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**NEWS RELEASE  
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**Alexandria Police Congratulates Crisis Intervention Team Graduates**

On Friday, May 21, eight police officers will become graduates of Alexandria's first Crisis Intervention Team's training academy. A graduation ceremony for the officers and six deputy sheriffs will be held at 3:00 P.M. at the Durant Center, located at 1605 Cameron Street. The Chief of Police, Sheriff and Mayor will be speaking to congratulate the graduating class on their accomplishment.

The Alexandria Police Department developed the Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) through a partnership with the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse. A Crisis Intervention Team is comprised of highly skilled and specially trained police officers who function as part of the regular police patrol. Through their 40 hours of training, these officers learn skills including recognition of psychiatric and substance use disorders, suicide intervention, verbal de-escalation techniques, the role of the family in the care of a person with mental illness, and legal training in mental health and substance abuse issues. In addition to classroom instruction, officers-in-training also participate in role playing exercises based on real-life scenarios and spend an entire day visiting mental health and substance abuse inpatient and outpatient treatment facilities where they have the opportunity to engage in one-on-one dialogue with mental health consumers, and learn about resources available to help people in crisis.

CIT is based on a model developed by the Memphis Police Department in 1988 following a Police shooting of a mentally ill person, and it has since been adopted in communities in 45 states. The training is designed to educate and prepare police officers who come into contact with people with mental illnesses to recognize the signs and symptoms of these illnesses and to respond effectively and appropriately to individuals in crisis. Since police officers are often the first responders in these incidents, it is essential that they understand how mental illnesses can alter people's behaviors and perceptions. The trained CIT officer is skilled at de-escalating crises involving people with mental illness, while bringing an element of understanding and compassion to these difficult situations. CIT is one of a number of cooperative, multi-agency initiatives currently underway in Alexandria to help divert persons with mental illness and substance use disorders away from the criminal justice system and into the treatment system, enabling them to live law-abiding and productive lives in our community.

For further questions, please call the Media Service Unit at 703.838.4636.