

# **Toronto Police Service's Witness Assistance and Relocation Program**

## **Ontario's Witness Protection Program**

### **Content for TPSconnects.com Website**

#### **Assistance for At Risk Witnesses**

Ontario's Witness Protection Program was founded on the principle that the justice system has a duty to assist in protecting witnesses who have been exposed to serious danger as a result of their involvement as a witness in the prosecution of serious crimes.

Ontario's Witness Protection Program is administered by the Ministry of the Attorney General in cooperation with various Ontario police services including the Toronto Police Service. The Program has been in operation for over 30 years.

The Program is a part of the Ontario government's commitment to building stronger, safer communities. Witnesses to criminal offences are encouraged to come forward and give their testimony without the fear of reprisal.

#### **Acceptance Criteria**

1. The life or health of a witness is in **real** danger as a result of their involvement as a witness in a prosecution of a criminal offence;
2. The case is important to the administration of justice (e.g. serious crimes of violence, organized crime, robbery);
3. The witness is cooperating with the police and has agreed to provide truthful testimony that is a **key** element of the Crown's case; and
4. The witness is willing and able to follow security advice and is capable of benefitting from the program's protective measures.

Participation in the Witness Protection Program is voluntary. Once accepted into the Program, a Protected Witness may leave the program at any time. Likewise, witness protection officers may withdraw their support for a Protected Witness's participation in the program.

#### **What the Program May Provide:**

Depending on the individual circumstances of a witness when accepted into the Program, time-limited funding may be provided to:

- cover the costs of relocation to a safer community;
- temporarily pay for rent, utilities, food and other living expenses;
- cover exceptional medical expenses including counselling where appropriate;
- cover approved educational or employment-related upgrades; and/or
- cover the costs of approved security measures.

In certain cases, assistance in changing names and obtaining new identification documents may also be provided.

## **Responsibilities of the Protected Witness**

A Protected Witness must assume certain responsibilities when they are accepted into the Witness Protection Program.

One of the most important responsibilities of a Protected Witness is to attend court when required and to testify truthfully.

The Protected Witness must also take steps to maintain security arrangements that have been made for them and to make sure that financial assistance provided by the Program is used for its intended purposes.

## **Common misconceptions:**

Participation in the Witness Protection Program should not be considered a benefit or reward for testifying. Program assistance is provided solely out of a concern for the witness's safety.

The Witness Protection Program does not provide long-term financial assistance. It provides temporary financial assistance to help witnesses become established in a new community.

## **For more information:**

If you, or someone you know, is a witness or victim to a serious criminal offence and a concern exists for the life or safety of that witness or victim, please contact your local division for more information about the Witness Protection Program.