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**NEWS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

September 7, 2021

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Virginia Beach Observes National Recovery Month, Debuts Opioid Treatment Message

In observance of National Recovery Month, Commonwealth's Attorney Colin D. Stolle and Police Chief Paul W. Neudigate urge those fighting an opioid addiction to seek help through The First Step Program. Data from the first quarter of 2021 shows the largest number of fatal drug overdoses ever seen in Virginia, according to the Virginia Department of Health. Law enforcement amps up its support for recovery by providing a safe place for residents in need of treatment for addiction.

A [Public Service Announcement](#) shows viewers that police precincts are safe, simple places to start a journey to recovery. When a resident arrives and asks for help with his or her addiction, police will initiate a screening by the Department of Human Services (Pathways Center) or Virginia Beach Psychiatric Center. After a free assessment, the resident may be transported (voluntarily) by police for medical detox or referred for another level of support or care.

Police do not want to arrest those experiencing opioid abuse disorder; rather, want to provide an alternative to incurring a criminal charge or suffering an overdose. While the goal of the program is to provide an alternative to criminal charges, if active warrants exist, those warrants **must** be served on individuals who appear at a police precinct. If, after being served, an individual is still open to treatment and not taken into custody, they may participate in The First Step Program.

"The First Step Program provides residents with a simple process for seeking help with addiction," Stolle said. "The impact of mental health and substance use disorders is apparent in the criminal justice system and remains one of the greatest challenges for law enforcement and the courts. I hope that members of the community will take advantage of this partnership."

"I recognize the need to connect people suffering from addiction with treatment and other services to address the burden of substance abuse disorders," Neudigate said. "The Virginia

Beach Police Department wants to be supportive to those seeking help, and we truly want to see these individuals receive the treatment they need, without fear of being arrested. Helping to facilitate access to such vital treatment can save lives and will be a benefit to the community.”

The Public Service Announcement, created by Virginia Beach’s Multimedia Services division, will air on local television channels and online throughout the remainder of the year.

Specific information about the location for treatment, Frequently Asked Questions, and resources are available on the program’s [website](#). For 24/7 crisis assistance, please call the Pathways Center at (757) 385-6956 or Virginia Beach Psychiatric Center (757) 627-LIFE (5433), and you will receive a free, confidential assessment.

For more information, contact the following individuals from the appropriate agency:

- Macie Allen at (757) 385-8545 or mpallen@vbgov.com (for the Office of the Commonwealth’s Attorney)
- Office of Public Affairs at (757) 385-4097 or VBPDPublicAffairs@vbgov.com (for the Virginia Beach Police Department)
- Bryan Clark at (757) 385-2347 or bcclark@vbgov.com (for the Department of Human Services)
- Brooke Hemphill at (757) 496-4464 or Brooke.Hemphill@uhsinc.com (for Virginia Beach Psychiatric Center)

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