

A few months back, my staff and I met with the mothers of three homicide victims. They had asked for this meeting to demand answers on their respective cases. They wanted to know why their children's murderers had not been brought to justice. There was so much pain on their faces. They spoke little, if no English. They had reached out to a community resource specialist that works with the Mt. Diablo School District and she asked me to meet with them.

They were frustrated and hurt with the investigative process. They cited a lack of communication and progress in the cases. I know my staff was talking with them and/or other family members but this situation did not call for factual or legal explanations. Although there were language and some cultural challenges, we were dealing with a larger issue. How do we communicate with victims and their families and not jeopardize the criminal investigation? And a bigger question is, how do we improve this communication process with victims on other crimes, such as burglaries, robberies, and domestic violence cases?

The criminal justice system is a mammoth of processes. There are legal issues, protocol, procedures, safety concerns, and countless other components that can make you dizzy. And each one of them can be confusing and frustrating for someone outside looking in. But there can be significant improvements to how this information network goes both ways. And to make sure the police department embeds this into our operating culture, the topic of sharing information with victims came up in the last council workshop.

Our City Council meets every spring to discuss their priorities. These are critical, as it allows department directors and other management staff to strategize around the issues most important to council. One of their five priorities is public safety.

The public safety priority had four areas of focus. This included 1) Focus all City departments on public safety, 2) Focus on preventative measures that enhance long-term public safety, 3) Reduce criminal activity in Concord, paying special attention to homeless related and juvenile related criminal activity, and 4) Assure the continued success of the Family Justice Center as part of the County's regional approach to wrap around services.

Council chose this year to add a few additional focus areas to public safety. One included paying special attention to gangs under reducing criminal activity. This is an important move, as Concord experienced a wave of gang violence last fall. A second area of focus that was discussed is improving the communication of information with victims and victim's families.

Procedural communication for crime victims and/or their families will become an important part of our police culture. As we move forward, my hope is the next meeting with a crime victim or their family regarding their case will revolve around the results, and not the process.