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**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE AWARDS PLYMOUTH COUNTY \$1.18
MILLION TO ADDRESS DRUG ENDANGERED CHILDREN**

BROCKTON – Plymouth County District Attorney Timothy J. Cruz’s Office has been awarded a \$1.18 million federal grant that will enhance its ongoing efforts to identify and assist drug endangered children.

In July of 2021, the Plymouth County District Attorney’s Office (PCDAO) applied for the grant, offered by the Bureau of Justice Assistance’s Comprehensive Opioid, Stimulant, and Substance Abuse Program (COSSAP) Resource Center. Last month, the grant was awarded to PCDAO and is to be utilized over a three-year period. The grant was created by DOJ to address opioid issues in local communities.

“We have been working tirelessly to build local capacity to respond to children and families impacted by substance use disorders,” DA Cruz said. “Identifying and offering support to children living in homes with addiction is an important step in disrupting the cycles of trauma, and helping children and families build resilience. Securing this grant money will help assist us in enhancing Plymouth County’s response to the trauma that these children are witnessing. The grant process is an extremely competitive process, and we are honored to have been chosen by COSSAP to receive this critical funding.”

Opioid addiction in the home is a fast growing Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) in Massachusetts, and specifically in Plymouth County. From 2010-2020, Plymouth County had the second highest opioid-related overdose death rate of the 14 counties in Massachusetts, with 278 deaths per 100,000 people.

In 2015, along with Sheriff Joseph McDonald, DA Cruz created the Plymouth County Drug Abuse Task Force in an effort to engage all community sectors to address the opiate overdose issue on several fronts – reducing the supply of drugs through prosecutions, enhancing the county’s capacity for data collection of overdose information, reducing the demand through education and prevention programs, and increasing access to treatment and recovery services.

DA Cruz will use funds from this grant to expand upon existing Drug Endangered Children Initiative efforts, including improving the police identification and referral of drug

endangered children, and increasing DECI awareness and referrals from local intercepts. The grant also allows for an increase in services provided by United Way Family Center.

Trayce Hillman, Director of Community Connections of Brockton and The Family Resource Center said, “The Family Resource Center staff and I are extremely excited to hear about the COSSAP grant awarded to DA Cruz’s Office. This award will allow our continued partnership to provide programs, trainings, services and various resources to many human service professionals, law enforcement, educators, and community members who all care about the safety and support for children and their families. The Drug Endangered Children Alliance will make a tremendous impact to offer community awareness about the need to keep children safe, along with enhanced trainings and advocacy for my team at the Family Resource Center. We look forward to a strengthened collaboration for all parties.”

In addition, the grant allows for the hiring of a project coordinator, and for PCDAO to partner with three groups offering services to children impacted by addiction.

“To the Moon and Back is pleased to partner once again with the Plymouth County District Attorney’s Office and the Drug Endangered Children’s Initiative,” said Theresa Harmon, the group’s executive director and founder. “To the Moon and Back is a 501(c) 3 dedicated to supporting children born opiate dependent or exposed. We provide a variety of supportive services to these children and their families from support groups, care packages, to grants. This year we are conducting a research study on the long term impacts of in utero opiate exposure. This grant will allow us to educate families and providers on our findings to help develop lacking best practices in the educational, medical, and social emotional care of these children. We are so grateful for this opportunity.”

“Balance Workshops is grateful for the opportunity to once again work with the Plymouth County District Attorney’s Office to support children and families affected by the trauma of SUD,” said Teri Sexton, co-founder of Balance4Kids. “The funding offered by COSSAP will provide BALANCE Workshop Facilitators Training for the staff of child and family centers and schools in Plymouth County. This yoga-based program is a fantastic opportunity to increase social-emotional and resilience skills, build family engagement, and provide mentoring relationships in the community.”

Emily Smalley, chief executive officer for Calmer Choice said, "Calmer Choice provides mindfulness-based prevention programs to schools and communities on Cape Cod and in Southeastern Massachusetts, and has served nearly 40,000 people since we began in 2010. Through both online and in-person programs, we teach skills to enhance resilience, reduce stress, increase emotional self-regulation, and improve overall wellness. We are incredibly honored to partner with Plymouth County to bring our evidence-based programs to children and families impacted by substance use disorder. We believe that mindfulness can be an essential tool in helping people reconnect with themselves and others."