

Line-of-Duty Serious Injury

April 2020

The IACP Law Enforcement Policy Center creates four types of documents: Model Policy, Considerations, Concepts & Issues Paper, and Need to Know one-page summaries. Typically, for each topic, either a Model Policy or a Considerations document is created, supplemented with a Concepts & Issues Paper. This file contains the following documents:

- *Considerations*: Offered as an alternative to the bright-line directives found in a Model Policy. Instead of providing exact policy language, the Considerations document outlines items that agencies should address and provides options that agencies should examine when developing their own policies on the topic.
- *Concepts and Issues Paper*: Designed to provide context and background information to support the Model Policy or Considerations document for a deeper understanding of the topic.



Considerations Document

Updated: April 2020

Line-of-Duty Serious Injury

I. PURPOSE

This document is intended to provide agencies with items for consideration when developing their policies and procedures for response to the serious injury of an officer in the line of duty and to direct the agency in providing support to the officer and their family.¹ While these procedures are specific to line-of-duty injuries, they may also apply to situations where the officer is not acting in their official capacity.²

II. POLICY

Agencies should develop a policy statement that briefly and concisely explains to agency personnel and the public the agency's policy on response to line-of-duty serious injury.

Sample: It is the policy of this agency to provide assistance to an officer and their immediate family who is seriously injured in the line of duty and to provide them with support during this traumatic period of readjustment.

III. DEFINITIONS³

Injury Benefits: Any work-related benefits that can help the injured officer including sick and vacation leave; short-term and long-term disability coverage; worker's compensation; and disability benefits.⁴ It does not include support from nonprofits, individual fundraisers, or other forms of support.

Line-of-Duty Injury: The injury of an officer by intentional or accidental means during the course of performing law enforcement functions while on- or off-duty.

Serious Injury: Injury that involves a substantial risk of death, protracted and obvious disfigurement, or extended loss or impairment of the function of a body part or organ.

¹ The term "officer" is used throughout this document. However, agencies should consider whether sworn, civilian, or reserve officers, volunteers, interns, cadets, explorers, or any individual engaged in agency-sponsored mentoring activities should be included.

² Agencies may wish to limit discussion to serious injuries, which may be defined as any injury requiring admission to a medical facility immediately following the incident and resulting in the officer needing an extended leave of absence. While this document, as a whole, specifically addresses serious injuries as defined, agencies should be aware that some procedures described herein may apply to injuries that do not meet the definition of "serious." In these instances, the officer may require extensive medical treatment and an extended leave of absence without initial admission to a medical facility or the need for such actions as notification and transportation of next of kin. Agencies should be prepared to ensure these officers receive services such as those provided by the benefits coordinator and family support advocate.

³ In the United States, some responses to line-of-duty injury, including serious and recurring injuries, may be governed by workers compensation and controlled by a third-party administrator.

⁴ In the United States, this may also include Family Medical Leave Act support and Public Safety Officers' Benefits (PSOB) from the Bureau of Justice Assistance.

IV. PROCEDURES

A. Initial Injury Notification

When possible, injured officers should make their own emergency notifications. In the event that an officer is unable to do so, agency policy should address the following:

1. *Which agency personnel should be notified immediately and by whom?* For instance, the commanding officer on duty at the time of the injury may be required to notify the agency's chief executive.
2. *When should the emergency contact and family be notified?* Due to the impact of social media, notifications should be made as soon as possible. Delaying the notification for the command staff or chief executive should be avoided whenever practical.
3. *Who should notify the emergency contact and family?* This may include
 - a. the injured officer or the officer's designee, if possible;
 - b. the chief executive or their designee;
 - c. a member of the agency with personal knowledge of the injured officer and their family; and
 - d. a chaplain, crisis intervention specialist, victim advocate, or other support personnel.
4. *Who should be notified?* Each agency should consider prioritizing the order in which notifications occur.
 - a. Command staff;
 - b. Individuals noted on the officer's emergency notification form, if available; agencies should require officers to update their emergency notification forms on a regular basis and ensure that these forms are available should a line-of-duty injury occur. These individuals may include
 - Family members;
 - Other personnel such as municipal or parent agency executives and elected officials;
 - c. Agency personnel—civilian, sworn, and retired
5. *What are the specific procedures that notifying officials should follow?* This may include the following:
 - a. Requiring at least two notifying officials to be present, keeping in mind not to overwhelm the family with too many individuals;
 - b. Ensuring notifying officials have familiarized themselves with essential details concerning the injured officer, to include
 - basic demographics such as full name, age, and race;
 - home address;
 - details of the injury; and
 - location of the injured officer and personal effects;
 - c. Determining if any family are children, elderly, disabled, visually or hearing impaired, have medical problems, or have limited English proficiency and preparing appropriate response to these individuals, to include addressing child/dependent care needs;
 - d. Summoning emergency medical services personnel if there are any health concerns;⁵
 - e. Identifying steps to take upon arrival at the notification location, to include
 - identifying the notifying officials by name, rank, and agency affiliation;
 - asking permission to enter the location;
 - requesting to speak with the family; and
 - verifying the relationship of the family to the injured officer;

⁵ Agencies may elect to summon emergency medical services personnel in all notification situations.

- f. Providing guidance on how notifying officials should deliver the news to the family, to include suggested language;
 - g. Ensuring that notifying officials do not leave solitary family members unattended and providing for transportation, where necessary, to include determining if there are any child/dependent care needs;
 - h. Furnishing the family with contact information for various agency personnel who will assist them in the future.
6. *Regarding the initial notification, what if the next of kin and/or family are located outside of the jurisdiction or outside of the area where it is reasonable to serve notice?*
- a. Consider working with an outside law enforcement agency if location and/or distance precludes agency officials from serving notice or if specifically requested by next of kin or family.
 - b. In-person notifications are ideal and should be conducted whenever possible; however, notification should be conducted in a timely manner.
 - c. Consider developing procedures for conducting injury notifications on behalf of other law enforcement agencies.
 - d. Consider appropriate documentation of the notification.
7. Agency policy should indicate whether formal documentation of injury notifications is required. Some forms of documentation may include the following:
- a. Completed task sheet or checklist
 - b. Formal written report.

