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NEWS RELEASE

Sheriff Gahler Announces new Heroin Initiatives

For Immediate Release: Contact: Cristie Kahler, HCSO Office of Media Relations, 410-836-5403

[November 16, 2015, Bel Air, MD] This morning, Sheriff Gahler joined with Maryland State Delegates Kathy Szeliga and Andrew Cassilly to announce new efforts to drive heroin out of our communities. Sheriff Gahler's HOPE (Heroin Overdose Prevention Effort) workgroup has been diligently working to understand and respond to the growing heroin epidemic. The newest initiatives are the product of the continued dedication from this group, to look at awareness, enforcement, and legislative responses.

Focusing on legislation, three essential heroin related bills will be submitted this session. It is imperative that law enforcement have the correct tools to effectively investigate, prosecute and stem the tide of heroin into our community. During this legislative session, Delegate Szeliga will introduce two bills. The first will mandate medical professionals to report heroin overdoses to law enforcement, providing real time information to investigators. This bill creates an opportunity to reach victims to offer critical services and begin an investigation into the source of the heroin. Delegate Szeliga commented, "One of the key components missing in our fight against heroin is access to real time data. My legislation will allow hospitals to communicate directly with law enforcement in Harford County to provide them the information they need to determine the full scope of the heroin epidemic."

After seeing far too many heroin victims saved by NARCAN only to need a second dose after the first wears off, it's time we require that medical personnel be contacted each and every time NARCAN is administered. The second bill will put this protocol in place for those administering this life preserving drug.

Delegate Cassilly is introducing legislation, co-sponsored by Delegate Szeliga, that will provide increased penalties to those individuals who prey on people seeking treatment at

clinics and health departments. The bill will establish a 1000 foot buffer zone around methadone clinics and other certified treatment facilities establishing stricter penalties for individuals attempting to sell heroin and other dangerous drugs in this zone. Cassilly remarked, "I am pleased to partner with Law Enforcement to increase penalties for those convicted of selling heroin to our most vulnerable. These dealers prey on those seeking treatment and the message needs to be sent that this will not be tolerated."

Since January 1, 2015, Sheriff Gahler has made significant strides to eradicate heroin in our community. The use of heroin is not only a public health concern but also an issue affecting crime and safety in our neighborhoods. To that end, Sheriff Gahler has made a number of protocol and policy changes that have enhanced the way we respond and investigate heroin overdoses.

This year alone, law enforcement has responded to 175 suspected heroin overdoses in Harford County, that's one every 48 hours. Of those 175 overdoses, 23 have turned fatal. The key to protecting our families is awareness, Sheriff Gahler remarked, "Too often we want to hide from the fact that heroin is negatively impacting our community and it is more prevalent than in recent memory and touches everyone. It's a 'dirty little secret' that if we don't talk about it and address it, it will continue to overtake our community." To continue his efforts in awareness and prevention, Sheriff Gahler is placing Heroin Overdose Awareness signs at all precincts and Headquarters. The signs will serve as a constant reminder that we must remain vigilant in our efforts. "As I travel around the County and State and talk about these issues it's clear that some people still do not understand how large of a problem this is for our communities, effecting almost every aspect of our daily lives. As Sheriff, I have ordered that signs be placed at our Headquarters, Northern and Southern precincts so the public can better understand just how deadly heroin addiction is and that if you try it just once you are likely signing over your entire life to this deadly drug." Bringing the community together is a critical part of ending heroin use and investigating the dealers.

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Harford County Sheriff's Office Mission

With courage, honor and integrity we protect the rights and dignity of all citizens. In partnership with our communities, we strive to preserve the peace and provide for a safe environment for all.