

## PREPLAN FOR CRISIS RESPONSE

### Planning Tools for District Attorney's Office:

*\*This section is only meant to get you planning and is not intended to be comprehensive. Every criminal incident will be vastly different with many legal considerations. Work with your District Attorney for a comprehensive plan.*

1. Does your jurisdiction have a critical incident team? Are you part of that team?
  - a. If there is a team, consider joining. If there isn't a team, consider starting one. A trained team is essential to providing coordination of efforts to support victims of critical incident crimes.
  - b. The DA's office will be a major provider of victim services throughout a criminal case. It will be important for law enforcement agencies and other victim service providers to know what role the DA has and how you will operate and support victims during and after a criminal critical incident.
  - c. As a team, decide what involvement the DA's Victim/Witness Unit will have during the initial stages of the response and during community meetings. Working together will help clarify roles and expectations. It helps maximize communication and reduces misunderstandings later on.
2. Start by learning how your community responds to critical incidents.
3. Identify who you might need to work with to provide services during the criminal case.
  - a. In addition to the continued involvement from outside victim service agencies and professionals that work directly with victims (such as mental health, school counselors, human services), consider establishing a working relationship with agency representatives who can help you meet the needs of victims during the prosecution. They might include:
    - i. District Attorney
    - ii. Chief DA Investigator
    - iii. DA IT support
    - iv. Prosecutors assigned to the case
    - v. District Attorney Office Administrator

- vi. District Attorney's Public Information Officer
- vii. Chief Judge
- viii. Judicial Administrator
- ix. Judicial IT support
- x. County Emergency Management
- xi. Courthouse Security

4. Plan for the prosecution of critical incidents knowing that some of these questions will not have answers until there is critical incident.
- a. Start at the beginning: How will you get victim information before the first appearance?
    - i. Will you get it from your own office through a law enforcement report, an investigator, or law enforcement advocates?
  - b. Work with law enforcement to determine the number of victims, family members or general public that you expect at the initial court hearings. Work with the Judicial Administrator and Chief Judge to plan for the following:
    - i. Will the regularly scheduled docket still exist? How will defendants and victims be notified of rescheduled hearings?
    - ii. Will the media be at the courthouse? Where will they be allowed inside the courthouse. Will they be in the courtroom or a secondary courtroom with CCTV?
    - iii. Will there be enough parking at the courthouse? Is there a place for secondary parking? Should you consider shuttling people by bus from an alternative parking lot?
    - iv. Is there enough room in the courthouse for victims, family and the public? Can you utilize a secondary courtroom or the jury assembly room and set up CCTV?
    - v. What security consideration does the court need to think about? Security at the door? More Sheriffs officers around the courthouse? Alternative entrances?
    - vi. Do you need assistance from other District Attorney's Offices? If there are a large number of victims or families, you may want to call on trusted providers to help. This may be especially true if the regular court docket is still scheduled and advocates will need to assist victims on other cases. You may need to request additional help, even after the initial court hearing.

- vii. You may consider lining up victim service professionals for crisis intervention or support. For example, you might want two or three mental health professionals on hand to help victims/families who need immediate intervention.
- c. Personnel Assigned to the case and Funding of Additional Personnel
- i. The sooner the case is assigned to a prosecutor(s), investigator(s) and advocate(s), the faster a relationship can be established.
  - ii. Establish a lead victim/witness assistant for large cases. Having a main point of contact, even if additional advocate help is needed, will facilitate in the flow of information internally and result in better accountability and communication.
  - iii. Work with the Division of Criminal Justice to determine if additional funding is available for direct victim services personnel. Grant funds may be available to allow you to hire an advocate or pay for case related office supplies/equipment as it pertains to serving victims.
- d. Determine how victims will be notified of critical stages and events?
- i. Will you use established protocols for the office (letter and phone calls)?
  - ii. Will you establish a secure (log-in) website or message board to relay information?
    1. This can be extremely helpful when describing what has happened at a hearing or what you expect to happen at an upcoming hearing.
    2. This is also a good tool to use for posting update information when court hearings have been canceled or rescheduled.
- e. Establish a procedure for transferring victims from law enforcement advocates to prosecution advocates.
- i. Victims of critical events benefit from a coordinated victim services model. (Two heads are better than one as long as those people are communicating). A victim will need the continued support of law enforcement and community advocates, but a relationship should be established with the prosecution team including the victim/witness staff. Because the prosecution is a lengthy and often confusing process, it is important that victims establish a relationship with prosecution and get court based information directly from the District Attorney's office.

- ii. Let law enforcement and community victim service agencies know who they can call/email with questions/concerns.
- iii. Let law enforcement and community victim services agencies know who victims should call/email with questions/concerns.
- iv. Establish in person meetings or conference calls when possible to transfer victims from law enforcement to prosecution advocacy.