B. Agency Personnel Assignments

When developing their policies related to line-of-duty injuries, agencies may choose to designate an individual or several individuals who will be responsible for coordinating the various aspects of the agency's response to a line-of-duty injury. This may be in the form of an incident command system to include establishing positions such as an agency liaison, public information officer (PIO), benefits coordinator, and family support advocate.

C. Hospital Response (agency liaison/officer and family support advocate assignment)

In situations where the officer is taken to a medical facility, there may be an influx of individuals. Agencies should assist officers in making arrangements for family and coordinating with the hospital. When developing policy, agencies should also prepare for the possibility that injured officers may be incapable of making such arrangements. Depending on the condition of the officer, some or all the following items should be addressed.

1. Making arrangements for the family, to include the following:
 - Waiting facilities
 - Security
 - Receipt of medical information
 - Access to the injured officer, in accordance with hospital policy
 - Privacy, such as from the media and other individuals who have not been approved by the family.
2. Designating a separate staging area for the media, to include involvement of the agency's PIO
3. Identifying a location for others, such as coworkers and family friends, to gather that will not interfere with the family or medical personnel
4. Ensuring hospital personnel have the necessary information regarding billing for medical services, such as instructions for forwarding all medical bills to the appropriate agency authority
5. Obtaining the personal effects of the injured for return to the family
6. Arranging transportation for the family upon their departure from the hospital and establishing a means of egress from the facility where the media and other observers are not present

7. Ensuring family members are provided with reassurance and receive any necessary assistance, such as that related to the care of children or elderly persons
8. Designating agency personnel who are responsible for ensuring that the preceding items are completed, which may include the individual who is designated as the agency liaison or family support advocate
9. Making arrangements for the next of kin and family to visit the injured officer if death is imminent, which may include offering to have an officer remain in the room until the officer dies, whether or not the family is on-site
10. Ensuring there is a plan for short-term and/or long-term support of the injured officer and family
11. Determining agency personnel who will provide support to the officer if they will be in the health care facility for longer than two weeks.

D. Release of Officer's Name

Agency policy should outline when the injured officer's name should be released to the media or other parties.

1. This decision should take the following concerns into account:
 - The injured officer's wishes, where applicable
 - The reality of social media and the ways in which information can be disseminated ahead of the agency's notification
 - Whether other officers can be requested to withhold information related to the injury until an official notification has been made and/or the media has been informed
 - That the injured officer and their family is informed that the name will be released prior to its release and that the extended family has been notified or reasonable attempts to notify have been made
 - Any concerns regarding release of information that may be related to or affect potential criminal investigations
2. Additional information that may be released includes
 - photographs;
 - employment history, such as years of service and rank; and
 - demographics, such as age and gender.

E. Post-Hospitalization Recovery and Support

Once the officer has been discharged from the hospital, they may require additional medical treatment. In response, the agency should do the following:

1. Coordinate between agency personnel, the officer, and family regarding discharge or transfer details. This may include media coverage, agency escorts, and continued family support.
2. Continue contact and support with the officer and family upon discharge or transfer to another health care facility.
3. Ensure information concerning the agency's behavioral health and wellness services, such as an employee assistance program, is provided to the injured officer and family members.
4. Ensure officers are informed and receive appropriate injury benefits, such as workers compensation, disability coverage, and disability benefits.
5. Ensure regular visitation of the officer by agency personnel.
6. Provide regular updates to the agency during the officer's recovery.
7. Monitor for any signs of depression, frustration, potential operational distress injuries (OSI), and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms that can lead to officer suicide.
8. Evaluate the need for the removal of agency property (e.g., vehicle) from the officer, and the possible impact of this change on an officer's depression or OSI/PTSD.

9. Communicate agency updates to the family, including messages of support.
10. Visit the officer if they must return to the hospital for another procedure.

F. Returning to Work

The chief executive or their designee should work with the injured officer, agency leadership, and the medical team to determine the officer's readiness to return to their previous duties or to assume light-duty status.⁶ If/when the officer is able to return to work, agencies should consider doing the following:

1. Reaching out to the media, with the support of the officer and family, to make the event a celebration.
2. Adopting a gradual reentry approach.
3. Checking in with the injured officer and family to see how the officer is adjusting for the first few weeks. If they are having problems, these should be addressed immediately.
4. Communicating any challenges if the officer is struggling to return to work or while at work to determine appropriate next steps, such as another role in the agency or medical retirement.
5. Checking in with the officer and the family on the anniversary of the incident or significant judicial events, such as a trial.

G. Medical Retirement

When addressing medical retirement, the agency should consider these actions:

1. Identifying who is authorized to make this determination
2. Outlining the legal and financial considerations of this option to the injured officer and their family⁷
3. Creating a plan with the officer and their family to help facilitate the transition into retirement, including injury benefits and opportunities available to the officer once the decision is made
4. Inviting the officer and their family to attend a retirement celebration, if they are amenable
5. Continuing invitations to agency events once the injured officer has retired, including, for instance, citizen's academies; employee engagement events, as appropriate; and community events with a large law enforcement presence.

H. Support for Coworkers and Their Family Members

Following a serious line-of-duty injury, agencies should be aware that other employees may exhibit frustration or resentment toward the dynamics surrounding the incident. Agencies should consider providing all officers and their family members with the opportunity to participate in behavioral health and wellness or peer support services through their employee assistance program or human resources function.

⁶ For more information, see the Policy Center documents on Temporary Light Duty available at <https://www.theiacp.org/resources/policy-center-resource/temporary-light-duty>.

⁷ In extreme cases, the agency can impose a medical retirement on an injured officer. However, this can have a negative impact on the injured officer, next of kin, family, agency, and community and should be exercised with caution.

