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SC Department of Mental Health's Division of Public Safety Receives Prestigious Accreditation

Columbia, SC – The South Carolina Department of Mental Health is proud to announce that its Division of Public Safety (SCDMH Public Safety) has earned a four-year accreditation from the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, Inc. (CALEA), making it the *only* mental health law enforcement agency in the United States to hold this distinction.

DMH Public Safety Chief Elizabeth Hall accepted the award, following a final review and vote by the CALEA Commission in Grand Rapids, Michigan July 28. Only 12% of law enforcement agencies in South Carolina are CALEA accredited.

“The safety of patients and staff is the Department’s highest priority,” said SCDMH Deputy Director Mark W. Binkley “Most patients in the Agency’s hospitals were admitted because they are posing a risk of harm as a result of symptoms of a mental illness. SCDMH is fortunate to employ highly professional law enforcement officers who have expertise in responding to situations in a psychiatric treatment setting.”

The CALEA accreditation program requires law enforcement agencies to demonstrate compliance with professional standards in multiple areas, including policy and procedures, administration, operations, and support services. Verification by an on-site Assessment Team that SCDMH Public Safety met all CALEA standards was part of a voluntary process to gain accreditation, a national recognition of law enforcement excellence. In order to maintain accredited status, law enforcement agencies must undergo re-accreditation every four years, including annual reviews, to ensure continued compliance with CALEA standards.

Chief Hall noted that the decision to seek CALEA accreditation “is a move towards excellence. CALEA requirements provide standards that strengthen our Agency’s practices, policies, and procedures, ultimately enhancing our law enforcement capabilities.”

The Division’s latest achievement is yet another area in which SCDMH Public Safety excels. Its Division’s dispatch communications are fully functional with the National Crime Information Center, its Body-worn Camera policy was reviewed and commended by the US Department of Justice, and it holds mutual aid agreements with the Columbia Police Department, the Richland County Sheriff’s Department, and the SC Law Enforcement Division.

[CALEA](#) was established as a credentialing authority in 1979, through the joint efforts of law enforcement's major executive associations, with the purpose of improving the delivery of public safety services, primarily by: maintaining a body of standards, developed by public safety practitioners, covering a wide range of up-to-date public safety initiatives; establishing and administering an accreditation process; and recognizing professional excellence.

The SCDMH Division of Public Safety is the law enforcement entity for the Agency and has statewide jurisdiction. The Division employs 141 fully certified law enforcement officers and has specific responsibilities for coordinating all law enforcement, fire and life safety, and security programs within the Department, and performs as the Agency’s first responders, as necessary. The Division enforces state laws and protects SCDMH property, patients, employees, and visitors.

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