

## Letter from the Editor – The most difficult call of all

Posted by [TBN Editor](#) On 07/27/2016

**Hollywood, MD** – Earlier this week I took a phone call from a very distressed young woman. Who could blame her? Her cousin had died in a local motor vehicle crash the previous week. To my frustration, the purpose of her call was specifically to scold us for releasing her cousin's name four hours after the crash occurred. No one should learn of a close relative's death from the news but apparently that's how she and several other extended family members found out.

Try as I may to request calm and allow for a careful explanation of how sensitive information is divulged, the young woman cursed and abruptly hung up the phone on me. I can understand her distress, it's sad to lose anyone under such tragic circumstances. And yet, it happens every day and the public has a right to know. It seems the tougher call is "when" does the public have a right to know?

Quite simply, when local law enforcement provides us in writing the names of people involved in accidents, it is only done so and subsequently reported on with the understanding that the families—that is, the "next of kin"—have been notified. That term "next of kin" denotes the closest relatives—parents, spouses, children, siblings. By its definition it apparently does not include cousins. I'll admit it is not something we routinely think twice about since we trust law enforcement to make the proper call.

For police, notifying families is its own daunting task. A police publication a few years ago listed the appropriate practices for what might be one of the most difficult tasks anyone has to handle. It is recommended the notification be made in person and that two officers, at least one in uniform, go to the home of a close family member to break the sad news. As if law enforcement officers don't have enough burdens to deal with, this is one that can't possibly have a good outcome. It's one more thing for which to show law enforcement your appreciation.

Coping with tragedy in a community is a cross that must be carried. Telling the community—including those connected by bloodlines—about the tragedy is a seemingly unbearable cross that is bore on a daily basis. Every now and then we and those whose job it is to investigate what happened and how, and to whom it happened to, might seem to stumble. But we must and shall carry on!!

Our hearts go out to the families and friends of the loved-ones lost.

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