

PROCEEDINGS OF THE PRL. DISTRICT JUDGE/CHAIRMAN,
DISTRICT LEGAL SERVICES AUTHORITY YADADRI-BHUVANAGIRI

PRESENT: A.JAYA RAJU
Prl. District Judge/Chairman.

Sub : W.P. (Crl.) No. 156 of 2018 of the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India dated. 05.12.2018 - Standing Committee under Witness Protection Scheme, 2018 - CONSTITUTED - ORDERS - Issued.

Ref: : 1. Lr. Roc.No.1299/TLSA/2024, Dt: 23.04.2024 of the Hon'ble Member Secretary, Telangana State Legal Services Authority, Hyderabad.

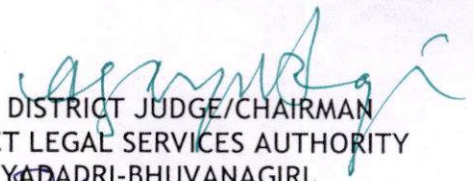
2. Witness Protection Scheme, 2018.

ORDER Dis.No. 235 /DLSA/2024, Dated. 04.05.2024

In view of the Orders passed by the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India dated. 05.12.2018 the undersigned constitutes a Standing Committee under Witness Protection Scheme, 2018 with the following :

CONSTITUTION OF "STANDING COMMITTEE" under WITNESS PROTECTION SCHEME, 2018

(i)	Prl. District & Sessions Judge	...	CHAIRMAN
(ii)	Deputy Commissioner of Police	...	MEMBER
(iii)	Public Prosecutor	...	MEMBER


PRL. DISTRICT JUDGE/CHAIRMAN
DISTRICT LEGAL SERVICES AUTHORITY
YADADRI-BHUVANAGIRI

To:

- 1) The Deputy Commissioner of Police, Bhuvanagiri.
- 2) The Public Prosecutor, Prl. District Judge, Bhuvavnagiri.

Copy to :

The Member Secretary, Telangana State Legal Services Authority, Hyderabad.

"Witness Protection Scheme, 2018

PREFACE

Aims & Objective:

The ability of a witness to give testimony in a judicial setting or to cooperate with law enforcement and investigating officers without fear of intimidation or reprisal is essential in maintaining the rule of law. The objective of this Scheme is to ensure that the investigation, prosecution and trial of criminal offences is not prejudiced because witnesses are intimidated or frightened to give evidence without protection from violent or other criminal recrimination. It aims to promote law enforcement by facilitating the protection of persons who are involved directly or indirectly in providing assistance to criminal law enforcement agencies and overall administration of Justice. Witnesses need to be given the confidence to come forward to assist law enforcement and Judicial Authorities with full assurance of safety. It is aimed to identify series of measures that may be adopted to safeguard witnesses and their family members from intimidation and threats against their lives, reputation and property.

Need and justification for the scheme:

Jeremy Bentham has said that "Witnesses are the eyes and ears of justice." In cases involving heinous crimes, witnesses turn hostile because of threat to life and property. Witnesses feel that there is no statutory legal obligation on the part of the state for extending any security.

Hon'ble Supreme Court of India also held in State of Gujarat v. Anirudh Singh (1997) 6 SCC 514 that: "It is the salutary duty of every witness who has the knowledge of the commission of the crime, to assist the State in giving evidence." Malimath Committee on Reforms of Criminal Justice System, 2003 said in its report that "By giving evidence relating to the commission of an offence, he performs a sacred duty of assisting the court to discover the truth". Zahira Habibulla H. Shiekh, and Another v. State of Gujarat 2004 (4) SCC 158 SC while defining Fair Trial Hon'ble Supreme Court of India observed "If the witnesses

get threatened or are forced to give false evidence that also would not result in a fair trial”.

