

Suicide Notes

1110.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

Pursuant to Government Code 27464, suicide notes are commonly collected by Deputy Coroners as a supplement to the death investigation. This policy establishes guidelines for the collection, processing, and release of such notes.

1110.2 COLLECTION AND RETENTION

All suicide notes apparently written by the deceased, which may tend to indicate an intention by the writer to take the writer's life, shall be collected and booked as evidence in accordance with Coroner Division Policy 1100.

1110.2.1 COLLECTION OF HOLOGRAPHIC WILLS

Suicide notes that are testamentary in nature, giving directions for disposition of property or disposal of remains, shall be considered a holographic will and filed with the Superior Court of Orange County – Probate in lieu of being booked as evidence (a copy shall be retained in the Coroner file as noted below).

- (a) If the holographic will is potentially evidence of a crime, the evidentiary processing of the original document shall take precedence over filing with the Superior Court of Orange County – Probate.
- (b) If the holographic will is accompanied by a small property item (example: keys, currency), Deputy Coroners shall book that property item for safekeeping until such time as the probate process is completed and lawful disposition is made.

1110.3 COPIES OF NOTES

Prior to booking of suicide notes, Deputy Coroners shall make a copy of the original document to be retained in the case file. Additional copies of suicide notes may be released to the decedent's legal next-of-kin or the note's addressee, at any point in the investigation, at the discretion of the Deputy Coroner.

1110.4 DISPOSITION

Following case closure, disposition of original notes and documents shall be facilitated through the Orange County Sheriff's Department Property/Evidence Bureau. The assigned Deputy Coroner may authorize release of the note or document to either the decedent's next-of-kin or the note's addressee.

- (a) If there are multiple suicide notes or multiple addressees on a single suicide note, Deputy Coroners may authorize release of the note to the legal next-of-kin entitled to property, once this has been determined. At the discretion of the Deputy Coroner, the note may be released to the addressee instead of the legal next-of-kin, if the addressee's identity and location may be determined without significant investigation.