Every effort has been made by the IACP Law Enforcement Policy Center staff and advisory board to ensure that this model policy incorporates the most current information and contemporary professional judgment on this issue. However, law enforcement administrators should be cautioned that no model policy can meet all the needs of any given law enforcement agency. In addition, the formulation of specific agency policies must take into account local political and community perspectives and customs, prerogatives, and demands; often divergent law enforcement strategies and philosophies; and the impact of varied agency resource capabilities, among other factors. Readers outside of the United States should note that, while this document promotes procedures reflective of a democratic society, its legal basis follows United States Supreme Court rulings and other federal laws and statutes. Law enforcement administrators should be cautioned that each law enforcement agency operates in a unique environment of court rulings, state laws, local ordinances, regulations, judicial and administrative decisions and collective bargaining agreements that must be considered, and should therefore consult its legal advisor before implementing any policy.

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Concepts & Issues Paper

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Line-of-Duty Serious Injury

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Purpose of the Document

This paper is designed to accompany the Considerations Document on Line-of-Duty Serious Injury established by the IACP Law Enforcement Policy Center. This paper provides essential background material and supporting documentation to provide a greater understanding of the developmental philosophy and implementation requirements for the Considerations Document. This material will be of value to law enforcement executives in their efforts to develop their own policies that meet the requirements and circumstances of their communities and their law enforcement agencies.

Much of the information provided herein applies to situations where the officer is seriously injured and is incapable of making decisions for themselves or their family. These procedures should be adjusted for situations where the officer is able to perform many of the tasks on their own.

B. Background

For many years, qualified mental health professionals (QMHPs) working with law enforcement agencies have recognized the emotional and psychological impact that can result in the aftermath of life-threatening, catastrophic events including officer injuries. Over the last several decades, however, this phenomenon has been brought to wider public attention in large measure by the significant number of war veterans who have experienced adverse and sometimes severe emotional reactions to their wartime experiences.

While a serious injury of an officer in the line of duty is categorized as a traumatic incident, a minor injury can become more serious over time and can also cause these effects. The potentially traumatizing effects of specific circumstances depend greatly upon the dynamics of the situation and the experiences and mindset of the personnel involved. Operational stress injuries (OSI), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), or acute stress (AS) can be triggered after a serious injury and can itself become a serious injury if the officer is dealing with a significant emotional event as a result of their duties. This trauma can break through the individual's normal coping mechanisms and cause extreme psychological distress. Agencies should also recognize that personnel other than the injured officer may also be affected. Communications personnel, investigators, or other officers who were involved in the incident may also experience negative reactions. The purpose of this document is to outline ways in which law enforcement agencies can support injured officers while balancing the needs of the agency and community.

C. Line-of-Duty Injury Defined

For the purposes of this document, a line-of-duty injury is defined as the injury of an officer by intentional or accidental means during the course of performing law enforcement functions while on or off duty. A serious injury is any injury that involves a substantial risk of death, protracted and obvious disfigurement, or extended loss or impairment of the function of a body part or organ. Finally, a recurring injury is a recurrence or aggravation of any injury that a law enforcement officer has previously reported.

In some instances, though, an officer may sustain an injury that does not qualify as “serious,” but that requires extensive medical treatment and results in an inability to perform law enforcement duties for an extended period of time. In these situations, the full response from the law enforcement agency may be unnecessary. For instance, there may be no need to notify the family or hospital liaison, while the services of the benefits coordinator may be crucial. Therefore, agencies should be prepared to tailor their response to the individual officer’s situation and desires.

II. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Agencies should not wait until an injury occurs to develop policies and procedures or to identify available resources that will be necessary following a line-of-duty injury. Personnel should contact potential service providers and support groups before an injury occurs and establish relationships that can be implemented in cases of emergency.

The following are recommendations that incorporate many of the areas of concern that should be addressed by law enforcement administrators and should be adhered to in cases of injuries. It should be understood, however, that these recommendations must allow agency employees some degree of flexibility to provide for the needs and desires of the injured officer and their family. Whenever possible, the injured officer should be given the opportunity to make decisions. Individuals providing services and assistance to the injured officer and their family should be in a position to accommodate all reasonable wishes and desires. However, these individuals should recognize the limits of their responsibilities and authority and should not make promises they are not certain can be met.

A. Differences Between Line-of-Duty Injury and Line-of-Duty Death Protocols

The purpose of this document is not to minimize the severity and impact of a line-of-duty death, but to highlight the unique set of challenges facing the officer, family, and agency when a law enforcement officer is seriously injured in the line of duty. While an injury can lead to the death of an officer, this is not always the case, and law enforcement agencies should be prepared for both types of incidents. Many initial similarities in protocol exist between the two scenarios, but the most obvious and significant difference is that in line-of-duty injuries, the injured officer survives and may have to cope with these injuries for the rest of their lifetime.

As the injured officer works to recover from the initial injury, they may experience recurring physical injuries that require additional hospitalizations or rehabilitation. In addition, psychological challenges can arise during the recovery process, and may include uncertainty about the future, guilt over being injured, or frustration because their life has changed dramatically. All of these challenges can have a negative long-term impact.

For the seriously injured officer’s family, they may have “lost” a parent, son, or sister as they knew them—especially if that officer was the primary or sole income earner. The spouse may shift from a partner to a primary caregiver for the officer and children while trying to maintain the household income and a sense of normalcy. In the case of severe injuries including traumatic brain injury (TBI), the officer might experience radical mood swings, lethargy, mobility issues, and psychological problems that can lead to potentially destructive behavior. With all of these situations, a new family dynamic may evolve and could lead to negative outcomes including divorce, domestic violence, or suicide.

The agency also faces a challenge—how to continue to protect the community with a smaller force. While this could be a larger issue for smaller agencies, all agencies should be aware of the impact that a seriously injured officer can have on the morale of the remaining officers and the agency’s budget.

For all of these reasons, pre-planning is critical for an agency to be able to navigate this type of incident.

B. Emergency Notification Forms

Agencies should require that officers complete and/or update an emergency notification form on a regular, such as annual, basis. This form should include who should be contacted in the event that the officer is injured and preferred agency members whom the officer would prefer to conduct the notification in the event that the injured officer is unable to do so. This information should be kept in a secure location, but one that can be easily accessed in the event of an injury. For instance, the forms may be stored with the officer's unit, as opposed to the human resources function.