First ever reference to Witness Protection in India came in 14th Report of the Law Commission of India in 1958. Further reference on the subject are found in 154th and 178th report of the Law Commission of India. 198th Report of the Law Commission of India titled as “Witness Identity Protection and Witness Protection Programmes, 2006” is dedicated to the subject. Hon’ble Supreme Court observed in *Zahira case supra*, “No country can afford to expose its morally correct citizens to the peril of being harassed by anti-social elements like rapists and murderers”. The 4th National Police Commission Report, 1980 noted ‘prosecution witnesses are turning hostile because of pressure of accused and there is need of regulation to check manipulation of witnesses.’

Legislature has introduced Section 195A IPC in 2006 making Criminal Intimidation of Witnesses a criminal offence punishable with seven years of imprisonment. Likewise, in statues namely Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, Whistle Blowers Protection Act, 2011, Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO Act) 2012 and National Investigation Agency Act 2008 and Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 also provides for safeguarding witnesses against the threats. However no formal structured programme has been introduced as on date for addressing the issue of witness protection in a holistic manner.

In recent year’s extremism, terrorism and organized crimes have grown and are becoming stronger and more diverse. In the investigation and prosecution of such crimes, it is essential that witnesses, have trust in the criminal justice system. Witnesses need to have the confidence to come forward to assist law enforcement and prosecuting agencies. They need to be assured that they will receive support and protection from intimidation and the harm that criminal groups might seek to inflict upon them in order to discourage them from co-operating with the law enforcement agencies and deposing before the court of law. Hence, it is high time that a scheme is put in place for addressing the issues of witness protection uniformly in the country.

Scope of the Scheme:

Witness Protection may be as simple as providing a police escort to the witness up to the Courtroom or using modern communication technology (such as audio video means) for recording of testimony. In other more complex cases, involving organised criminal group, extraordinary measures are required to ensure the witness's safety viz. anonymity, offering temporary residence in a safe house, giving a new identity, and relocation of the witness at an undisclosed place. However, Witness protection needs of a witness may have to be viewed on case to case basis depending upon their vulnerability and threat perception.

1. SHORT TITLE AND COMMENCEMENT:

- (a) The Scheme shall be called
"Witness Protection Scheme, 2018"
- (b) It shall come into force from the date of Notification.

Part I

2. DEFINITIONS:

- (a) "Code" means the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 (2 of 1974);
- (b) "Concealment of Identity of Witness" means and includes any condition prohibiting publication or revealing, in any manner, directly or indirectly, of the name, address and other particulars which may lead to the identification of the witness during investigation, trial and post-trial stage;
- (c) "Competent Authority" means a Standing Committee in each District chaired by District and Sessions Judge with Head of the Police in the District as Member and Head of the Prosecution in the District as its Member Secretary.
- (d) "Family Member" includes parents/guardian, spouse, live-in partner, siblings, children, grandchildren of the witness;
- (e) "Form" means "Witness Protection Application Form" appended to this Scheme;
- (f) "In Camera Proceedings" means proceedings wherein the Competent Authority/Court allows only those

persons who are necessarily to be present while hearing and deciding the witness protection application or deposing in the court;

(g) **"Live Link"** means and include a live video link or other such arrangement whereby a witness, while not being physically present in the court room for deposing in the matter or interacting with the Competent Authority;

(h) **"Witness Protection Measures"** means measures spelt out in Clause 7, Part-III, Part-IV and Part V of the Scheme.

(i) **"Offence"** means those offences which are punishable with death or life imprisonment or an imprisonment up to seven years and above and also offences punishable under Section 354, 354A, 354B, 354C, 354D and 509 of IPC.

(j) **"Threat Analysis Report"** means a detailed report prepared and submitted by the Head of the Police in the District Investigating the case with regard to the seriousness and credibility of the threat perception to the witness or his family members. It shall contain specific details about the nature of threats faced by the witness or his family to their life, reputation or property apart from analyzing the extent, the or persons making the threat, have the intent, motive and resources to implement the threats.

