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**For Immediate Release**

***Summit County Common Pleas Court Welcomes Tank***

***The Turning Point Program Therapy Dog***

Summit County, Ohio: Turning Point Program Presiding Judges Joy Malek Oldfield and Christine Croce have a furry new staff member, Tank, the Summit County Turning Point Therapy Dog. Tank, an 18-month old Golden Retriever, will begin serving the court this month. He was procured through Circle Tails, an accredited Assistance Dog International organization, and completed several months of training through the Inmate/Canine Educational Training Program.

Turning Point, an Ohio Supreme Court-certified drug court, serves non-violent felony offenders who have committed crimes as a result of their addiction to drugs and/or alcohol. The program requires defendants to engage in drug and/or alcohol treatment, case management services, probation supervision and to participate in regular Court hearings with Judges Croce and Oldfield. Drug Courts apply a therapeutic approach with treatment, wrap-around services, judicial engagement and accountability to address the underlying causes of each participant’s criminal behavior.

Turning Point Presiding Judges Malek Oldfield and Croce approved use of a therapy dog after Turning Point Probation Officer Jillian Zetts made the initial suggestion for the initiative. Officer Zetts researched the idea, put together a proposal, obtained Tank, and underwent handler training.

 “Through Officer Zetts’ research, we learned that registered therapy dogs are routinely used in courts as therapeutic companions who help individuals relax, reduce their level of stress and help them feel more comfortable in the court setting,” stated Judge Malek Oldfield.

The concept of having a therapy dog in the court setting has grown traction in recent years. Therapy dogs are being more widely used in bringing about a major change in how courts meet the emotional needs of those involved in the criminal justice system. Emerging research on the human-animal bond has found that having such a bond with pets has a positive impact on people’s health, such as lowering blood pressure, improving motivation to participate in treatment and the potential to improve stability, health, economic outputs and reduce healthcare costs. In the court setting, therapy dogs are particularly helpful for those who are suffering from the disease of addiction, as well as those defendants with mental health concerns.

“We understand that there is anxiety and stress related to participating in the Turning Point Program and we make every effort to help participants realize success,” asserted Judge Croce. “The addition of Tank will enhance the court’s therapeutic environment and, as research suggests, ease this anxiety and break down barriers,” concluded Judge Croce.

In addition to his role with the Turning Point Program, Tank is available for scheduled use by any specialized docket program, or Probation Supervision Unit to assist in providing comfort to any post-plea/post-conviction defendants who would benefit from his services.

Judges Malek Oldfield and Croce are proud of this initiative and the hard work of Officer Zetts. “Summit County Common Pleas Court and specifically the Turning Point Program now have another proven therapeutic method to assist those in the criminal justice system who suffer with anxiety and stress, in order to help them focus on recovery and become productive citizens,” stated Judge Malek Oldfield.

“Every day we work tirelessly to fight the opioid epidemic and we need to use every tool available to help people address their addiction and lead a life of recovery,” concluded Judge Croce.

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