**P R E S S R E L E AS E**



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**Operation Watchful Eye V**

Thanks to an initiative involving 46 Georgia Sheriffs, 25 sex offenders were arrested and 88 warrants were issued across the state from October 26 – November 29, 2020 for violations of state registration laws. In 2015, the first coordinated effort across the state was launched to conduct residence verifications and compliance checks of registered sex offenders during a specific time period. The coordinated initiative became known as Operation Watchful Eye. Due to the overwhelming success of the original initiative, Georgia’s Sheriffs have made this an annual operation and recently conducted Operation Watchful Eye V.

The Office of Sheriff is mandated by law to register sex offenders and to keep the public informed of where registered sex offenders reside, work and attend school. Throughout the year, each sheriff’s office verifies addresses provided by registered sex offenders. While conducting residence verifications, deputies also assure additional registration requirements are being adhered to.

The purpose of this statewide effort is to create awareness that sheriffs’ offices work collectively, network, and actively engage their office by participating in statewide verification checks and other non-compliant matters in order to make our state safer. In numerous counties, deputy sheriffs, U.S. Marshals, U.S. Probation officers and Department of Community Supervision probation/parole officers worked together to verify sex offenders comply with the law.

Preliminary reporting by the 46 participating sheriff’s offices reveals 5,167 registered sex offenders, 144 predators and 55 homeless sex offenders are currently living in their counties. During the five week operation, 4,962 residence verifications were conducted, 82 new sex offenders moved into the reporting counties, 22 new warrants were issued for violations of the sex offender registry law, 6 warrants were issued for new sex offenses, 43 warrants were issued for residency violations of the sex offender registry and 17 warrants were issued for other miscellaneous new charges. More importantly, it was discovered that 154 sex offenders had absconded from their last known address, which will require the sheriff to work with other supporting agencies and track these individuals down.

Remember, for the protection of your family and neighbors, visit your local sheriff’s office website or visit the <http://gbi.georgia.gov/georgia-sex-offender-registry> for more information on the whereabouts of registered sex offenders in your community.