It shall also categorize the threat perception apart from suggesting the specific witness protection measures which deserves to be taken in the matter;

(k) **"Witness"** means any person, who possesses information or document about any offence;

(l) **"Witness Protection Application"** means an application moved by the witness in the prescribed form before a Competent Authority through its Member Secretary for seeking Witness Protection Order. It can be moved by the witness, his family member, his duly engaged counsel or IO/SHO/SDPO/Jail Superintendent concerned;

(m) **"Witness Protection Fund"** means the fund created for bearing the expenses incurred during the implementation of Witness Protection Order passed by the Competent

Authority under this scheme;

(n) "Witness Protection Order" means an order passed by the Competent Authority detailing the witness protection measures to be taken

(o) "Witness Protection Cell" means a dedicated Cell of State/UT Police or Central Police Agencies assigned the duty to implement the witness protection order.

Part II

3. CATEGORIES OF WITNESS AS PER THREAT PERCEPTION:

Category 'A': Where the threat extends to life of witness or his family members, during investigation/trial or thereafter.

Category 'B' : Where the threat extends to safety, reputation or property of the witness or his family members, during the investigation/trial or thereafter.

Category 'C' : Where the threat is moderate and extends to harassment or intimidation of the witness or his family member's, reputation or property, during the investigation/trial or thereafter.

4. STATE WITNESS PROTECTION FUND:

(a) There shall be a Fund, namely, the Witness Protection Fund from which the expenses incurred during the implementation of Witness Protection Order passed by the Competent Authority and other related expenditure, shall be met.

(b) The Witness Protection Fund shall comprise the following:-

- i. Budgetary allocation made in the Annual Budget by the State Government;
- ii. Receipt of amount of costs imposed/ordered to be deposited by the courts/tribunals in the Witness Protection Fund;
- iii. Donations/contributions from Charitable Institutions/Organizations and individuals permitted by the Government.
- iv. Funds contributed under Corporate Social Responsibility.

(c) The said Fund shall be operated by the Department/Ministry of Home under State/UT Government.

FILING OF APPLICATION BEFORE COMPETENT AUTHORITY:

The application for seeking protection order under this scheme can be filed in the prescribed form before the Competent Authority of the concerned District where the offence is committed, through its Member Secretary along with supporting documents, if any.

5. PROCEDURE FOR PROCESSING THE APPLICATION:

(a) As and when an application is received by the Member Secretary of the Competent Authority, in the prescribed form, he shall forthwith pass an order for calling for the Threat Analysis Report from the ACP/DSP in charge of the concerned Police Sub-Division.

(b) Depending upon the urgency in the matter owing to imminent threat, the Competent Authority can pass orders for interim protection of the witness or his family members during the pendency of the application. Provided that nothing shall preclude police from providing immediate protection in case of grave and imminent threat to life of applicant and his family members.

(c) The Threat Analysis Report shall be prepared expeditiously while maintaining full confidentiality and it shall reach the Competent Authority within five working days of receipt of the order.

(d) The Threat Analysis Report shall categorize the threat perception and also include suggestive protection measures for providing adequate protection to the witness or his family.

(e) While processing the application for witness protection, the Competent Authority shall also interact preferably in person and if not possible through electronic means with the witness and/or his family members/employers or any other person deemed fit so as to ascertain the witness protection needs of the witness.

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(f) All the hearings on Witness Protection Application shall be held *in-camera* by the Competent Authority while maintaining full confidentiality.

An application shall be disposed of within five working days of receipt of Threat Analysis Report from the Police authorities.

(g) The Witness Protection Order passed by the Competent Authority shall be implemented by the Witness Protection Cell of the State/UT or the Trial Court, as the case may be. Overall responsibility of implementation of all witness protection orders passed by the Competent Authority shall lie on the Head of the Police in the State/UT.

However the Witness Protection Order passed by the Competent Authority for change of identity and/or relocation shall be implemented by the Department of Home of the concerned State/UT.

(h) Upon passing of a Witness Protection Order, the Witness Protection Cell shall file a monthly follow-up report before the Competent Authority.

(i) In case, the Competent Authority finds that there is a need to revise the Witness Protection Order or an application is moved in this regard, and upon completion of trial, a fresh Threat Analysis Report shall be called from the ACP/DSP in charge of the concerned Police Sub-Division.

