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HARFORD COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE ADMINISTRATIVE POLICY

Victim Services

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Responsible Unit:	Criminal Investigations Division	Rescinds:	OPS 1210 dated 08/21/21
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1. Purpose

To provide members of the Harford County Sheriff's Office (HCSO) with guidelines regarding the functions and call-out procedures for the Victim Services Unit (VSU).

2. Policy

The HCSO will ensure that the rights of victims and witnesses are protected and that they are treated with fairness, compassion, and dignity.

3. Definitions

CRISIS INTERVENTION: refers to methods used to offer immediate, short term help to victims of crime who experience an event that produces emotional, mental, or physical problems.

LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY INDIVIDUALS: those persons, who cannot speak, read, write, or understand English well enough to interact effectively with government agencies, to include the HCSO.

VICTIM: for the purposes of this policy, a person who has suffered direct physical abuse, emotional distress, or monetary loss as a result of any Part I crime.

VICTIM SURVIVOR: the family members of a deceased victim.

WITNESS: a person who has information or evidence concerning a crime and provides such information or evidence to the HCSO. When the witness is a minor, the term "witness" includes an appropriate family member or legal guardian. The term "witness" does not include defense witnesses or those who are suspects in the crime.

4. References

Maryland "Crime Victims and Witnesses: Your Rights and Services" booklet
Maryland Code Annotated Criminal Procedure Article § 11-104 (b)
Maryland Code Annotated Criminal Procedure Article § 11-801 to §11-819

5. Procedures

A. Administration and Management

1. The Victim Services Coordinator (VSC) is a part of the VSU and will be appointed at the direction of the Sheriff.
2. The Child Advocacy Center (CAC) Lieutenant will supervise VSU personnel.

B. Function

1. Treating victims with respect, and providing them with assistance, benefits victims and helps the HCSO build better relationships and better cases.
2. VSU personnel will confirm that the following tasks are performed:
 - a. Ensure victims are identified, notified of the rights to which they are entitled, and provided with assistance to help them cope with the impact of crime;
 - b. Ensure victim(s) needs have been assessed and triaged;
 - c. Ensure the confidentiality of victims and their role in case development to the extent consistent with applicable Maryland Law;
 - d. Maintain liaison with law enforcement personnel, other criminal justice agencies, governmental and non-governmental agencies, and organizations concerned with victim rights and needs;
 - e. Ensure that the HCSO conducts training of its sworn personnel in victim rights and services, and the Agency's role in meeting those rights and services, as mandated by law;
 - f. Ensure that sworn and civilian personnel directly involved in Agency victim assistance efforts receive an appropriate level of training and retraining;
 - g. Coordinate efforts to periodically inform the public about the Agency's victim assistance program;
 - h. Provide Agency members with appropriate materials regarding victim assistance and referral information;
 - i. Provide information to the survivor victim(s) on how to obtain a copy of the report when an autopsy is completed by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) for an HCSO handled death investigation;
 - j. Provide services to victims of crime; and
 - k. Provide crisis intervention not grief counseling.

C. Response Parameters

1. VSU will be consulted if deemed necessary by a Criminal Investigations Division (CID) supervisor or the primary investigator for the following crimes/incidents:

- a. Homicide;
- b. Suicide;
- c. Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)/Sudden Unexpected Death in Infancy (SUDI) deaths;
- d. Violence involving children (as survivor, witness, or victim), except child abuse and sexual assault cases where the victim is 15 years of age and under;
- e. Human trafficking;
- f. Serious assaults (i.e., shootings, stabbings, beatings, etc.);
- g. Robbery (with use of a weapon);
- h. Suspicious deaths (including fatal overdoses);
- i. Abductions/attempted abductions (Including false imprisonment, hostages, and barricades);
- j. Rape/attempted rape;
- k. Sexual assaults (1st and 2nd degree);
- l. Home invasions (non-drug or gang related); and/or
- m. Hate crimes.

D. Response Guidelines

1. VSU personnel will respond in a timely and appropriate manner when crisis response services are needed.
2. If VSU is unavailable for any reason, alternative victim assistance resources may include:
 - a. The Harford County Mobile Crisis Team (MCT);
 - b. HCSO Behavioral Health Coordinator; and/or
 - c. HCSO Chaplain(s).
3. VSU personnel will only be on scene if law enforcement is present.
4. For the safety of VSU personnel, law enforcement personnel will not leave VSU personnel on scene alone.
5. VSU personnel will, upon arrival, be briefed on the nature of the crime and crime scene so that appropriate crisis intervention techniques can be employed.
6. VSU personnel will not disseminate information pertaining to the investigation without prior permission from the lead detective or on-scene supervisor when no detective is present.