C. Initial Injury Notification

Agencies should provide officers with guidance regarding the notifications they should make in the event of any injury sustained in the line of duty, such as instructing them to immediately notify their supervisor and providing them with guidance on how best to inform family members. Agencies should also have procedures in place for making serious injury notifications if the injured officer is unable to do so.

Following a serious injury in which an officer is incapable of making notifications, the individuals listed on the officer's emergency notification form, if available, should be contacted. This notification should occur before the officer's name is released to the media. It is critical to make these notifications as soon as possible given the nature of social media and the 24-hour news cycle, where information can be posted, shared, and become viral in a matter of minutes. If the emergency contacts are not immediately available, every reasonable effort should be made to locate them and to inform them of the officer's condition and the circumstances surrounding their injury. In addition, the agency's command staff and other personnel, both sworn and civilian, should be notified in a timely manner.

Whenever possible, notifications should be made in person. However, time is of the essence when initially contacting the family of an officer who has been seriously injured. The family will want to get to the injured officer as quickly as possible, particularly if there is a significant possibility that the officer will die. In these cases, the notification should proceed with any appropriate personnel available and can be done via telephone instead of in-person. Every effort should be made to transport the family to the medical facility to reconnect with the injured officer as quickly as possible, particularly if death is imminent.

The notifying officials should familiarize themselves with the available facts relevant to the officer and their condition. These should include basic demographics, such as the officer's full name, age, and race; home address; details of the injury; and location of the officer. This information should be committed to memory before the notification, so the notifying officials will not be required to refer to notes. The names of family should also be memorized, together with any other information that would be of value to the task. Similarly, notifying officials should attempt to determine if any of the family are visually or hearing impaired or do not speak English and, if so, request the appropriate support resources. Prior to arriving, notifying officials should request additional assistance for the care of infants, small children, or elderly family members who will require attention while the other adult family members are taken to the hospital. Agencies may also wish to summon emergency medical personnel prior to conducting the notification in preparation for potential reactions that require medical assistance.

Where feasible, the actual notification should not be made on the doorstep, even though the family will normally suspect that there is a problem and may have immediate questions. The notifying officials should begin by identifying themselves by name, rank, and agency affiliation. They should then ask permission to enter the location, request to speak with the family member(s), and verify the relationship of the family member(s) to the injured officer. Once this information has been verified, the notifying officials should inform the family slowly and clearly of the situation.

In giving notification, officials should be as straightforward as possible about the condition of the officer and not make statements or use language that is ambiguous or gives false hope.

The predominant reaction will most likely be the urge to see the injured officer as quickly as possible, especially if death is possible. Hysteria, shock, fear, anger and rage, silence or stoicism, fainting, or screaming are also some of the more common reactions, but notifying officials should be prepared to respond to a range of reactions. Some family

members, especially those who may be in law enforcement themselves, may appear to be emotionless while gathering information about the officer's injury. Even those individuals who react with intense emotion will eventually begin to ask questions concerning the circumstances surrounding the officer's injury. In this situation, notifying officers may provide basic information in a straightforward and honest fashion but should avoid extensive explanations and graphic details of the incident. Such information can be provided, if necessary, at a later time, after a thorough investigation of the incident has been completed.

The notifying officials should be ready to immediately escort the family to the medical facility where the injured officer has been taken, especially if death is possible. Children should be transported, if practical, or arrangements for their care should be made prior to departing. In situations where the parents are not the next of kin, and when they are available in the immediate area, they should be notified simultaneously, if possible, and transportation arranged separately. Family should never be expected to drive themselves. If they adamantly insist otherwise and refuse to accept provided transportation, someone should accompany them in their vehicle, if possible. As soon as possible following the incident, the agency chief executive should meet with the family. This may be at their residence or the hospital.

An important part of the responsibility of the notification team is to evaluate the physical and emotional condition of the family. This begins with the first contact and does not end until the family members have been placed in the care of other officers, family members, or service providers. Notifying officials should be alert to verbal cues as well as nonverbal gestures or expressions that suggest when and how fast they should proceed with information.

When the family is located outside of the jurisdiction or outside of the area where it is reasonable to respond, the agency should consider working with the primary law enforcement agency in that jurisdiction to arrange for personal notification. Telephone notifications in these or other situations should not be performed unless there is no other reasonable alternative and time is of the essence. Agencies should consider developing specific procedures for conducting injury notifications on behalf of other law enforcement agencies in these situations.

Agency policy should indicate whether formal documentation of injury notifications is required. This may include completing a task sheet or checklist or developing a formal written report to be submitted by the notifying officials to the agency chief executive specifying the identity, time, and place of family members notified. If a notification is made by a law enforcement agency in another jurisdiction, agencies should consider obtaining verification as to who made contact, person contacted, and time of notification prior to the officer's name being released to the media.

D. Agency Coordination

The number of personnel required to properly coordinate the response of an agency to a line-of-duty serious injury will vary greatly depending upon the seriousness of the injury, the size of the agency, and the resources available. However, the nature of the tasks that should be addressed by any agency under these conditions remain relatively consistent. Smaller agencies may need to rely on a few individuals to perform a variety of tasks, while larger agencies may distribute responsibilities more widely.

The tasks and procedures that should be addressed should be preplanned and assigned to personnel thoroughly briefed on their responsibilities. All personnel having assignments related to a line-of-duty serious injury should remain in close communication with one another to ensure that procedural details are not overlooked. At least one individual—preferably someone who interacts directly with the officer and their family during initial notification or at the hospital—should be available to the family as a central point of contact. This individual should be prepared to remain as a focal point for officer and family assistance over an extended period of time following the initial injury.

At the same time, the agency should realize that the officer and family members will be focused on the officer's recovery and may initially not be concerned with the services, assistance, or benefits available to them. For this reason, information and offers of assistance should be reinforced at appropriate times to give officers and their family members additional opportunities to consider their needs as these needs can shift as the recovery process continues.

Online resources, such as those related to meal delivery, can be utilized to coordinate support for the family and keep people informed, but should be initiated only with the full support of the next of kin.