6. TYPES OF PROTECTION MEASURES:

The witness protection measures ordered shall be proportionate to the threat and shall be for a specific duration not exceeding three months at a time. These may include:

(a) Ensuring that witness and accused do not come face to face during investigation or trial;

(b) Monitoring of mail and telephone calls;

(c) Arrangement with the telephone company to change the witness's telephone number or assign him or her an

unlisted telephone number;

(d) Installation of security devices in the witness's home such as security doors, CCTV, alarms, fencing etc; Concealment of identity of the witness by referring to him/her with the changed name or alphabet;

(e) Emergency contact persons for the witness;

(f) Close protection, regular patrolling around the witness's house;

(g) Temporary change of residence to a relative's house or a nearby town;

(h) Escort to and from the court and provision of Government vehicle or a State funded conveyance for the date of hearing;

(i) Holding of *in-camera* trials;

(j) Allowing a support person to remain present during recording of statement and deposition;

(k) Usage of specially designed vulnerable witness court rooms which have special arrangements like live video links, one way mirrors and screens apart from separate passages for witnesses and accused, with option to modify the image of face of the witness and to modify the audio feed of the witness' voice, so that he/she is not identifiable;

(l) Ensuring expeditious recording of deposition during trial on day to day basis without adjournments;

(m) Awarding time to time periodical financial aids/grants to the witness from Witness Protection Fund for the purpose of re-location, sustenance or starting a new vocation/profession, as may be considered necessary.

(n) Any other form of protection measures considered necessary.

7. MONITORING AND REVIEW:

Once the protection is dispensed, the Competent Authority would monitor its implementation and can review

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the same interms of follow-up reports received in the matter. However, the Competent Authority shall review the Witness Protection Order on aquarterly basis based on the monthly follow-up report submitted by the Witness Protection Cell.

PartIII

8. PROTECTION OF IDENTITY:-

During the course of investigation or trial of any offence, an application for seeking identity protection can be filed in the prescribed form before the Competent Authority through its Member Secretary.

Upon receipt of the application, the Member Secretary of the Competent Authority shall call for the Threat Analysis Report. The Competent Authority shall examine the witness or his family members or any other person it deem fit to ascertain whether there is necessity to pass an identity protection order.

During the course of hearing of the application, the identity of the witness shall not be revealed to any other person, which is likely to lead to the witness identification. The Competent Authority can thereafter, dispose of the application as per material available on record.

Once, an order for protection of identity of witness is passed by the Competent Authority, it shall be the responsibility of Witness Protection Cell to ensure that identity of such witness/his or her family members including name/parentage/occupation/address/digital footprints are fully protected.

As long as identity of any witness is protected under an order, of the Competent Authority, the Witness Protection Cell shall provide details of persons who can be contacted by the witness in case of emergency.

PartIV

9. CHANGE OF IDENTITY:-

In appropriate cases, where there is a request from the witness for change of identity and based on the Threat Analysis Report, a decision can be taken for conferring a

new identity to the witness by the Competent Authority.

Conferring new identities includes new name/profession/parentage and providing supporting documents acceptable by the Government Agencies. The new identities should not deprive the witness from existing educational/ professional/property rights.

Part V

10. RELOCATION OF WITNESS:

In appropriate cases, where there is a request from the witness for relocation and based on the Threat Analysis Report, a decision can be taken for relocation of the witness by the Competent Authority.

The Competent Authority may pass an order for witness relocation to a safer place within the State/UT or territory of the Indian Union keeping in view the safety, welfare and wellbeing of the witness. The expenses shall be borne by the Witness Protection Fund.

Part VI

11. WITNESSES TO BE APPRISED OF THE SCHEME:

Every state shall give wide publicity to this Scheme. The IO and the Court shall inform witnesses about the existence of "Witness Protection Scheme" and its salient features.

12. CONFIDENTIALITY AND PRESERVATION OF RECORDS:

All stakeholders including the Police, the Prosecution Department, Court Staff, Lawyers from both sides shall maintain full confidentiality and shall ensure that under no circumstance, any record, document or information in relation to the proceedings under this scheme shall be shared with any person in any manner except with the Trial Court/Appellate Court and that too, on a written order.

