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## Monterey County District Attorney's Funeral Protocol

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Funeral Protocol

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This capstone project was created with the support of The Monterey County District Attorney's Office to create a funeral protocol for investigators who lose their lives in the line of duty that best supports the needs of their families.

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## **Abstract**

### **Monterey County DA's Office Funeral Protocol**

The investigators working for the Monterey County DA's Office put their lives on the line protecting people in their community each and every day. Some of the high risks of this line of work often involve violent altercations involving individuals disobeying the law. Those risks may often involve severe injury or possibly death on the job. The Funeral Protocol is meant to provide full assistance to the families of the officers involved in these accidents. This project provided a set guidelines for the office to follow so that the families will not have to lift a finger in their times of grief. This protocol consists of a family liaison provided to help the family figure out the logistics in order to make the situation as easy as possible for the family. The heart of this capstone was to address the lack of assistance to investigators' families in emergency situations.

Keywords: *Protecting, Community, Assistance, Guidelines, Protocol*

## **Agency Description**

The Monterey County District Attorney's office serves the whole county of Monterey. Which consists of 435,232 people, of those people 49.1% are Women and 50.9% are men. The specific department that is implementing the protocol is the Investigations bureau. The mission of the department is to promote justice, ensure that the rights of victims are upheld by treating them with dignity, respect and compassion, and aggressively and fairly prosecuting those who violate the law, essentially protecting the people of Monterey County. The vision states, "We are committed to diversity and recognize the significant and valuable contributions to our Mission from our employees and the community we serve. Our vision is to enhance the quality of life in our community, to aggressively advocate the cause of justice, and seek to enhance the criminal justice system, ultimately protecting our community" (Monterey County, 2018).

The DA's office has a variety of branches and programs that work together to protect the community. One program that stands out in particular is the Victims Restitution Program. This program provides compensation to victims who have been involved in physical injury, or threat of physical injury or death. For certain crimes, emotional injury would qualify for the compensation. Ultimately, serving and protecting the County of Monterey in more ways than just prosecuting those who violate the law.

## **Problem**

When DA's office employees pass away, their families lack the support they need to fully recover from such a trauma.

## **Contributing Factors**

The DA's office does not have a set funeral protocol due to the fact that there hasn't been

a situation in which one was needed. According to the Officer Down Memorial Page, there hasn't been an officer related death within the agency since the founding of the Monterey County DA's office (Officer Down, 2018). The office does have a procedure manual describing the department personnel responsibility of handling the death of an employee. Since a situation like this has never occurred, they do not have a protocol to fully assist families of the victims in case of an emergency. At this point, if an officer were to pass away, the office would be lost in the sense of trying to help the families. They have no written structure, they would be scrambling all over trying to help the families as much as they can (J. Bradley, Personal Communication, 2018).

Officers are not killed in the line of duty on a regular basis in Monterey County. In fact, even as a nation, the rate amongst officer related deaths is 11.1 per 100,000, which is a death rate at about .01% (Bier, 2014). The agency has never needed to prepare for a line of duty death, hence the lack of protocol to support the families in their times of grievance.

### **Consequences**

The consequences of this problem is that with this lack of a support, may cause continued stress and mental health issues. Ryback from *Psychology Today* states, "Grief can deplete you to such an extent that the slightest tasks become monumental, and what previously was easily achievable now may seem insurmountable" (2017). If a death of a loved one does occur, and there is no protocol in place, the agency will not be able to support the families in the funeral planning process, leaving the family to do most of the planning during their most vulnerable state. If the planning of the funeral does fall into the hands of the family, it may cause other mental health issues such as depression or bereavement where the family is stuck in the state of mourning (Ryback, 2017).

Another consequence is that if the agency isn't able to give the family of the fallen officer the support they need, the family could feel a sense of abandonment. The Law Enforcement Agency Handbook states, "Failure to provide continued support for the surviving family gives them the impression that they have been 'totally abandoned' by the department"(1988). Insensitivity on the part of the administration and officers involved with the incident is a reason behind why a family might feel betrayed by the agency. The trauma any type of death inflicts on the family is devastating, regardless of the circumstances, which makes it that much more important for the office to be helping the family in their time of need.

