



# LEON COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Walt McNeil, Sheriff

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[www.leoncountysos.com](http://www.leoncountysos.com)

## ***FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE***

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### **New LCSO Unit Deploys Mental Health Responders to Crisis Calls**

The Leon County Sheriff's Office has launched a new Mental Health Unit, in collaboration with the Apalachee Center, to assist individuals in a mental health crisis or those who are dealing with substance abuse issues.

The unit is staffed with three teams which consists of a full-time Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) trained sworn deputy and a Crisis Response Specialist (CRS), who is a Master Level Counselor (MLC) provided by the Apalachee Center. LCSO deputies in the unit have specialized training, focused on recognition of persons in crisis, communication skills, and de-escalation techniques.

The teams will respond to calls for service, assess individuals and provide follow up until the crisis is diverted or resolved. The deputy and counselor will also conduct home visits, help to identify people frequently in mental health crises, and connect them with services as needed.

By taking a proactive approach, LCSO's Mental Health Unit can help reduce the number of deputy interactions with individuals who are in crisis. The deputies are dressed in a polo-style uniform and drive unmarked vehicles which has proven to make them more approachable by citizens in crisis.

"This is an amazing opportunity to integrate the expertise of trained counselors as first responders and help the citizens of Leon County who may need mental health services, instead of a law enforcement response when they are in crisis," said Sheriff Walt McNeil. "We have been working for a long time to create a system that helps improve outcomes of crisis calls and this is a first step in providing compassionate and professional services to our residents."

Since launching in December 2021, the Mental Health Unit has initiated or responded to 257 calls for service, and this includes follow-up visits. The teams work overlapping shifts throughout the week from 8 am until midnight.

The MHU provides services to adults and minors as well as those who are part of the homeless community.

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