All the records pertaining to proceedings under this scheme shall be preserved till such time there is a trial or appeal thereof is pending before a Court of Law. After one

year of disposal of the last Court proceedings, the hard copy of the records can be weeded out by the Competent Authority after preserving the scanned soft copies of the same.

RECOVERY OF EXPENSES:

In case the witness has lodged a false complaint, the Home Department of the concerned Government can initiate proceedings for recovery of the expenditure incurred from the Witness Protection Fund.

13. REVIEW:

In case the witness or the police authorities are aggrieved by the decisions of the Competent Authority, a review application may be filed within 15 days of passing of the orders by the Competent Authority.

Witness Protection Scheme, 2018
 Witness Protection Application
 under
 Witness Protection Scheme, 2018

Before, (To be filed in duplicate)
 The Competent Authority,
 District.....

Application for:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| 1. Witness Protection | |
| 2. Witness Identity Protection | |
| 3. New Identity | |
| 4. Witness Relocation | |

1.	Particulars of the Witness (Fill in Capital): 1) Name 2) Age 3) Gender (Male/Female/Other) 4) Father's/Mother's Name 5) Residential Address 6) Name and other details of family members of the witness who are receiving or perceiving threats 7) Contact details (Mobile/e-mail)	
2.	Particulars of Criminal matter: 1) FIR No.	

	2) UnderSection 3) PoliceStation 4) District 5) D.D.No.(incaseFIRnotyet registered) 6) Cr.CaseNo.(incaseofprivate complaint)	----- ----- ----- -----
3.	Particulars of the Accused (if available/known): 1) Name 2) Address 3) PhoneNo. 4) Email id	----- ----- ----- -----
4.	Name & other particulars of the person giving/suspected of giving threats	----- ----- -----
5.	Nature of threat perception. Please give brief details of threat received in the matter with specific date, place, mode and words used	----- ----- ----- -----
6.	Type of witness protection measures prayed by/for the witness	----- ----- -----
7.	DetailsofInterim/urgentWitness Protection needs, if required	----- ----- -----

- Applicant/witness can use extra sheets for giving additional information.

(FullNamewithsignature)

Date:.....

Place:.....

UNDERTAKING

1. I undertake that I shall fully cooperate with the competent authority and the Department of Home of the State and Witness Protection Cell. I certify that the information provided by me in this application is true and

correct to my best knowledge and belief.

2. I understand that in case, information given by me in this application is found to be false, competent authority under the scheme reserves the right to recover the expenses incurred on me from out of the Witness Protection Fund.

(Full Name with signature)

Date:.....

Place.....”

- 2) As is clear from its reading, the essential features of the Witness Protection Scheme, 2018 include identifying categories of threat perceptions, preparation of a “Threat Analysis Report” by the Head of the Police, types of protection measures like ensuring that the witness and accused do not come face to face during investigation etc. protection of identity, change of identity, relocation of witness, witnesses to be apprised of the scheme, confidentiality and preservation of records, recovery of expenses etc.
- 3) Since it is beneficial and benevolent scheme which is aimed at strengthening the criminal justice system in this country, which shall in turn ensure not only access to justice but also advance the cause the justice itself, all the States and Union Territories also accepted that suitable directions can be passed by the court

to enforce the said Scheme as a mandate of the court till the enactment of a statute by the Legislatures.

- 4) It is clear from the aforesaid events that the Scheme is the outcome of the efforts put in by the Central Government with due assistance not only from the State Governments as well as Union Territories but other stakeholders including Police personnel, NALSA and State Legal Services Authorities, High Courts and even civil society. There is no reason not to accede to the aforesaid submission of the learned Attorney General and other respondents.
- 5) As pointed out above, in **Sakshi's** case, the Court had insisted about the need to come up with a legislation for the protection of witnesses. It had even requested the Law Commission to examine certain aspects, which resulted to 172nd review of rape laws by the Law Commission. However, the Court specifically rejected the suggestion of the Law Commission regarding examination of vulnerable witnesses in the absence of accused. Having regard to the provisions of Section 273 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, which is based on the tenets of principle of natural justice, that the witness must be examined in the presence of the accused, such a principle cannot be sacrificed in

trials and in inquiries regarding sexual offences. In such a scenario examination of these witnesses through video conferencing provides the solution which balances the interest of the accused as well as vulnerable witnesses.