E. Hospital Liaison

In situations where the officer is taken to a medical facility, agencies should be prepared for an influx of individuals. Procedures should be developed for assisting officers in making arrangements for family and coordinating with the hospital and the media. Agencies should prepare for the possibility that injured officers may be incapable of making such arrangements or require assistance doing so. The best approach to accomplishing these objectives and for serving the immediate needs of the officer and their family at the hospital is to designate a hospital liaison. This individual should have the authority to designate necessary resources to accomplish these and related tasks efficiently and effectively.

Prior to a line-of-duty injury, agencies should identify medical facilities that may be involved and contact them directly. The procedures to be followed in the event of a serious injury and the corresponding roles and responsibilities of staff should be discussed and agreed upon by both parties in advance.

Preparations should be made at the hospital to receive the family members and to interact with the media in an orderly manner. First, a designated area should be identified, and security should be provided for the family in order to maintain their privacy. This area should allow family members to converse and meet with authorized individuals and medical personnel in relative privacy. The hospital liaison should ensure that medical staff meets with family members in a timely manner and provides them with all available information. Particular care should be taken that the family is the first to receive information on the officer's condition—never the media.

In addition to medical personnel, officers and family members may wish to allow close friends to be admitted to this designated area. This may include other officers in the agency who want to express their support, assistance, and condolences. The desires of the injured officer and the family should be followed in this as in other matters and communicated appropriately to all concerned agency personnel. If many members of the agency wish to come express their sympathy and respect for the officer and their family, the agency may consider designating a location for these individuals to congregate that will not interfere with family or medical personnel.

The injury of a law enforcement officer in the line of duty has the potential to be a major media event. As such, the agency should take all necessary steps in advance to protect the officer and their family members from unwanted media attention and the intrusion of curiosity seekers. To address this concern, the media should also be provided with a designated assembly area. The agency's public information officer (PIO) should be assigned as soon as possible to the media area and should serve as the agency's primary point of contact.

The hospital liaison should answer any questions from the hospital regarding the payment of medical care. The hospital should be instructed in precise and unequivocal terms that all matters related to the payment of hospital expenses should be addressed to the law enforcement agency—not to the family.

Finally, arrangements should be made to return all members of the immediate family to their homes. These individuals should not be left alone without adequately ensuring that they are capable of coping by themselves or within the context of their family unit. For example, friends, family, clergy, or social welfare personnel may have to be summoned to assist where the emotional stability of family members is in question and/or where assistance is needed to deal with small children or the elderly.

F. Release of the Officer's Name

When making the decision regarding when and how the officer's name should be officially released, agencies should keep in mind the reality of social media and the ways in which information can be disseminated ahead of an official notification. Due to the rapid spread of information in the digital age, agencies should strive to release accurate information about the injury as soon as possible. However, any official release of the name should occur only

after the immediate family has been notified and the extended family has been contacted or reasonable attempts to contact them have been made. The officer and their family should be informed that the officer's name will be released prior to its release.

In addition, other officers who are privy to this information should be requested to withhold any information related to the injury until an official notification has been made and/or the media has been notified. However, agencies may wish to consider allowing officers to contact their loved ones to assure them that they are unharmed but ask that conversations be limited to this information and not include details of the injury.

Agencies should also be aware of and factor into their decisions any concerns regarding release of information that may be related to or affect potential criminal investigations. However, additional information that generally may be released depending on collective bargaining agreements and/or jurisdictional requirements includes the officer's photograph; employment history, such as years of service and rank; other demographics, such as the officer's age and gender; and the prognosis and general seriousness of the injury with the consent of the officer and/or their family.

G. Agency Liaison

The agency liaison assigned to assist the officer and their family provides one of the most significant roles by serving as a bridge between the agency, the officer, and the family. For that reason, this individual should be chosen with the utmost care and should be in a command position or be delegated with enough authority to expedite the tasks of employing agency resources and assigning responsibilities.

As other officers are assigned to responsibilities in the event of a line-of-duty serious injury, the agency liaison should be well briefed on the role in advance. The individual should have at their disposal information regarding contact persons within the agency, as well as individuals, agencies, and others within the community that can be called upon for assistance. For example, some law enforcement agencies have succeeded in making arrangements with local lodging facilities to provide free services or services at greatly reduced prices for the families of officers killed in the line of duty and may be amenable to extending these benefits to families of severely injured officers. Civic and fraternal organizations may also provide rooms or halls for family gatherings, and church groups, restaurants, and catering services may be willing to provide food for the family.

The key to taking advantage of these and related services is preplanning. The agency liaison must contact potential service providers and support groups before a serious injury and establish relationships that can be implemented in cases of emergency. Officers and their families should also be informed of these relationships and benefits before an injury occurs. Utilizing these resources for an injured officer should be done thoughtfully, with an emphasis on helping those family members of critically injured officers so as not to take undue advantage of these offers. Law enforcement officers are an integral part of their communities, and community members and organizations are generally eager to express their ongoing support for the law enforcement agency in times of need.

The agency liaison should also be responsible for ensuring that several key tasks are performed. For example, the agency liaison should ensure there is a preestablished, agency-accessible fund to cover travel and/or lodging for visiting family members. Officers and families should be informed of this benefit before an injury occurs. When the benefit is offered to the family, the agency liaison should work closely with the injured officer and their family to best determine how to make travel arrangements, with input from the officer's next of kin. While many major airline carriers provide significant discounts for bereavement travel, these typically are not applicable to travel to be with injured family members and could present a hardship for some. Whenever a local hotel has offered to provide special discounts to family members in these situations, the liaison should make the initial contact with the designated hotel representative, explain the circumstances, and ensure that appropriate accommodations can and will be secured. This should be used in cases of seriously injured officers and should not be abused.

An additional responsibility of the agency liaison is to coordinate all official law enforcement agency notifications, particularly if the officer needs to continue medical care outside of their hometown, in which case the agency liaison may need to reach out directly to agencies in the new facility's area in order to request support.

