies and dignitaries.
63. If directed, coordinate having someone video record services and agencies present.
64. Designate a Traffic Coordinator whose responsibilities include the following:
65. Coordinate/Manage traffic and parking at each venue including visitation, funeral, cemetery, and any fellowship function.
66. Collaborate with any involved jurisdictions for needed traffic control for visitation, funeral, and procession.
67. Under direction of the Honor Guard Coordinator, direct the assembly of the squad and vehicle procession.
68. Pre-plan and designate the procession route in consultation with the Honor Guard Coordinator.
69. Benefits Coordinator
70. The Benefits Coordinator will gather information on benefits available to the family. The Benefits Coordinator has the Agency’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. The Benefits Coordinator may be a non-sworn employee, and given the specialized information managed by this person, the Agency may consider this role as a standing position within the Agency.
71. The Benefits Coordinator is responsible for the following:
    1. Filing Workers’ Compensation claims and related paperwork.
    2. Contacting the appropriate agencies without delay to ensure that the beneficiary receives death and retirement benefits, the employee’s remaining paychecks, and payment for remaining annual and compensatory time.
    3. Gathering information on all benefit/funeral payments, to include the Federal Public Safety Officers Benefits Act that is available to the family.
    4. Setting up any special trust funds or educational funds.
    5. Notifying police organizations, such as Wisconsin Professional Police Association, Dane County Deputy Sheriff’s Association, and any other fraternal organizations the employee was a member of. These organizations may also offer financial assistance with logistical needs of the funeral services.
    6. 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.
    7. Meeting with the surviving family a few days after the funeral to discuss the benefits they will receive, what has been done, as well as what has yet to be completed. 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. Attention should be given to the revocation of health care benefits. Many providers allow a 30-day grace period before canceling or imposing monthly payments upon survivors.
    8. Continue meeting with the family until benefit applications are well underway. Then, meet with the family in four to six months to ensure they are receiving benefits.
72. Continued Support for the Family
73. Members of the Agency 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 post-traumatic stress reaction to the tragedy.
74. Survivors should continue to feel a part of the “police family.” They should be invited to Agency activities to ensure continued contact.
75. Members of the Agency 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, as long as the family expresses a desire to have these contacts continue.
76. 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 Wisconsin Law Enforcement Officers Memorial.
77. Holidays may be especially difficult for the family, particularly if small children are involved. Increase contact with the survivors, as additional support is important at these times.
78. The Family Liaison Officer acts as a long-term liaison with the surviving family to ensure that close contact is maintained between the Agency and the survivors and that their needs are met for as long as they feel the need for support.
79. If no court proceedings surround the circumstances of the member’s death, the Family Liaison Officer will relay all details of the incident to the family at the earliest opportunity.
80. If criminal violations surround the death, the Family Liaison Officer will:
    1. inform the family of all new developments prior to press release.
    2. keep the family apprised of legal proceedings.
    3. introduce the family to the victims’ assistance specialists of the court.
    4. encourage the family to attend the trial, and accompany them, whenever possible.
    5. arrange for investigators and prosecutor(s) to meet with the family, at the earliest opportunity following the trial, to answer all their questions.