



**SPRINGFIELD TOWNSHIP POLICE DEPARTMENT**  
**Wyndmoor, Pennsylvania**

**Policy 4-05**

**Policy Title:** Victim and Witness Assistance

**Date of Issue:** December 1, 2022

**Rescinds:** None

**By Authority of:**

**Chief of Police**

**I. Purpose**

The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines for members of the Springfield Township Police Department when providing assistance to victims of crimes.

**II. Policy**

It is the policy of the Springfield Township Police Department that all members shall treat victims and witnesses of crimes with fairness, compassion, and dignity. Members shall comply with the procedures established by the Pennsylvania Crime Victims Act (18 P.S. 11.101 et. seq.) for local law enforcement agencies, and the procedures outlined in this policy.

**III. Victim / Witness Rights**

- A. All members of the police department are responsible for the courteous treatment of victims and witnesses; this responsibility cannot be delegated to other agencies. The department is committed to the development, implementation, and continuation of appropriate victim / witness assistance programs and activities.
- B. When interacting with victims / witnesses of a crime, protect them from further injury.
- C. Attempt to strengthen the cooperation between the victim / witness and the police department to enhance the willingness of the victim to assist in the prosecution of criminal offenders.
- D. Chapter 49, Subchapter B of the Pennsylvania Crimes Code outlines procedures to help ensure that victims and witnesses are free from intimidation.

- E. Statutory provisions require that officers shall provide basic information on the rights and services available to victims / witnesses in instances of personal injury crime, arson, burglary, or domestic violence. This information shall be provided within the first 24 hours of the officer's first contact with the victim / witness and is contained in the PCCD booklet entitled "Help For Victims of Crime." The "Receipt of Information" form located at the back of the booklet shall be completed by the officer and should be signed by the victim. This completed form shall be attached to the incident report. The following information is contained in the booklet:
1. Pennsylvania Victim Bill of Rights
  2. Victim's Responsibility
  3. Crime Victims Compensation Program
  4. Domestic Violence Victims Rights
  5. Agencies to Assist the Victim
- F. Officers shall, within 48 hours of the report of the incident, give notice to the victim or, if appropriate, a member of the victim's family, of the availability of crime victim's compensation. This notification is also contained in the PCCD booklet entitled "Help For Victims of Crime." An application form for crime victim's compensation shall also be provided with this notification.
- G. The department is required to make a reasonable effort to notify personal injury crime victims of a suspect's arrest, within 24 hours of the arrest. It is the responsibility of the investigating officer to make or arrange for notification to be made. The officer should answer any questions that the victim / witness may have and explain the remainder of the process. A supplement report shall then be completed indicating who was notified, the date and time of this required notification or, in the event that no notification can be made, the report shall reflect all information concerning the attempts at making this notification, to include the times, dates, and locations of the attempted notification.
- H. In the event of an escape of a suspect, the department is required to notify personal injury crime victims of the escape. A supplement report shall then be completed indicating who was notified, the date and time of this required notification or, in the event that no notification can be made, the report shall reflect all information concerning the attempts at making this notification to include the times, dates, and locations of the attempted notification.
- I. Department policy regarding domestic violence provides additional information for victims of domestic violence.
- J. The department shall return the property of the victim / witness which has been seized as evidence upon the District Attorney's office determination that the evidence is no longer needed for prosecution.

- K. All information concerning the victim / witness shall remain confidential in accordance with all applicable laws.

#### **IV. Victim / Witness Assistance**

Although the department is a referral agency for victim / witness services, the information may be obtained from any police officer 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Officers will be dispatched accordingly by Montgomery County Emergency Dispatch Services (MCEDS) and provide appropriate referral information.