- 6) Part II(7)(L) of the Witness Protection Scheme, 2018 provides for usage of specially designed court room having special arrangements like live links, one way mirrors, and screens apart from separate passages for witnesses and accused with the option to modify the image of the face of the witness and to modify the audio feed of the witness's voice, so that he/she is not identified.
- 7) In consonance with the same, the Delhi Judiciary has already established four Vulnerable Witness Deposition Complexes in the National Capital Territory, the latest one being at the Dwarka District Court, which was established in February, 2017. This complex provides facilities like separate witness room, separate accused room, play area for the child witnesses, pantry, separate toilet and an exclusive & comfortable waiting area and is equipped with all facilities of audio-visual exchange for a free interface between the presiding Judge, the witness and the accused without witness facing the accused. The complex has a

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separate entry for vulnerable witnesses, so that they do not come in direct contact with accused at any point of time. There are provisions for support persons, pre-trial court visit and facilities for pick and drop of the witnesses from their residence. In this way, all possible efforts have been made for providing comfortable environment to vulnerable witnesses at this complex in order to enable them to give their best evidence in criminal proceedings.

8) One of the main reasons behind establishing these Vulnerable Witness Deposition Complexes was that a large percentage of acquittals in criminal cases is due to witnesses turning hostile and giving false testimonies, mostly due to lack of protection for them and their families, especially in case of women and children.

9) In fact, the Supreme Court too, in *The State of Maharashtra v. Bandu @ Daulat* (Order dt. 24.20.2017 in Crl. Appeal No. 1820/2017) has directed as follows:

"10. ... there should be special centres for examination of vulnerable witnesses in criminal cases in the interest of conducive environment in Court so as to encourage a vulnerable victim to make a statement. Such centres ought to be set up with all necessary safeguards. Our attention has been drawn to guidelines issued by the Delhi High Court for recording evidence of vulnerable witnesses in criminal matters and also the fact that four special centres have been set up at Delhi for the purpose.

12. The directions of Delhi High Court and setting up of special centres for vulnerable witnesses as noted above are consistent with the decision of this Court and supplement the same. We are of the view that all High Courts can adopt such guidelines if the same have not yet been adopted with such modifications as may be deemed necessary. Setting up of one center for vulnerable witnesses may be perhaps required almost in every district in the country. All the High Courts may take appropriate steps in this direction in due course in phases. At least two such centres in the jurisdiction of each High Court may be set up within three months from today. Thereafter, more such centres may be set up as per decision of the High Courts."

10) One thing which emerges from the aforesaid discussion is that there is a paramount need to have witness protection regime, in a statutory form, which all the stakeholders and all the players in the criminal justice system concede. At the same time no such legislation has been brought about. These are the considerations which had influenced this Court to have a holistic regime of witness protection which should be considered as law under Article 141 of the Constitution till a suitable law is framed.

11) We, accordingly, direct that:

(i) This Court has given its imprimatur to the Scheme prepared by respondent No.1 which is approved hereby. It comes into effect forthwith.

(ii) The Union of India as well as States and Union Territories shall enforce the Witness Protection Scheme, 2018 in letter and spirit.

(iii) It shall be the 'law' under Article 141/142 of the Constitution, till the enactment of suitable Parliamentary and/or State Legislations on the subject.

(iv) In line with the aforesaid provisions contained in the Scheme, in all the district courts in India, vulnerable witness deposition complexes shall be set up by the States and Union Territories. This should be achieved within a period of one year, i.e., by the end of the year 2019. The Central Government should also support this endeavour of the States/Union Territories by helping them financially and otherwise.

12) Writ petition stands disposed of in the aforesaid terms.

..... J.
(A.K.SIKRI)

..... J.
(S.ABDULNAZEER)

**NEW DELHI;
DECEMBER 05, 2018.**