A record should be kept of all outreach and offers of assistance from other law enforcement agencies, as well as any messages of support that are received. A copy of these records should be kept for official agency acknowledgment at an appropriate time, most likely when the officer is discharged from the out-of-town facility. Additionally, a list of those agencies who are willing to help and copies of official messages of support should be kept for the officer and their family.

After a period of time following the initial serious injury, the family may want to piece together all of the details surrounding the manner in which the officer was injured. In most cases, it is inappropriate to discuss such details with family members who are initially in shock and attempting to cope with the immediate aftermath of the serious injury. In some cases, particularly during internal investigations of the incident, agency employees may be required to maintain the confidentiality of all or a large part of this information. Once the initial shock has passed, the officer and their family members may want to know all of the details surrounding the injury. The agency should release as much of this information as early as possible following the incident. If information of a sensitive nature cannot be released due to court proceedings or for internal investigative reasons, this should be explained to the officer and their family.

H. Media

Responsibilities regarding contact with the media should be assumed by the agency's existing PIO. The PIO should be prepared to work closely with the family to assist them in handling media inquiries. In many cases, media representatives will make every effort to interview the officer or their family members irrespective of inappropriate timing or the impact upon the family. The individual assigned to this duty should make it clear to all media representatives that they are the official point of contact for media inquiries and any interviews with the officer or their family members that may be granted. They should coordinate efforts with any spokesperson at the hospital or others who wish to release information on the condition of the officer or the circumstances surrounding the injury to ensure that consistent and appropriate information is released. They should also inform the officer and their family of the limitations on what they should say to the media so as not to inhibit or prejudice any investigation or fact-finding efforts surrounding the incident. If the officer or their family members wish to make a statement, the PIO should assist them in this regard and prepare them for potential inquiries from media representatives.

The PIO should be responsible for preparing and disseminating the official agency bulletin regarding the officer's injury. The bulletin should provide the name of the injured officer, date and time of injury, a summary of the incident, the officer's duty assignment, current prognosis and duty status, and contact information for additional inquiries.

Following a line-of-duty serious injury, the officer and their family can become a target of curiosity within the community and elsewhere. The PIO should assess the potential for criminal activity against the officer and their family based on the incident and work with the agency to reasonably secure the injured officer's primary residence while the officer is in the hospital or after being transferred to an out-of-town facility. The assessment should also include any personal threats against the officer or their family as a result of the incident. If the threat is substantial, the agency should identify a safe place for the family until the threat can be neutralized. To protect family members against annoying inquiries, pranksters, opportunists, and the like, as well as to identify legitimate sources of concern and support, the PIO should also encourage the officer and their family to allow an agency representative or willing family relation to screen their calls.

I. Benefits Coordinator

The agency should centralize responsibility for the coordination of health, welfare, and disability benefits. Normally, this responsibility is assigned to an employee who has experience in handling personnel-related issues, but another individual who has sound experience in this field may be assigned.

A law enforcement agency should not wait until a line-of-duty injury occurs to determine the scope of the officer's family disability benefits or whether the family's health insurance would be terminated if the officer goes on extended leave or has to medically retire. Officers and their family members should never be placed in a position where they are forced to discover or research their entitlement for themselves. This information should be available and presented to the officer and their family by the benefits coordinator at the appropriate time in a clear and definitive manner. Moreover, agency policy should ensure that all officers and civilian personnel receive appropriate information and training on benefits and entitlements available to them so that they may make informed decisions in this and related matters. Personnel should also be encouraged and given periodic opportunities to review their benefit packages and to make appropriate and timely changes in terms of beneficiaries, coverage, and related matters.

The benefits coordinator should also understand the procedures and paperwork requirements needed to initiate benefit payments and services and prepare and file all necessary paperwork related to benefits on behalf of the officer and/or their family members, to include workers' compensations claims. Assistance should be provided to ensure that appropriate procedures have been followed, and the coordinator should maintain close contact with the officer and/or their family members to confirm that benefits are received in a timely fashion. The benefits coordinator should complete paperwork requirements whenever possible and discuss these and related matters with the officer and/or their family when the papers are filed. The coordinator should always be sure of the specifics of the benefits that the officer and/or family will receive and should never make assurances to the officer and/or family that cannot be confirmed. In addition, the benefits coordinator should maintain regular contact with the survivors and provide information regarding the

- benefits processes, including reasons for any delays,
- current status of any claims,
- nature and amount of benefits that may be received by each individual,
- schedule of payments,
- names and contact information of individuals at each benefit or payment office, and
- appeals process, if necessary.

Their family may feel that an injury is totally disabling; however, determining organizations may reject the claim in a process that can be frustrating. While there are opportunities to appeal any rejections, the officer and/or their family may want to engage legal counsel before continuing.

If the officer and/or family is not eligible to receive a benefit that is expected or desired, the basis for the ineligibility should be explained in detail. The coordinator should also inform the officer and/or family of the tax status of the monies that are received, if that information is available and verifiable. They should also recommend the use of professional tax preparation, as the incident will be a complex financial matter.

As an aspect of contingency planning for a line-of-duty serious injury, law enforcement agencies should review their benefits packages with a view toward their unexpected impact upon the injured officer and family members. For example, written procedures should clearly specify the eligibility of the family to utilize the officer's sick leave, annual leave, and compensatory time before initiating short- and/or long-term disability. Every effort should be made to keep the officer and family on the officer's health insurance following their serious injury.

The agency should also designate an individual to be responsible for documenting inquiries and interest and establishing a mechanism for receipt of public donations. However, legal counsel should be consulted to determine if there are any legal or ethical concerns in this area. Once the incident is made public, individuals or groups may wish to start fundraising campaigns to help the officer and/or their family with the medical bills and ongoing treatment through websites or benefits hosted by local businesses. While these webpages and events can provide tremendous financial support for the officer and their family, the potential exists for individuals to take advantage of the situation by creating fundraising pages where the proceeds never reach the officer or their family. To cut down on potential fraud, the benefits coordinator should contact the local police foundation, benevolent society, or union prior to a line-

of-duty injury to determine if any of these organizations have a process to help fundraise for an individual officer. In the United States, for example, by partnering with a reputable local organization that is also a registered nonprofit, donations may be tax deductible and donors can be confident that their contribution is going to the officer and family. If a friend of the family wishes to set up an online fundraising page or events, the benefits coordinator should follow up with the officer and/or family to verify the validity of such opportunities before publicizing the information. The officer and/or family should always make the final determination on whether any fundraising pages or events should be created or promoted.

