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PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PUTNAM COUNTY, TN – Putnam County Sheriff's Office Announces 2015/2016 Budget Initiatives

Two of Sheriff Eddie Farris' primary goals when he took office were to ensure the safety of our children and enhance the professionalism of the Sheriff's Office so that all Putnam County residents can feel safe in their homes and in our community.

In a continuance of this agenda, Sheriff Farris and the Putnam County Sheriff's Office is announcing its 2015/2016 budget initiatives, focusing on requests for additional funding of three new School Resource Officers (\$100,500), additional training for its certified officers (\$10,000) and a reduction of its uniform budget line item by \$25,000.

"Children are our county's most precious resource, but as children, they often lack the skills to protect themselves," said Sheriff Farris. "It is our responsibility, as parents, teachers, support staff members and as a Sheriff's Office, to safeguard their daily school environment."

Today, there are approximately 12,000 students enrolled in 18 schools within the county. According to U.S. Department of Justice guidelines, we should have 1 School Resource Officer (SRO) for every 850 students, which would equal approximately 13 SROs in Putnam County. In the State of Tennessee, there are a total of 970 SROs in 95 counties. Putnam County is the 18th largest county in the state and according to recently published articles there is a trend of major industry relocating to Putnam County, which will eventually increase enrollment in our schools.

Currently, there are 6 SROs serving at three high schools and two middle schools within the county. With the addition of 3 more this year, Putnam County would be well on its way to achieving the minimum established standard set by the federal government for the safety of our students and schools.

"School should be a place where a positive learning environment is emphasized, not a place where parents and educators have to worry about safety. That's our job," said Sheriff Farris.

School Resource Officers play a diverse role in the school community and have many duties and responsibilities. They are sworn officers assigned to their schools on a long-term basis and they work in collaboration with the school and the community as a resource for safety and security issues.

"We are very fortunate to have such dedicated SROs in Putnam County," added Farris. "The SRO program creates a safe and supportive environment for every child."

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Some of the duties of our SROs include: meeting with principles to exchange information gathered from parents, community members and social media to detect potential spillover of threats, drug activity and other criminal behavior onto school property; listening to students' concerns about bullying and talking to teachers and administrators to help develop solutions to these situations; and working with administrators to keep school emergency plans updated.

An SRO provides a highly visible presence to deter or identify trespassers on campus. Each of our SROs assists the school administration in maintaining a safe and secure environment. School administrators also benefit from the SROs training, knowledge and experience in handling situations involving possible weapons violations or in the identification of controlled substances.

SROs frequently assist in resolving problems that are not necessarily law violations, such as bullying or disorderly behavior, but which are nonetheless safety issues. They also can serve as a resource for classroom presentations that complement the educational curriculum by emphasizing the fundamental principles and skills needed for responsible citizenship, such as:

- Alcohol and drug awareness
- Distracted Driving Awareness
- Gang and stranger awareness and resistance
- Bullying/Conflict resolution
- Babysitting safety
- Bicycling, pedestrian, and motor vehicle safety
- Special crimes in which students are especially likely to be offenders or victims, such as vandalism, shoplifting, and sexual assault by acquaintances.

In addition to the three new School Resource Officer positions, Sheriff Farris is requesting an increase of \$10,000 for the 2015/2016 Sheriff's Office training budget.

Training is critical to the advancement of the department and Sheriff Farris is committed to training deputies in the most innovative and effective ways to fight crimes, conduct investigations, and to exemplify professionalism at all times. Through proper training, we can increase safety, decrease the number of potential lawsuits, and raise the level of professionalism in the department. This translates directly into higher morale and greater effectiveness on the part of our work force.

State POST (Peace Officer Standards & Training) guidelines mandate 40 hours of basic in-service annually for every certified officer. In addition to the POST guidelines, the Putnam County Sheriff's Office has recently embarked upon the TLEA Accreditation [<http://www.tacp.org/Programs/Accreditation/>] process which will place additional demands upon the training of our deputies as we seek to provide the highest quality of professional services to the community.

"Training in all aspects of career paths is vital to developing successful employees and maintaining a professional agency," said Sheriff Farris. "As we continue to grow and develop our personnel, we have identified a need to keep current with laws and practices. Some of this has been identified as a result of our Accreditation efforts. The Accreditation process enhances Best Practices and helps reduce exposure to risk and liability situations. We need to ensure the safety of our personnel and reduce risk and liability if we want to ensure that our residents receive the quality of service they deserve from their Sheriff's Office."

And, finally, the Putnam County Sheriff's Office will be addressing the need for a continuation of the uniform budget line item, reducing the requested funds from \$100,000 last year to \$75,000 this year. "Based on recent law enforcement incidents in Missouri, New York and South Carolina," explained

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Farris, “we have determined that the positive outcomes that visual technology affords us in certain situations speak to the need for body cameras for our deputies. The visual documentation that these devices provide will help to protect Putnam County and its citizens from undue risk and liability in high risk traffic stops and arrests.”

“Although we are sensitive to the growing demands on the overall budget for Putnam County, we feel that the aforementioned items must be addressed if the Sheriff’s Office is going to fulfill its mission to serve and protect the citizens of Putnam County,” added Farris. “We have done our very best to control expenses and increase income opportunities within the Sheriff’s Office by utilizing corporate and federal grants as well as cooperating with Federal Law Enforcement Support Office (LESO) programs to acquire assets at no cost to taxpayers and liquidating old or unused equipment on GovDeals.com. However, there are certain items that can only be addressed with an increase in our budget.”

TN Code Annotated 8-24-103:

The County legislative body is required by law to fund authorized expenses fixed by law for the operation of the Sheriff’s Office, including the salaries of all Sheriff’s deputies and staff members.

TN Code Annotated 8-20-12:

The County legislative body may not adopt a budget that reduces below current levels the salaries and number of employees in the Sheriff’s Office without the Sheriff’s consent.

“According to the aforementioned codes, it is the job of County government by law to responsibly review and fund the authorized activities of the Sheriff’s Office so that we can fully perform our duty to the citizens of this community,” said Sheriff Farris. “I believe that we have acted in a fiscally responsible manner and you have my commitment that we will continue to do so. We sincerely appreciate all that our County Commissioners have already done for the Sheriff’s Office and hope that they will view these requests as reasonable and necessary for us to fulfill our lawful duties and responsibilities.”

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