Risk Factors	Problem/ Issue	Consequences
Little to no guidelines for how to provide support for the families of officers.  No line of duty deaths in the DA's office	When DA's office employees pass away, their families lack the support they need to fully recover from such a trauma	Continued trauma  Sense of abandonment

**DA's Office Funeral Protocol**

The funeral protocol is a set of guidelines to follow for the officers and workers of law enforcement who pass away on the job. The policy affects those who are employed at the office and pass away while not on the job. The purpose of this project was to provide assistance to the families of officers or employees who have passed away during their time working for the police force. This policy created steps that the agency can follow to where the family of the lost one don't have to lift a finger when it comes to having to deal with the planning of the funeral.

The Monterey County District Attorney's Funeral protocol was the implementation of a protocol for the office. The reason behind this project was to provide a set guideline for the office to follow to help a family to the best of their ability after the loss of a loved one. There is an employee questionnaire handed out so that the officers can decide their church preference and funeral options. It even asks the employee who they would want to be the liaison for his or her family.

The family liaison officer is the person chosen by the decedent's next of kin as the primary point of contact for the family on all matters relating to the death and funeral of the employee. It requires one of strong character who has a close bond with the family.

Ideally, all contact with the family should be through this person. (Ventura County, 2005, p.8)

This is the most important part of the protocol due the major involvement between the liaison and the grieving family. This liaison will be someone who was chosen by the victim and is close with the family, so that the liaison can serve the family to the best of their ability. In addition with helping the agency plan the funeral service so that the family won't have to lift a finger.

The process of creating a protocol that fits the needs of this specific office has been made easier through the gathering protocols and policies from other agencies such as Ventura County Sheriff's Department and San Diego Police Department. Not every agency is the same, but it is important to research what kind of protocols fit for certain areas and offices. A crucial part in the process is contacting funeral homes. It is important to see what kind of support they can give to their local agencies who risk their lives day in and day out to protect their community.

An evidence based program to show the successes of a protocol that has not been revised since 2005 is the San Diego Police Departments (SDPD) Procedure Manual. Showing that the manual has met the needs of the department for the last 13 years. In case of an emergency, the manual provides a detailed guideline to fully prepare for an on duty death. The procedure manual has a list of responsibilities of the liaison and others involved in the full funeral planning services. It states that it is the liaison's responsibility to prepare with the next of kin to figure out the burial arrangements for the deceased officer and that the family's wishes will be kept in mind when the location of cemetery and church are discussed (SDPD, 2005). Showing that the families needs are the main focus through the whole process.

The method used to implement this protocol was going through many levels of research and revision to make sure that the protocol fit the needs of the office and the county of Monterey. With the help of SDPD's manual, and Ventura County's protocol, gathering and using information to create a protocol that fits Monterey County's is made easier. After putting together a draft of the protocol, the Captain of the Investigations bureau will provide two rounds feedback. After final rounds of revision, the protocol will then be submitted to the Head District Attorney for approval. From there, government protocols and policies may take many months to be finalized and implemented.

### **Project Results**

The expected outcome was to have a protocol implemented in the Monterey County District Attorney's office that meets every need of the families during their time of need. Although government protocols may take many months to be fully implemented, the feedback

received from the Captain of Investigations has helped the progress during the implementation period of the protocol. Gathering the feedback has helped with understanding the effect that the protocol is going to have on the agency as a whole.

The funeral protocol has been modified to a point where the planning of the funeral for an officer related death has been made easier for the DA's office to follow. Before there were no guidelines on how to plan for a funeral for an officer if a death were to occur. The goal was to create a guideline for the agency to follow to plan a proper full honor funeral for one who risks his or her life each and every day. With that goal in mind, the creation of the funeral protocol was successful in meeting the needs of honoring the officers and their families.