#### **V. Threats to a Victim / Witness**

- A. Members of the department will treat threats or a victim / witness concern of intimidation with sensitivity and concern and will provide appropriate assistance to victims / witnesses who have been threatened or who express specific, credible reasons for fearing intimidation or further victimization. Protective measures may be implemented to protect persons to whom there is a real and tangible danger of serious physical harm from an assailant. The specific level of danger of physical harm required to implement these affirmative protective measures will be determined by the best judgment of the responding officer, the investigating officer, or the supervisor. Protective measures may include the following:
  - 1. Officers notified and additional patrols in the area of the victim's neighborhood and home.
  - 2. Escorts or surveillance of the victim / witness.
  - 3. Investigation of suspicious persons in the area of the victim / witness home or business.
  - 4. Persuading the victim to take up a temporary residence at a relative's home or a hotel until additional action can be taken.
  - 5. Documentation of all reports of threats or intimidation in an incident report.
  - 6. Contacting other agencies, law enforcement or otherwise, for assistance.
  - 7. Others, as necessary.
- B. Whenever an officer becomes aware of a potential physical danger to a victim / witness who resides in another jurisdiction, the officer shall:
  - 1. Contact an officer in the other jurisdiction and advise them of the circumstances, requesting that reasonable precautions or measures be taken. Notification directly to a supervisor is preferred, if available.

2. Advise the investigating officer of the case of any additional information.
  3. Document the names of the persons who were advised at the outside agency and all pertinent information.
- C. Whenever a police officer becomes aware of a threat to any victim / witness, whether in or out of the jurisdiction of the Springfield Township Police, the officer shall attempt to advise the victim / witness of the circumstances and nature of the threat and will attempt to advise them of the alternatives available to deal with that threat.

## **VI. Preliminary Investigations**

- A. At the point of initial contact with the victim / witness of a crime, and after emergency assistance has been rendered, the initial responding officer shall render the following services in addition to normal investigative routines:
1. Give information to the victim / witness about applicable rights and services (Help For Victim of Crime Booklet) and encourage the victim to sign receipt of the form. This would include victims of personal injury crime, arson, burglary, and victims of domestic violence. If the victim is not available or deceased, the form may be provided to the parent or legal guardian of family member.
    - i. Personal injury crime is defined as an act, attempt, or threat to commit an act which would constitute a misdemeanor or felony relating to Criminal Homicide, Assault, Kidnapping, Sexual Offenses, Arson or Related Offenses, Robbery, Victim / Witness Intimidation, PFA Violations, and any vehicular or watercraft offenses involving death or personal injury.
  2. Advise the victim / witness about what to do if the suspect or the suspect's companions or family threaten or otherwise intimidates them.
  3. Inform the victim / witness of the case number (if known by the officer) and subsequent steps in the processing of the case.
  4. Provide the name and contact information for the investigating officer as well as contact numbers to use to report additional information about the case or to receive information about the status of the case.

## **VII. Follow-Up Investigations**

- A. If, in the opinion of the investigating officer, a supervisor, or the Chief of Police, the impact of a crime has been unusually severe upon a victim / witness and has triggered an above-average need for victim / witness assistance, the victim / witness should be contacted periodically to determine whether needs are being met and / or additional assistance is needed.

- B. The investigating officer shall explain to the victim / witness the procedures involved in the prosecution of their case and their role in these procedures. Caution shall be used to ensure that the successful prosecution of the case is not endangered.
- C. Scheduling line-ups, interviews, and other required appearances shall be at the convenience of the victim/ witness, whenever feasible. Factors that shall be considered in this scheduling include the physical, financial, and emotional well-being of the victim / witness. It may be necessary for the police department to provide transportation.
- D. The department shall return any property of the victim / witness which has been seized as evidence upon the District Attorney's office determination that the evidence is no longer needed for prosecution.
- E. Whenever there is a traumatic incident such as a rape, child abuse, sexual assault, or other incident which requires more than the average amount of victim / witness assistance, the victim / witness shall be advised of the services of a victim advocate to assist them during the follow-up investigation.

#### **VIII. Training**

- A. All officers and employees of the department shall be familiar with the requirements of Pennsylvania Crime Victims Act regarding crime victim's compensation (section 11.212).
- B. All newly-hired officers and employees of the department shall have the requirements of the Pennsylvania Crime Victims Act regarding crime victim's compensation (section 11.212) included in their trainee curriculum.

