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## **PRESS RELEASE**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **SCHOOL BUS SUPERINTENDANT CALLS FOR SAFETY ENFORCEMENT**

PUTNAM COUNTY, TN – School is back in session and school bus safety is once again a priority. At the request of Putnam County School System Transportation Supervisor Terry Randolph, the Putnam County Sheriff's Department Motor Unit is partnering with motor units from Cookeville Police Department and Tennessee Highway Patrol to add enhanced traffic safety patrols for bus stops and school zones during regular bus transportation hours.

"We are facing a growing problem of blatant disregard among some motorists for the safety of our students," said Randolph. "We've had motorists illegally pass our school buses on the Right-Of-Way after a bus turned on its eight-way flashers and put the stop arm out. We've had distracted drivers crash into the back of buses that were unloading children or total their car by rear-ending a bus inside of a school zone. Last year alone, the Tennessee Department of Transportation sent 80 warning letters to drivers we reported for passing stopped school buses. We have to put a stop to this before someone gets injured or killed."

According to TN Code 55-8-151 -- *Overtaking and passing school, youth or church bus*: "the driver of a vehicle upon a highway, upon meeting or overtaking from either direction any school bus that has stopped on the highway for the purpose of receiving or discharging any school children, shall stop the vehicle before reaching the school bus and not proceed until the school bus resumes motion or is signaled by the school bus driver or the visual signals are no longer actuated."

"The safety of our kids is a priority and we strongly advise all drivers to pay special attention to school bus stops and school zones," said Sheriff Eddie Farris. "Cookeville Police Department has tackled this problem for years and I am proud that our new Motor Unit can partner with them and THP to increase patrols and address this issue in a coordinated effort."

It is important to note that motorists in all lanes of traffic even on four and five lane roads must stop for school buses unless the road has a median that is not suitable for vehicular traffic, in which case only traffic in the lanes on the same side of the median as the bus are required to stop.

"Motorists are required by law to stop on both sides of the street when a bus is using its red flashing lights. This includes four and five lane streets," said Captain Mike Lee of the Cookeville Police Department. "Our officers have encountered several violations on S. Jefferson Avenue, S. Willow Avenue, and W. Jackson Street."

Starting this week, motorists are forewarned to be aware of bus stop markings such as eight-way flashers and stop arms and school zones with flashing lights and signs posting speed limits during school transportation hours. There will be an enhanced law enforcement presence protecting these areas, especially in the problem areas of 10<sup>th</sup> Street, 12<sup>th</sup> Street, Willow Avenue and South Jefferson. They will be ticketing motorists who violate the law.

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Tickets for this type of violation can be costly and have far-reaching effects. Depending upon the type of violation, it can cost \$250 - \$1,000 with possible serious additional consequences, such as Class A or Class C misdemeanor charges and notification to the driver's insurance company which could result in points on the driver's license and perhaps additional insurance fees.

"We are giving motorists fair warning," added Randolph. "I hope there will be no tickets written but if even one ticket will save the life of a child then it will be worth it. School buses are still the safest mode of transportation for kids going to school and we aim to keep it that way."

"School buses are often overlooked by distracted drivers who do not notice the bus lighting until it's too late," said Captain Mike Lee of the Cookeville Police Department. "Drivers need to use caution and be aware that children may be crossing the street. Never attempt to pass a stopped school bus that is loading or unloading children, even at their school. Take a little extra caution and be aware, alert and safe for the safety of our children."

"The troopers in the Cookeville District have been gearing up for the return of our students and have implemented enforcement plans for our school zones," said Captain R.C. Christian, Tennessee Highway Patrol. "Our goal is to combine proactive as well as reactive enforcement to the issues that arise as students and faculty return to their respective schools. Our hope is that with all of the law enforcement agencies partnering together, we will be able to deter the safety concerns presented by Mr. Randolph and the bus drivers who transport our students every day. This is an issue we take very seriously. Lives depend upon it."

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