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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Crisis Intervention Officer Program Initiated to Improve Police Response to Mental Illness Event to Introduce Crisis Intervention Officers to be Held at Poulsbo City Hall

July 14, 2014--The public introduction of a new "Crisis Intervention Officer" (CIO) program will be held on Wednesday, July 30, from 3 PM to 4:30 PM in the Poulsbo City Hall Council Chambers. The event will showcase a significant improvement in how law enforcement responds to incidents involving those with mental health problems, such as drug addiction and mental illness.

Against the backdrop of ongoing violent encounters nationwide involving the mentally ill, as well as our county's decision to fund and develop programs to address mental health problems through a 1/10 of one cent sales tax increase, the CIO program is an innovative approach to helping law enforcement handle calls involving crisis situations. It will provide greater safety for the officer, the person involved, and the public.

CIOs will be specially trained law enforcement officers, from each law enforcement agency in Kitsap County, who will work with each other to respond to calls and incidents that involve mental illness. They will also serve as liaisons with their communities about mental health issues. The recent approval by the County Commissioners to award \$117,000 to county law enforcement agencies to provide training for these issues will assist in the training of these CIOs along with all officers in basic skills for dealing with those suffering from mental illness. The grant and training will be coordinated by the Bremerton Police Department. The training will also include skills enhancement for staff at Cen Com, the area's emergency dispatch center.

The CIO Program is one of many approaches developed by Kitsap County's Police Departments and the Sheriff's Office to increase effectiveness and safety in this area. Additional proposals include a Crisis Triage Center, which is still under consideration for 2015 implementation by the County Commissioners using the sales tax funds.

The July 30 event will feature speakers who will explain the new program. CIOs and law enforcement leaders will provide information about why this program is both necessary and significant, and how community members can get involved in the initiative.

The development of the CIO Program is a cooperative effort of community groups and law enforcement, including Islanders for Collaborative Policing (ICP), the League of Women Voters, the local chapter of the National Alliance for the Mentally ill (NAMI), Kitsap Mental Health (KMH), Poulsbo Police, Bremerton Police, Bainbridge Island Police, Kitsap County Sheriff's Office, and Port Orchard Police. The event is being co-sponsored by ICP, NAMI-Kitsap, and the Kitsap County Vulnerable Adult Task Force.

For more information about the CIO program, contact Bremerton Chief Steve Strachan at steven.strachan@ci.bremerton.wa.us or Poulsbo Chief Al Townsend at atownsend@cityofpoulsbo.com

For more information about the event, contact ICP Board Member Kim Hendrickson at contactcollpol@gmail.com.

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