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DA'S OFFICE AND UPPER PERK POLICE LAUNCHING COUNTY'S SECOND PROGRAM FOR LOW-LEVEL DRUG OFFENDERS

NORRISTOWN, Pa. (Dec. 4, 2017) — Montgomery County District Attorney Kevin R. Steele and Upper Perk Police Chief Michael S. Devlin announce the launch of the second joint program for 18 to 26 year olds arrested on minor drug possession charges.

The diversionary program, called D.E.A.P Program, Drug Education and Abuse Prevention Program, is patterned after the pilot program launched earlier this year with the Lower Providence Police Department. The opt-in, voluntary program is for non-violent offenders charged with possession of a small amount of illegal drugs who have never been arrested or who have been convicted of underage drinking, minor drug possession or minor theft.

The D.E.A.P. Program uses a combination of carrot and stick strategies to deter defendants from escalated drug use and the more serious arrests that often accompany drug addiction. It is estimated that approximately 5-10 criminal cases a month will qualify for the D.E.A.P. Program in the Upper Perkiomen Valley.

“The drug epidemic we are facing is so widespread across Montgomery County that we cannot simply arrest our way out of it. Fighting it requires innovative approaches on multiple fronts to try to stem the progression from low-level drug use to heroin use and addiction to a potential overdose victim,” said DA Steele. “This program can save young people from the slippery slope of drug use and addiction thereby protecting their futures.”

For this new program with the Upper Perk Police, an additional partner, Project Live, will be involved with the DA's Office and local law enforcement in implementing and supporting this diversionary program. Project Live is a non-profit organization that was formed in response to the growing number of people suffering from the effects of drug addiction in the Upper Perk Valley, which encompasses several municipalities, including Green Lane Borough, Marlborough Township, Red Hill Borough, Pennsburg Borough, East Greenville Borough, Upper Hanover Township and Hereford Township (Berks County). Project Live's mission is to provide

preventative, educational, social, and rehabilitative support to those affected by substance use disorder in the Upper Perkiomen Valley.

The D.E.A.P. Program includes four elements: an introductory meeting with representatives with the police department, the District Attorney's Office and the Magisterial District Judge; a drug and alcohol assessment and a presentation on drug use/addiction by professionals in the addiction field and former addicts; a presentation on the medical consequences of drug use by the Montgomery County Coroner's Office; and several observation sessions at the Montgomery County Drug Court. In addition, participants must be drug-free and arrest-free during the program and for six months following the completion of all elements. They will be subject to random drug testing while in the D.E.A.P. Program.

Participants in the program will not be arrested, which means they will not be processed or fingerprinted so no criminal record will be created should they complete the program. And while they are in the program, the criminal case will be suspended. If they wash out or drop out of the program, they will be arrested and prosecuted on the original charges.

Upper Perk Police Chief Devlin reiterated DA Steele regarding the prospects of impacting the epidemic through this program. "We need to be innovative in our approach to overcome this epidemic. We need ways to serve and help our people—all of our people. It is not our job to arrest everyone we encounter, but ultimately to stop criminal behavior," said Devlin. "There are many ways for law enforcement to intervene in a situation, especially when it involves a young person's first encounter with the criminal justice system. The implementation of this D.E.A.P. Program should help stem the tide of addiction for our youth in the Upper Perkiomen Valley. At the very least, it gives them the ability to get treatment and avoid having a criminal record, which could negatively affect their future prospects of getting an education or a job."

As the D.E.A.P. Program continues to show success, the District Attorney's Office will continue discussions with other police jurisdictions in Montgomery County to implement additional programs.

Approved for release:

Kevin R. Steele