



## News Release

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**Contact:** Sheriff's Office: Ofc. John Roach, 313-213-5162

CEO Office: Vanessa Denha-Garmo, 313-967-3891

Prosecutor's Office: Maria Miller, 313-224-5817

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### Sheriff, CEO & Prosecutor team up to help juvenile offenders reform, avoid criminal record

#### ◆ *Deputies begin making home visits to check on kids given a 2<sup>nd</sup> chance*

Wayne County Sheriff's Deputies have started making "house calls" to some low risk juvenile offenders and their families as part of an expanded effort to give at-risk kids a second chance at a clean record, Sheriff Warren C. Evans, County Executive Robert A. Ficano and Prosecutor Kym L. Worthy announced today.

Starting last week, the Sheriff's Office new **Juvenile Spot Check Unit** hit the streets to follow up with juveniles who have been directed by the Prosecutor's Office to a community based diversion program called Correct Course, as an alternative to prosecution.

The new fulltime unit, which is made up of three deputies and one sergeant, is funded through the CEO's Department of Children & Family Services (CAFS) and will serve as the accountability component for Correct Course. Since the diversion program was launched less than a year ago, more than 350 kids have been referred to the program, which boasts a 90 percent success rate (no new offenses).

"The creation of the Juvenile Spot Check Unit supports our goal of keeping kids with their families and out of the juvenile justice system," Evans said. "We have seen from the success of our adult Spot Check Unit for parolees and probationers, that this approach is a very effective method of assuring compliance and helping change people's long term behavior."

Deputies assigned to the new unit recently underwent two months of training from officers from the county's Missing & Exploited Children's Task Force, Juvenile Apprehension Unit, and adult Spot Check unit to understand the myriad of issues they will face while dealing with juvenile offenders. During their visits, officers will be discussing school attendance, behavioral issues and completion of other Correct Course program requirements.

"Some kids will need a strong, firm approach to get their attention, but others will require some sensitivity and good interpersonal skills on the part of the deputy," Evans said. "We want kids to see these officers as mentors or role models, not just as the police."

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### About Correct Course

Correct Course serves as an alternative to traditional juvenile court adjudication and probation and brings together programs from key areas of county government, including the Prosecutor's Office, CAFS and the Sheriff's Office, as well as numerous community organizations.

"We must look at new approaches to save our youth from becoming a part of the criminal justice system. We must distinguish between those who merit more serious sanctions and those who deserve a second chance," said Prosecutor Worthy.

Correct Course was conceived and designed by Eric Smith, a former Chief of Operations in the Sheriff's Office and Assistant County Executive under Robert Ficano. Smith now works under contract for the County to provide legal counsel and improve the delivery of certain services, particularly in the area of juvenile justice. In this role, Smith works closely with the Sheriff, Prosecutor, County Executive and Chief Judge of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Circuit Court to develop these programs.

The goal of Correct Course is to direct kids to community based diversion programs that are designed to:

- Address assessed reasons for the offense behavior via community service focus
- Hold youth accountable to help learn from their mistakes
- Repair the harm caused to families, victims and the community
- Allow eligible offenders the opportunity to keep their record clean
- Support youth to attend school and participate safely in the community

"These are mostly good kids who have made some bad decisions," said County Executive Robert A. Ficano. "We can't just expect them to change their behavior on their own; we must provide them and their families a framework and a support system they can work within and rely upon, and Correct Course accomplishes that."

Before the creation of the Juvenile Spot Check Unit, oversight and follow-up for Correct Course has come in the form of interaction with Youth Assistance providers who verify whether a juvenile has completed program requirements.