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Bias Crimes

320.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE
The purpose of this policy is to provide members of this Sheriff's office with guidelines for identifying and investigating incidents and crimes that may be motivated by hatred or other bias.

320.1.1 DEFINITIONS
Definitions related to this policy include:

Bias crime - A crime motivated by prejudice based on actual or perceived race, color, religion, national origin, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or disability of the victim. This includes an offense based on actual or perceived creed or because the person or owner or occupant of an affected property was associated with any other recognizable group or affiliation (I.C. § 10-13-3-1).

320.2 POLICY
The Vigo County Sheriff's Office recognizes and places a high priority on the rights of all individuals guaranteed under the state and federal constitution and incorporated in state and federal law.

320.3 PREVENTION AND PREPARATION
While it is recognized that not all crime can be prevented, this Sheriff's office is committed to taking a proactive approach to preventing and preparing for likely bias crimes by:

(a) Making an affirmative effort to establish contact with persons and groups within the community who are likely targets of bias crimes, and forming networks that address prevention and response.

(b) Providing victim assistance and community follow-up or identifying available resources.

(c) Educating community and civic groups about bias crime laws.

320.4 INVESTIGATIONS
Whenever any member of this Sheriff's office receives a report of a suspected bias crime or other activity that reasonably appears to involve a potential bias crime, the following should occur:

(a) Assigned deputies should promptly contact the victim, witness or reporting party to investigate the matter further, as circumstances may dictate.

(b) A supervisor should be notified of the circumstances as soon as practicable.

(c) Once the in-progress aspect of any such situation has been stabilized (e.g., treatment of victims or arrest of suspects at the scene), the assigned deputies should take reasonable steps to preserve evidence that establishes a possible bias crime.

(d) Based upon available information, deputies should take appropriate action to mitigate further injury or damage to potential victims or the community.

(e)   Depending on the situation, the assigned deputies or supervisor may request assistance from investigators or other resources.

(f)   The assigned deputies should interview available witnesses, victims and others to determine what circumstances, if any, indicate that the situation may involve a bias crime.

(g)   The assigned deputies should make reasonable efforts to assist the victim by providing available information on local assistance programs and organizations as required by the Victim and Witness Assistance Policy.

(h)   The assigned deputies should include all available evidence indicating the likelihood of a bias crime in the relevant reports. All related reports should be clearly marked "bias Crime" to enable identification for federal hate crime reporting.

(i)   The assigned deputies and supervisor should take reasonable steps to ensure that any such situation does not escalate further and should provide information to the victim regarding legal aid (e.g., a Petition for a Temporary Protective Order) through the courts or County Attorney.

320.4.1   CRIMINAL INVESTIGATIONS RESPONSIBILITIES
If a bias crime case is assigned to the Criminal Investigations, the assigned investigator will be responsible for:

(a)   Coordinating further investigation with the County Attorney and other appropriate law enforcement agencies.

(b)   Maintaining contact with the victim and other involved individuals, as needed.

(c)   Maintaining statistical data and tracking of suspected bias crimes, as indicated or required by state law.

320.5   TRAINING
All members of this Sheriff's office should receive training on bias crime recognition and investigation.