7. VSU personnel will, if requested by the victim survivor to view the deceased on scene, follow the following procedure:
 - a. Discuss other options with the individual making the request;
 - i. After discussing other options, if a victim survivor(s) still wants to view the deceased, VSU personnel will make the request known to the scene supervisor.
 - ii. The scene supervisor will confer with the Medical Examiner (ME) on scene to decide if the body can be viewed without interfering with an investigation.
 - b. When body removal is by a funeral home and no further investigation is needed, the family may view the body prior to the funeral home removal, after the body has been loaded for transport. VSU or law enforcement personnel will accompany the family if on scene;
 - c. Those viewing the body on ME transports will be accompanied by VSU or law enforcement personnel when on scene, and the viewing will occur only after the ME is finished with his investigation and the body is loaded for transport;
 - d. Only the head and face area will be subject for viewing and no direct contact will be allowed; and
 - e. Viewing will be prohibited in all homicide cases so as not to lose any trace evidence that may be on the body.

E. Patrol

1. The patrol deputy having first contact with the victim of a crime will be responsible for addressing the initial needs of the victim.
2. Every victim, regardless of severity of the crime, will receive a copy of the Maryland "Crime Victims and Witnesses: Your Rights and Services" booklet as mandated by law (Criminal Procedure Article § 11-104 (b)) which provides that all victims of crime are:
 - a. Apprised of basic criminal justice procedures;
 - b. Directed to useful resources, to include VSU;
 - c. Given financial compensation options; and
 - d. Given information pertaining to obtaining DNA information of a suspect, as mandated by law (Criminal Procedure Article §§ 11-801 to 11-819).
3. A deputy on scene may request response of VSU when the crime falls within the parameters set forth under 5.C.
4. If a crime falls within the parameters noted in 5.C., and there are victim(s) that could benefit from the services of the VSU, the deputy will immediately request the patrol shift supervisor to contact the on-call Criminal Investigations Division (CID) supervisor and notify them of the nature of the crime and the existence of victim(s).

F. Patrol Supervisor or CID Detective

1. Will inform crime victims of their rights in a timely manner.
2. Will discuss with the CID supervisor the integrity of the scene and possible adverse effects on the investigation when deciding whether to grant VSU access to the inner perimeter of the crime scene.
 - a. VSU personnel will only be granted access to the inner perimeter of a crime scene if such access is specifically approved by the on-scene CID supervisor.

G. Cases When On-Scene Response is Not Needed

1. The VSU will compile all case data that fits the criteria outlined in this policy and enter the data into the VSU database as well as the Law Enforcement Records Management System.
2. VSU personnel will make two attempts to contact the victim, by telephone and by initial contact letter. Under certain circumstances in-person contact may be warranted.
3. Once contact is established with a victim(s)/victim survivor(s), as defined in this policy, all services outlined in this policy will be offered, per Maryland Crime Victim's Rights Laws.

H. Chaplains

1. The request of a chaplain or non-secular advisor on the part of the victim(s)/victim survivor(s) does not negate the services of the VSU, unless VSU is unavailable.
2. VSU personnel provide victim rights information, crisis intervention, and mental health services. Chaplains or non-secular advisors provide spiritual care services, unless otherwise specially trained in crisis response.

I. Follow-Up Guidelines


1. During the follow-up portion of the investigation, VSU staff will provide the following services:
 - a. Re-contact the victim within one week and periodically thereafter to determine whether the victim's needs are being met and provide further resources. Contact will be made until such time as the victim(s)/victim survivor(s) no longer need services and support;
 - b. Assist with explaining the criminal justice process and all available services;
 - c. Assist with the return of victim's property in accordance with Agency policy;
 - d. Refer victim(s) to the appropriate detective for investigative information; and
 - e. Provide necessary mental health information and referrals.

J. Death Notifications

1. VSU may accompany HCSO personnel to deliver death notifications as requested through a CID Supervisor. It is always preferable to have VSU present when a death notification is made depending upon the dynamics of the situation and on the available manpower of the unit.
2. VSU will provide training on the proper delivery of death notifications to HCSO and cooperating agencies.

K. Assistance for Limited English Proficiency

1. Every effort will be made to ensure that those individuals with limited English proficiency have access to victim services.
2. Agency personnel who can translate and interpret will be utilized whenever possible.
3. Available translation and interpretation services will be utilized to assist these victims when no Agency personnel are available.
4. The State of Maryland Judiciary maintains a current Court Interpreter Release List which will be maintained in the VSU office. The list may be accessed at:
<https://secure.scheduleinterpreter.com/marylandcourts/cgi-bin/reports.cgi?action=publicListing>.

Approved

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