

Testimony to the United States Senate Special Committee on Aging

Chairman Rick Scott (R-FL)

Ranking Member Kirsten Gillibrand

“Serving and Protecting Seniors in Florida”

Charlotte County (Florida) Sheriff Bill Prummell

Presented: Wednesday January 15, 2025

Chairman Scott, Ranking Member Gillibrand, and Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify. Today, I would like to outline ways in which the Charlotte County Sheriff's Office is working to serve and protect our senior population.

We implement several programs at the Charlotte County Sheriff's Office, including phone calls on Mondays and Thursdays, Christmas gifts and Birthday cards as well as weekly phone calls between trained volunteers and participants over 60 years of age, disabled, or living alone with little or no contact with the community.

Additionally, our *Take Me Home Program* is designed to assist deputies in locating loved ones who have gone missing or are lost. Information about your loved one, a recent photo, and description is shared with all road patrol officers in an effort to locate and reunite the family. Any office member can register a participant for this program.

Our *DNA Scent Kits* is a program that enables participants to keep a DNA scent article at their home in the event a loved one goes missing. Charlotte County K9 deputies use that pure scent to begin a track in order to locate the loved one and reunite them with family. These are handed out by our Community Affairs Team, Mental Health Unit, and patrol members.

Project Lifesaver serves as the premier search and rescue program locally operated by the Charlotte County Sheriff's Office and is strategically designed for "at risk" individuals who are prone to wandering. The program uses a GPS tracking bracelet to locate the wandering party quickly.

Operation Pill Drop allows individuals to drop off expired or unwanted medication in drug receptacle boxes at participating district office locations. This keeps family members and others that might have access to a senior's medicine cabinet from getting those old and unused medications.

Special vehicle decals provide free decals for individual's vehicle to alert deputies of the possible presence of someone that may require special attention within the vehicle, such as a hearing impairment or autism.

Often seniors misplace or leave items behind such as keys. Through our *Operation Lock Out Program*, key tags are provided to help return lost car keys to the owners. The tags are registered with a special code in our system with the owners' information. We educate them not to put their name or address on the key chain in order to protect themselves. If the keys are turned in to us, we are able to then return the keys to the owner.

We offer *Citizen's Police Academy* classes for mostly seniors to learn behind the scenes and promote our volunteer program. Classes are held for 7 or 9 weeks throughout the year.

We also spend time visiting local retirement homes to advise on local scam problems.

In addition, we rely heavily on Facebook, Instagram, Our blog and press releases. We know that many seniors do not monitor this, but many family members and those that work or live around seniors do. This helps us get the word out to them to watch out for their neighbors.

Lastly, we focus our effort on speaking to neighborhood watches, local churches, and various organizations, such as the Parkinson's Group, averaging 1-2 speeches per week. We work closely with OCEAN, Our Charlotte Elder Affairs, a group of business owners in the senior arena that want to specifically help Seniors.

Currently, we are seeing several different methods in which criminals are attempting to scam our senior population. This includes scammers visiting our website looking up recent arrests and then calling family pretending to have the ability to bail out the arrestee. We are also seeing what is referred to as "Romance Schemes" which can be long running and generally include a person asking for money while pretending to love someone. Other schemes that have become more pronounced center around sweepstakes lotteries where individuals have to play to win. In these cases, the scammer will ask for gift cards to pay the taxes to get people their winnings.

The Charlotte County Sheriff's Office has partnered with Charlotte Behavioral Health Care (CBHC) for the addition of a case worker to be assigned to the CCSO. This case worker receives referrals from deputies who, during the course of business, identify a senior who might be in need of services, as well as calls from the public. This case worker will refer and/or provide services through CBHC and/or make additional referrals to outside entities depending on the elders needs. Our office provides a number of resources, including:

- *Area Agency on Aging* – Provides a variety of assistance for qualifying seniors (home and community-based care, enrollment in Medicaid long-term supports, Elder help-

line) CM assist by giving brief overview of the program, provide the contact number and in some cases provide hands on assistance. CM follows up by phone if required and CM provides CM's contact information for additional assistance if needed.

- Home care providers (such as Highest Honor Home Care, Home Instead Senior Care, Right at Home) - Provides in home non-medical assistance based on individual's needs (personal care, meal prep, light housekeeping). CM assist by giving brief overview of the program, provide the contact number and in some cases help call the provider. CM follows up by phone if required and CM provides CM's contact information for additional assistance if needed.
- Transportation – (Charlotte County Transit, F.I.S.H (Englewood only) CM assist by giving brief overview of the program, provide the contact number. CM follows up by phone if required and CM provides CM's contact information for additional assistance if needed.
- Family Service Center – Has programs that assist with paying bills, Housing services, home repair. CM assist by giving brief overview of the programs, provide the contact number. CM follows up by phone if required and CM provides CM's contact information for additional assistance if needed.
- St Vincent De Paul - Programs that help with food, utilities, rent payment assistance, equipment (wheelchairs, refrigerators, stoves). CM assist by giving brief overview of the programs, provide the contact number and in some cases provide hands on assistance by contacting the provider on behalf of POC. CM follows up by phone if required and CM provides CM's contact information for additional assistance if needed.
- Active Age (Daytime Senior Care) - Daycare program for seniors. CM assist by giving brief overview of the program, provide the contact number. CM follows up by phone if required and CM provides CM's contact information for additional assistance if needed.
- Senior Placement Services (housing) - Assistance with locating and placement into assisted living, memory care facilities. CM assist by giving brief overview of the programs, provide the contact number and in some cases provide hands on assistance by calling the provider on behalf of POC. CM follows up by phone if required and CM provides CM's contact information for additional assistance if needed.
- Social Services Resource Center – Provides Guardian and POA services. CM assist by giving brief overview of the programs, provide the contact number. CM follows up by

phone if required and CM provides CM's contact information for additional assistance if needed.

- Florida Rural Legal services – Provides legal services. CM assist by providing the contact number. CM follows up by phone if required and CM provides CM's contact information for additional assistance if needed.
- Meals on Wheels – Provides meals to seniors. CM assist by giving brief overview of the program, provide the contact number and in some cases provide hands on assistance. CM follows up by phone if required and CM provides CM's contact information for additional assistance if needed.
- Senior Friendship Meals (Congregate meals, and Volunteer Services) - Provides congregate meals at a variety of sites in Charlotte County, offer volunteers that visit with home bound seniors. CM assist by giving brief overview of the programs, provide the contact number and in some cases provide hands on assistance. CM follows up by phone if required and CM provides CM's contact information for additional assistance if needed.
- CapTel - Captioned telephone for hearing impaired. CM assist by giving brief overview of the programs, provide the contact number and in some cases provide hands on assistance. CM follows up by phone if required and CM provides CM's contact information for additional assistance if needed.
- Dementia/Alzheimer's Caregiver support group – Support Group for caregivers. CM assist by providing the contact number. CM follows up by phone if required and CM provides CM's contact information for additional assistance if needed.
- The Dubin Center - Support Group for caregivers. CM assist by providing the contact number. CM follows up by phone if required and CM provides CM's contact information for additional assistance if needed.

Thank you, Chairman Scott and Ranking Member Gillibrand, for holding this hearing and focusing on senior population. I look forward to working with members of this Committee to develop proactive, and effective ways to protect our communities from crime.