J. Family Support Advocate

The law enforcement agency's responsibilities to the injured officer and their family can last for many years; it is important that the agency have a plan to determine what help can be offered throughout the various stages of the injured officer's lifetime. The family may also need support services to assist them in coping with the emotional impact and related life changes that can be a result of the injury. Continued involvement in the aftermath of the injury may assist the officer and their family in coping and potentially offset additional trauma.

The individual assigned to provide ongoing officer and family support may be the same individual who has worked with the family in liaison capacities throughout the process. This approach is advisable because it provides the officer and their family with a continuity of assistance and does not require familiarization with and by another individual. In other instances, the agency may wish to assign an employee who has the appropriate training or demonstrated ability to provide this type of crisis intervention and advocacy service.

There are a number of specific services that the family support advocate should provide. For example, if the officer's injury involved criminal activity, the officer and family should be kept abreast of the criminal investigation, hearings, and related proceedings. The injured officer may be needed to testify. The family support advocate should remain informed of the progress of the investigation and share any available information with the officer and family.

Contact should not be terminated once the investigation and legal proceedings are finalized. The officer and family should be informed of the dates of any parole hearings if they occur in the future, and the family support advocate should assist the officer and family in attending and making statements at these and other hearings if permitted and interested in doing so.

The support advocate should be willing to listen to the concerns and feelings of the officer and their family members, particularly if they are struggling with next steps. The willingness of the family support advocate to simply talk with the officer and their family and act as a sounding board for their feelings and concerns is critical. The family support advocate should not be afraid to speak one-on-one with the family away from the injured officer in order to understand the challenges during the recovery process. This purging of emotions is important to help the family to work through and eventually accept the new reality that the injury has brought to their lives.

However, family support advocates must understand the limitations of their capabilities. Family members may demonstrate unusual emotional reactions to the officer's serious injury, such as frustration at the situation or even the officer, or extreme and prolonged depression that make them unable to cope with the situation, both of which can be very destructive to the family unit if allowed to continue. The family support advocate should know the signs of emotional maladjustment that require professional assistance and should be prepared to refer the officer or family members to, or seek professional help for, such individuals. As such, the family support advocate should have a complete knowledge of these and other community services available that can be brought to bear on family or individual problems.

K. Post-Hospitalization Recovery and Support

The impact of an officer's injury may continue long beyond the initial event and hospitalization. Depending upon the severity of the injury, the officer may face new challenges such as a lifetime of long-term care, the end of a much

beloved career, or a radical shift in family structure. This can bring up feelings of abandonment, frustration, anger, and guilt.

After the initial hospitalization, the injured officer may be transferred to a rehabilitation facility, a long-term care facility, another hospital, or released home. While leaving the first hospital is a cause for celebration for the officer and family, it could be the start of a long road to recovery—and the agency support team should remain engaged with the officer and family to support them through this next stage. With any transfer, the agency liaison should offer to coordinate with the family regarding an honor guard for the officer as they leave the hospital and move to the next location. In this instance, the wishes of the officer and family should be honored above the wishes of the agency.

Many families of injured officers may be unsure how to move forward in their lives after the injury. With severe injuries, the injured officer and their immediate and extended family may face challenges and hurdles, including the potential financial stresses of ongoing medical bills or a reduced salary. The family support advocate can be a critical link to helping not only the adults but also the children work through some of these challenges and feelings. Agencies should be mindful of law enforcement families and the impact the injury may have upon them and provide resources such as behavioral health and wellness or peer support services.

The family support advocate should work with the officer and the family to evaluate the reality of the situation and work toward a resolution. If at any time the injured officer begins to exhibit signs of being a danger to themselves or other family members, the family support advocate should immediately reach out to a QMHP to provide support and assistance, while working to ensure that the officer and family members are safe.

If the injured officer is transferred to a medical facility out of town, the agency liaison should work with the family to provide an escort to the transportation location, again having the wishes of the family take priority over those of the agency. The agency liaison should also reach out to local law enforcement agencies, police foundations, and/or unions in the new city to identify a support person who can help ensure that the injured officer and family are well received in the new community and provide feedback to the home agency, particularly if the location is distant. The home agency support team should continue to check in with the officer and family on a regular basis to continue to provide support.

The agency support team should work together to gauge the sentiment of the agency's current officers and leadership in regard to the continued absence of the injured officer while also working with the officer and family. This can help minimize potentially negative perceptions of the injured officer while creating an understanding of the challenges facing all parties. The family support advocate should also encourage others in the agency to let the officer and their family know that they are thinking about them.

The family support advocate serves as a critical link in this process with the law enforcement agency and should be permitted to continue providing service to the officer and family for as long as it is needed. The agency should continue to invite the officer and family to agency functions, such as award ceremonies, graduations, retirement dinners, and the like, until notified that they are no longer interested in attending. There may be a point in which the officer, spouse, or other members of the family will be interested in sharing their experience with others during in-service training, or to testify on behalf of new legislation (such as use of seat belts or soft body armor), or in other relevant contexts in an effort to help others. If so, these individuals can serve as a significant resource to the agency and should be permitted to become involved, if at all possible.

Long-term support for an injured officer can be difficult for an agency. Personnel are promoted or leave the agency. Other incidents take priority. This can cause the injured officer to feel less connected to the agency. On the other hand, the officer and family may sever all contact with the agency or may leave the area in order to put the incident behind them or to escape painful memories.

The agency chief executive should ensure that an agency liaison, preferably one who worked with the injured officer, remains in contact with the family.

