



# LEON COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

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***FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE***

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## **LCSO Partners with Big Bend Continuum of Care to Support Those Experiencing Homelessness**

The Leon County Sheriff's Office is officially launching a new unit to address homelessness in our area.

The Homeless Outreach Street Team (HOST) will assist homeless individuals in gaining access to resources and ultimately decrease the reactive law enforcement response by implementing proactive community policing strategies. HOST will be made up of two LCSO deputies who will establish a "boots on the ground" law enforcement presence and act as a force multiplier and liaison to the Big Bend Continuum of Care (BBCoC).

Homelessness is a complex issue, which cannot be solved by law enforcement response alone. The HOST intends to work in coordination with community partners to reduce the impacts of homelessness on the community by:

- **Educating:** educate interested unsheltered persons about the local social services available throughout the local Continuum of Care and other social service organizations.
- **Encouraging:** HOST deputies will encourage interested unsheltered persons to utilize these social services and offer assistance with referrals to social service organizations.
- **Enforcing:** If education and encouragement have previously or presently failed, or are not appropriate in the circumstances, and deputies have probable cause of criminal activity, then deputies may proceed with criminal enforcement.

The HOST deputies have received specialized training through the Homeless Outreach Team Specialist Course provided by the Multi-Agency Homeless Taskforce of Broward County, along with the Crisis Intervention Team (CIT), Mental Health First AID, and the Leon County Emergency Medical Services (EMS) to learn how to assess and manage excited delirium and mental health protocols.

"LCSO deputies have always engaged in efforts to address homelessness in our area. Our experience has helped structure how our deputies move forward with this initiative. The expertise developed, in addition to the implementation of HOST, will undoubtedly help those individuals who are ready to accept services that will allow them to improve their lives and find permanent housing," said Assistant Sheriff Argatha Gilmore.

In December 2021, the Leon County Commission approved funding for the unit.



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