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PROBATE COURT OF MOBILE COUNTY, ALABAMA

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Mobile County Probate Court Launches Community Mental Health Officer Program

Mobile County Judge of Probate, Mark Erwin, in conjunction with the Mobile County Commission, Presiding Circuit Court Judge, Wesley Pipes, Mobile County Sheriff, Paul Burch, and AltaPointe Health Systems CEO, Tuerk Schlessinger, announce the appointment of Mobile County's first Community Mental Health Officers, an initiative designed to strengthen support for individuals experiencing mental health crises and connect them with appropriate community-based resources.

The program allows law enforcement officers direct access to these designated AltaPointe mental health professionals who are trained to assist in the response to non-violent mental health-related calls for service. The goal is to reduce unnecessary arrests, improve outcomes for individuals in crisis, and promote long-term stability through access to services.

"Having AltaPointe agree to provide these employees to serve in this role at no additional expense to Mobile County is huge and I am most grateful for their commitment of resources to this program. I am also grateful for the leadership of Judge Wesley Pipes and Sheriff Paul Burch in bringing the local stakeholders to the table to work on issues where our mental health system intersects with the criminal justice system. As a result of these efforts, we have found a willingness among our local agency partners to work together to solve some of the ongoing issues we encounter in the mental health system" said Probate Judge Erwin. "This program is the first step in what I hope will be a number of initiatives that will provide a more effective process focused on care, de-escalation, and connection to appropriate resources."

Community Mental Health Officers receive specialized training in crisis intervention, de-escalation techniques, and mental health awareness. These officers will work closely with local service

providers to assist individuals with referrals to counseling, treatment programs, housing support, and other available resources.

Key goals of the program include:

- Improving responses to mental health–related calls
- Reducing the number of mentally ill persons being arrested and booked into jail
- Connecting these individuals to appropriate mental health services
- Reducing the need for repeated emergency calls related to those who need mental services
- Strengthening collaboration between law enforcement and community partners

The program is intended to complement existing emergency services and does not replace calling 911 or 988 in the event of an immediate emergency. Also, the program does not alter the current statutory procedures related to the involuntary commitment of the mentally ill.

For more information about the Community Mental Health Officer Program, please contact Probate Judge, C. Mark Erwin at 251-574-6113 or probate@probate.mobilecountyal.gov.

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