L. Response of Other Personnel to Injury

In addition to directly assisting the officer and family, law enforcement agencies should recognize the impact of the injury on other agency personnel. The serious injury of an officer in the line of duty can be traumatic to coworkers, particularly if they were on the scene or otherwise immediately involved in the incident and can have long-lasting impacts on the agency. While most officers do not dwell upon the possibility of becoming seriously injured in the line of duty, they are confronted with the reality that it may happen to them—and the effect it would have on themselves and their families. The care with which the agency deals with an injured officer and their family concretely demonstrates the agency's concern for all its officers and reassures them that their families would be given the same consideration under similar circumstances.

Agencies should consider providing all officers and their family members with the opportunity to participate in behavioral health and wellness or peer support services through their employee assistance program or human resources function.

M. Returning to Work

For many officers injured in the line of duty, the ultimate goal is to return to their previous role. Unfortunately, this might not be a reality for some, particularly those who have been critically injured. The agency team should work with the officer and family to determine the possibility of returning to work based on input from the medical team, including physicians, QMHPs, the officer, family, agency, and disability reviewers. This decision should not be taken lightly, but legal requirements may require it happen within one calendar year of the accident.

A temporary duty status can be a good way for the injured officer to ease back into the agency. This allows the officer and agency to determine how well the transition will occur before putting the officer back in their former role.¹

It is recommended that for the first year, the agency support team work closely with the injured officer and family to monitor progress and ensure that all parties are adjusting well. This is particularly critical with the spouse and children of the injured officer who may feel isolated and anxious about the officer returning to what can be a dangerous profession. This anxiety at home can have an adverse effect on the injured officer who may need to constantly reassure and justify the decision to return to work, which can lead to increased stress.

N. Medical Retirement

The decision to retire early can significantly impact the injured officer. Some injured officers may be able to transition into a new career, either with the agency or elsewhere. For others, this decision is the end of their work life. The agency support team should be aware of potential pitfalls and be ready to assist the officer and family as needed.

If the family support advocate feels that the transition is not going well, the advocate should reach out to the officer, family, and agency chief executive individually to gauge their perception. If all individually agree it is not going well, then the advocate shall determine the most productive next steps while advocating that the decision be driven by the officer and family. While the officer should not feel pushed out of the agency, the advocate can highlight options including medical retirement to the officer and family in order to assist them in making a sound decision.

The benefits coordinator should determine what benefits are available to the injured officer upon retirement and work closely with the family support advocate to provide assistance. The agency liaison should work with the family to determine how best to mark the officer's retirement, including a potential celebration at headquarters. Again, the wishes of the officer and family in relation to this event should take precedence over the wishes of the agency.

¹ See the IACP Policy Center documents on Temporary Duty Assignments available at <https://www.theiacp.org/resources/policy-center-resource/temporary-light-duty>.

O. Officer Injuries Outside the Line of Duty

This paper addresses the law enforcement agency's response to serious injuries that occur in the line of duty; the agency should also develop a policy to clearly articulate response to injuries that occur outside the line of duty. Such a policy can clarify how to determine whether an injury occurred in the line of duty or not, as well as response procedures. Such a policy can help officers and their families have a clear idea of what to expect in the event of an injury.

An agency should emphasize the significance of these as opposed to serious injuries outside the line of duty, given the direct link to community service and the tremendous sacrifice of the officer. However, not all line-of-duty serious injuries involve heroism, acts of bravery, or courage. Some are the result of accidents in which the officer played no part, while others may be the result of negligence on behalf of the officer or a fellow officer.

The issue that some law enforcement agencies have struggled with is whether all serious line-of-duty injuries should be treated equally on a procedural basis. The manner in which an officer is seriously injured and/or the definition of line of duty may be of value to the agency. However, such distinctions may be meaningless when considering the impact on the officer and needs of the officer's family. These individuals must face a new reality and need the types of assistance outlined in this paper, irrespective of the manner of serious injury. Agencies should provide the family of an injured officer with the same courtesies and benefits if the circumstances or outcome of the injury vary. For example, the foregoing holds true for officers who have short- or long-term mental health incapacitation, or for officer suicides following a serious injury.

APPENDIX A: UNITED STATES BENEFITS

In the United States, injured officers may qualify for social security benefits if they are deemed disabled; the federal government may provide benefits to those who have a disability. The Social Security Administration (SSA) offers disability benefits based on the claimant's inability to work. Their definition of what qualifies as a disability is strict: the claimant cannot do work that they did before; cannot adjust to other work because of a medical condition(s); and the disability must last or be expected to last at least one year or result in death.¹ United States law enforcement officers may also be eligible to receive monetary compensation from the Bureau of Justice Assistance Public Safety Officers' Benefits (PSOB) program. The PSOB provides a one-time benefit to eligible public safety officers who are killed or permanently and totally disabled as a result of a catastrophic injury sustained in the line of duty. Their definition of what qualifies as a disability is stringent: "A public safety officer is considered to be totally disabled for the purposes of PSOB eligibility if given the current state of medicine in the United States, there is a degree of medical certainty that the officer is unable to perform any gainful work."² The benefits coordinator should be familiar with the specific documents that must be filed in order for the officer and the officer's family to be considered for the PSOB benefit.³

State and local governments have individual definitions of disability; the law enforcement agency's benefits coordinator should work with the appropriate government agencies to identify the applicable criteria.

In terms of federal disability nondiscrimination laws, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) defines an individual with a disability as "a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such an impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment."⁴ While the ADA covers a wide range of impairments, it cannot assist injured officers in receiving monetary benefits. However, ADA protections can be helpful if the officer is still able to work despite the injury, as they can ensure that accommodations are made.

¹ Social Security Administration, "Benefits Planner: Disability – How We Decide If You Are Disabled," <https://www.ssa.gov/planners/disability/qualify.html#anchor3>.

² Scott D. Szymendera, *Public Safety Officers' Benefits (PSOB) and Public Safety Officers' Educational Assistance (PSOEA) Programs* (Congressional Research Service, February 1, 2019), 6, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R45327.pdf>.

³ For more information, please visit the PSOB website at <https://psob.bja.ojp.gov/benefits/>.

⁴ ADA website (<https://www.ada.gov/cguide.htm#anchor62335>)

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