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PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Autism: Aware + Prepare Conference for First Responders Sheriff's Office Brings Groundbreaking Training to Putnam County

PUTNAM COUNTY, TN – The Putnam County Sheriff's Citizens' Strategic Advisory Committee (CSAC) is hosting a one of a kind conference designed to prepare first responders for interactions with persons with autism in emergency situations. The conference will be held March 27-30 at the River Community Church. The conference's nationally recognized instructors Captain Bill Cannata and Sergeant Jimmy Donohoe from the Autism & Law Enforcement Educational Coalition (ALEC) are first responders themselves with direct knowledge of ASD through a family member. Instruction will focus on how to better identify, communicate with, and respond to people with autism in life-threatening situations.

“Public safety is our number one priority,” said Sheriff Eddie Farris. “Over the past two years, we realized that individuals with autism and related developmental disorders are highly vulnerable in emergency situations due to the way their brain processes information. Keeping these individuals safe in an emergency requires special skills and training. Thus, we are very proud to bring this remarkable program to Putnam County and offer it for the first time anywhere to ALL first responders countywide. With this training and our new Smart 9-1-1 system, Putnam County will be one of the first counties in the country to be positioned to help these individuals safely through any emergency situation.”

The conference is a direct result of information taken from an employment satisfaction survey distributed to Sheriff's Office Deputies by CSAC. ‘Helping people’ was listed as the favorite part of their job, but they wanted to extend their knowledge and understanding of autism and other brain disorders to be better equipped for when the need arises.

“As in any successful business, strategic training is key. The same is true in first responder organizations, like law enforcement. I am confident that this training coupled with our new Smart 9-1-1 system will set our county apart,” says CSAC member Sonny Conner.

The event has grown to include Putnam County law enforcement, fire, EMS, rescue, and hospital personnel. First responders from other counties have requested to participate, but cannot be accommodated at this time.

“Earning the Public's Trust Every Day!”

CSAC is a group of local professionals who advise Sheriff Farris on non-law enforcement matters affecting Putnam County.

ALEC began in 2003 as a collaborative effort of the The Family Autism Center of The Arc of South Norfolk and former Norfolk County District Attorney William R. Keating. The ALEC Program currently receives funding through the Autism Spectrum Division of the Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services and other federal, local and private grants.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a group of developmental disabilities that can cause significant social, communication and behavioral challenges. Global prevalence of autism has increased twenty- to thirty-fold since the earliest studies 40--50 years ago. Autism Aware + Prepare is a first responder training conference sponsored by the Putnam County Sheriff's Office Citizens Strategic Advisory Council (CSAC) to educate Putnam County law enforcement, fire, EMS, rescue and hospital workers on how to identify and better care for those individuals with autism and related brain disorders during an emergency. The training will be held March 27-30 at The River Community Church and led by nationally renowned instructors Captain Bill Cannata of the Westwood, Massachusetts Fire Department and Sergeant Jimmy Donohoe of the Pensacola Police Department. Their Autism & Law Enforcement Education Coalition training program has been featured on the Today Show and taught around the country but has never before been offered to every first responder in an entire county.

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