It is known that a line of duty death for an investigator requires a full honors funeral including a motorcade, a 21 gun salute, honor guard, ceremonial folding of the flag and bagpipers and buglers. The reason behind the success of this protocol is that it covers all of that and more. This protocol covers different funeral categories for certain types of deaths within the agency. These categories include line of duty deaths, death of an employee in any other manner, death of a civilian employee, and death of a retired employee.

The protocol also has the creation of a team within the agency that is in charge of each little specification when it comes to planning the funeral. This team includes a;

- Department Liaison
- Public Information Officer
- Operations Officer
- Planning and Intelligence Officer
- Logistics Officer
- Traffic Group Leader
- Ceremonies Group Leader
- Officer's Associations Liaison

These positions are designated by an Incident Commander, who is preferably one of high rank with decision making authority. Each member of the team has an assigned duty and checklist in order to complete the tasks to make the funeral run as smooth as possible while meeting the wants and needs of the family.

A challenging aspect of this project was time management. There was a lot of research involved and it took up until the last week to submit a full protocol to the office. It was difficult finding certain information on the planning of a full honors funeral. Even though it was a small challenge, through hours of research, the protocol was able to come together in time to submit to the captain of investigations.

Some implications to possibly expand the contents of the protocol would be to fully assign the roles of the protocol to a certain funeral committee. At that point, the committee would be able to come together and already know the content included in the protocol. Giving the committee an understanding of their roles before a tragedy like this happens and they are left to assign roles to different officers.

### **Personal Reflection**

The need of a protocol in this agency was long overdue. Even though there has not been a death on the job since the the founding of the DA's office, there is a lot of information that goes into planning a funeral for a line of duty death. The protocol is necessary for the department to fully understand what goes into the planning of a funeral. While trying to figure out what goes into the protocol, the main focus was and always should be the needs of the family of the officer.

There are many of ways a funeral can honor the death of an officer, but maintaining contact with the family and having a liaison that puts the family's needs first is the most important part of the protocol. There were times where the focus of creating this project was not related around the family, and more so around the planning of a funeral. With the focus of the families needs first, it was simple to create a protocol that revolves around the wants and needs of the next of kin. Under the Family Liaison section of the protocol, it states that it is the most critical role in the command structure. The needs of the family were, and have always been the main issue being addressed.

Some advice that would benefit a future intern at the DA's office is to not be afraid to ask for work. Both mentors and everyone in the office are there to help you. Yes, they all have their own busy jobs to do as well, but that doesn't mean that they don't want to help you. Regardless of the situation, their goal is for you to learn as much as you would like to learn. All you have to do is ask questions and they will be there to help you out along the way.

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**Appendix**

**NOTIFICATIONS**

WHO DO YOU REQUEST FROM THE DEPARTMENT TO MAKE A NOTIFICATION TO THE FAMILY MEMBERS?

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Name: \_\_\_\_\_

WHO DO YOU REQUEST TO SERVE AS THE DEPARTMENT LIAISON OFFICER TO YOUR FAMILY?

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**IMPORTANT BUSINESS/PERSONAL INFORMATION**

DO YOU WISH TO HAVE A LAW ENFORCEMENT FUNERAL? YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

CHURCH PREFERENCE: \_\_\_\_\_

RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION: \_\_\_\_\_

CLERGYMAN: \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

FUNERAL HOME TO BE USED: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

PRE-PAID BURIAL PLAN: YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

**Scope of Work**

Activities	Deliverable	Timeline	Estimated Completion Dates
Gather other protocols and procedure from different agencies	Take notes on information	Early in the semester to get a head start on the project	9/4
Contact Funeral Homes	See the help that they can provide for office	Prep for start of first draft	9/16
First draft due	Provide mock draft of protocol	As early as possible to complete revisions	10/9
Receive feedback, Begin revision	Begin revising the feedback the mentor has provided	Mid semester for enough time for more revisions	10/16
Second draft due	Second round of revisions	4 weeks before final revision due	11/15
Final draft due			11/30