
	GAITHERSBURG POLICE DEPARTMENT		
	Victim and Witness Assistance		
	GENERAL ORDER	604.3	
Effective Date	06/23/2016	55.1.3, 55.2.2, 55.2.3	
Authorized by:	Mark P. Sroka CHIEF OF POLICE	SIGNATURE <i>Mark Sroka</i>	DATE 06/23/2016

I. DEPARTMENT POLICY

It is the policy of this department to enhance the treatment of victims and survivors of crime and non-criminal crisis situations by providing the assistance and services necessary to speed their physical and emotional recovery, and to support and aid them as they continue to interact with the criminal justice system. Victims of crime must be treated with dignity, respect and sensitivity during all phases of the criminal justice process.

II. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to emphasize the needs of victims of crime and non-criminal incidents and the responsibilities of officers to provide support, information and guidance for these individuals.

Law enforcement officers are often in a unique position to provide assistance to victims of crime and other traumatic incidents that may have both immediate and long-term impact on their emotional recovery. Victims who feel they are treated with understanding and concern for their hardship and suffering more frequently become enthusiastic about cooperating with the investigation and assisting in the prosecution.

III. PROCEDURES

A. Safety and Security

1. Officers are responsible for securing the crime or incident scene to protect lives and ensure safety.
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. To reduce trauma and promote 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 emotional shock, officers shall assist them in making decisions and keep them informed of police actions and protocols.
6. Whenever possible, police officers should not leave a distraught victim alone. Arrangements should be made to have a relative, friend, family or clergy 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. The confidentiality of victims/witnesses and their role in case development are safeguarded by all officers involved in the investigation, to the extent consistent with applicable law.
8. Media inquiries concerning a victim/witness of a crime will be referred to the PIO, Investigative Section, or Chief of Police. Only information of a general (non-specific) nature will be released by the department.

B. Providing Emotional Support

1. 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 overtly 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
 - f. Emphasize their commitment and that of the department to assist and work with the victim.

C. Information and Referral

1. Before leaving the scene it is important that officers take the steps necessary to meet victims' needs for support and information. These include:
 - a. Providing a brief overview of what actions will be taken shortly thereafter and attempt to answer questions they may have;
 - b. Providing information on victim service agencies available in the community by providing a copy of the Montgomery County "Crime Victim and Witness Your Rights and Services" brochure to the victim/witness at the initial contact and document in their event report that the brochure was provided;
 - c. Leaving names and telephone numbers where the victim can reach the officer or the criminal investigator at the department, and encouraging the victim to use the number to report additional information about the incident or to request information or assistance, by providing each victim with a business card containing the officer's name, case number and department telephone numbers;
 - d. Advising victims/witnesses to call 911 in an emergency or the police dispatch non-emergency number at 301-279-8000, 24 hours a day, for non-emergency response or referral regarding the current event or any subsequent events;
 - e. Directing victims or witnesses in crisis to the 24 hours crisis hotline at 240-777-4000 prior to clearing the call. The crisis center serves as a clearinghouse for a number of county victim services under the Department of Health and Human Services.

D. Victims/Witnesses Intimidation

1. Victims or witnesses who have been threatened or intimidated will be encouraged to report these incidents to the Department. A thorough investigation will be conducted by a uniformed officer or investigator. The officer or investigator will advise the victim/witness on the appropriate courses of action, including prevention measures and legal avenues of recourse.

2. Protection for victims/witnesses will be afforded to the extent reasonable and practical, consistent with the threat and department staffing levels. **Officers receiving a request for protection will notify their supervisor of the request.** The supervisor will then notify any Bureau Commander, who will determine the extent of protection that will be provided by the department or coordinate assistance by the Montgomery County Police Department.
3. Officers/Investigators are encouraged to place criminal charges for victim/witness intimidation after consultation with the State's Attorney utilizing Criminal Law 9-803 and Criminal Law 9-802 (Gang Intimidation).

E. Follow-up

1. Lack of information about case status is one of the greatest sources of dissatisfaction among victims of crime and victims' survivors. Therefore, investigators assigned to criminal investigations shall make routine victim callbacks in order to determine whether the victim has new information concerning the case, to ascertain whether the victim is in need of assistance from outside sources or the department, and to relay information relating to such matters as:
 - a. The status of stolen, recovered or removed property;
 - b. The arrest and detention of suspects, and their pretrial release status;
 - c. The victim's possible eligibility for victim compensation;
 - d. Court restraining orders;
 - e. Court proceedings and schedules; and
 - f. Police procedures and the criminal justice system.
2. Investigators will provide victims/witnesses with the State's Attorney's Office VINE (Victim Information and Notification Everyday) Program's toll-free number - 1-866-634-8463, to track their case or obtain additional information regarding the arrest and custody status of offenders.
3. The State's Attorney's Office also has victim/witness coordinators that work closely post-arrest. Investigators should refer victims and witnesses to the State's Attorney's Office post-arrest.

4. The Investigative Section will schedule line-ups, photo-arrays, interviews, and other required appearances at the convenience of the victim/witness, whenever possible, and provide transportation as required.

F. Coordination with the Montgomery County Police Victim/Witness Assistance Section

1. This department works in collaboration with our partners in the Montgomery County Police Department, who share concurrent jurisdiction within the boundaries of the City of Gaithersburg.
2. The Montgomery County Police provide a structured victim/witness assistance program, administered through their Major Crimes Division.
3. Victims and witnesses of crimes within the Gaithersburg city limits receive assistance through this outreach program. The program is designed to compliment the services already being rendered by first responders and other agencies.
4. Montgomery County Police Victim/Witness assistants serve as liaisons between victims and the police, facilitating communication and easing demands of sworn officers by handling routine inquiries and requests.

G. Contacting Montgomery County Police Victim/Witness Assistants

1. Victim/Witness Assistants can be reached at their respective District Station during regular office hours. After hours and on weekends, a message can be left for an assistant who will make contact during regular business hours. The phone number for the MCP Montgomery Village (6th) District is 240-773-5700.

H. Informing the Public and Media About Police Victim/Witness Assistance Services

1. The agency publicizes the assistance and services provided to victims and witnesses through press releases, local media articles and on-going notices on the agency's web site (www.gaithersburgmd.gov).
2. The Department makes available victim/witness information on a 24-hour basis, via a single point of contact, the Department's main phone number (301/258-6400) and web site (www.gaithersburgmd.gov).

- a. When a citizen calls the Department's main number during normal business hours (0800-2100) administrative staff answer the incoming lines and will provide appropriate assistance or referral.
- b. After normal business hours (2100-0800 hours), the main number contains a recording in English and Spanish that refers victims and witnesses to the PSCC.

I. Documented Review of Victim/Witness Assistance Needs

1. At least every three years, the Montgomery County Police Department's Victim Assistance Unit provides a documented review and analysis of victim/witness needs and services in the community.
2. The document is reviewed and approved through the Office of Legislative Oversight of the Montgomery County Government. This document includes reviews of the Gaithersburg Police Department service area.
3. Copies of the document are provided as a resource for all employees at the front desk, in the police operations area and in the Community Services office.