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OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL STATE OF FLORIDA

Florida Attorney General's Office News Release

PGPD Recognized for Veteran Crisis Assistance



TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—Attorney General Ashley Moody today recognized a new program instituted by the Punta Gorda Police Department—the Veteran Crisis Assistance Team. The purpose of VCAT is to help ensure that PGPD is able to effectively handle situations involving military veterans experiencing mental health crises, or who are in need of assistance. Attorney General Moody presented the inaugural members of this team, Detective Jose Delgado, Officer Russell Fiorino, Officer Amber Gray, Officer Brandon Meddaugh, Captain Norman Nahra and Officer Tom Vetri, Back the Blue Awards for the creation of the program and their extraordinary service rendered to local veterans.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, “I am honored to present Back the Blue Awards to these police officers, who served in the military themselves, for continuing to give back to their community and going above and beyond to serve veterans. VCAT provides much-needed aid and assistance to veterans experiencing mental health crises. As veterans themselves, these law enforcement officers understand personally the sacrifice service members make to protect Americans. I am so grateful to Officers Fiorino, Gray, Meddaugh and Vetri, Captain Nahra and Detective Delgado for their selfless efforts.”

Officer Meddaugh and Capt. Nahra are the leaders who spearheaded the formation of the program for PGPD. Members of VCAT respond to situations involving military veterans in need of assistance. The team is made up of sworn Punta Gorda law enforcement officers who served, or are currently serving, in a branch of the United States military. VCAT coordinates with community-veteran organizations to ensure that veterans in need are connected with the

appropriate channels and services and assisted in receiving eligible military benefits.

Members of VCAT are specially trained for de-escalating situations involving military veterans, and adept at dealing with special needs that the affected military veterans may have. The team is dedicated to following up with veterans to ensure aid is offered and any additional needs are addressed.

In December 2020, the Punta Gorda VCAT, in conjunction with the Charlotte County Veterans Services and the Military Heritage Museum, hosted a Veterans Services Seminar to bring together representatives of organizations that provide resources and assistance to veterans within Charlotte and Lee counties. Per the goal of the event, VCAT provided a setting in where the different veterans' aid organizations of the community networked and gained a better understanding of each other helping the organizations network together on serving the veterans of Charlotte and Lee counties.

Providing aid and assistance to those who have served in the U.S. military is a priority for the Attorney General's Office. The Office of the Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division created the Military and Veterans Assistance Program to help educate military members and veterans on the types of scams that target their communities, what they can do to protect themselves and how to help protect others by reporting scams and deceptive business practices. In addition, members of the MVAP team work directly with service members and veterans, or their representatives, who have been targeted, to help resolve consumer protection related issues or find other outside assistance if necessary.

To learn more about the MVAP team, click here.

It is a top priority for Attorney General Moody to promote and highlight positive relationships between law enforcement officers and the communities they serve. Soon after taking office, Attorney General Moody launched a statewide Back the Blue campaign. The campaign highlights law enforcement officers, citizens and organizations taking extraordinary steps to forge positive relationships with law enforcement and local communities. Attorney General Moody has issued more than 30 Back the Blue Awards since its launch in 2019.

To nominate a law enforcement officer, citizen or organization for a Back the Blue Award, or for more information about Attorney General Moody's Back the Blue campaign, click here.

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Attorney General Ashley Moody's Back the Blue campaign highlights law enforcement officers, citizens and organizations taking extraordinary steps to forge positive relationships between law enforcement and the communities they serve. Supporting law enforcement is a top priority for Attorney General Moody and the mission of Back the Blue is to commend Florida's brave law enforcement officers and Floridians who back them.