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SUCCESSFUL KEYS 2 DRIVE DIVERSION PROGRAM EXPANDS TO NASSAU COUNTY

The KEYS 2 Drive program has been a growing success since its launch in Duval County just under a year ago. Now the smart justice initiative is growing larger — much larger — as it expands to Nassau County starting today.

The goal of KEYS 2 Drive is to provide people with certain license-related infractions an opportunity to obtain a valid driver's license. The streamlined diversion program allows participants to obtain their license and avoid criminal charges on primary offenses of Driving While License Suspended or Revoked, or No Valid Driver's License.

The State Attorney's Office, Nassau County judiciary, Nassau County Clerk of Courts, and Court Options have worked together to expand the program, which has the support of area law enforcement.

The program benefits the community by improving public safety, reducing recidivism, recouping taxpayer expenses from outstanding fines and fees, and decreasing unnecessary expenditures in the criminal justice system. To date, more than 650 people have successfully obtained their license in Duval County, a number that is sure to increase with the expansion.

"KEYS 2 Drive is working," said State Attorney Melissa Nelson. "I am excited that Nassau County will be able to benefit from this effective smart justice initiative."

The Honorable Judge Wesley Poole of Nassau County said the great majority of criminal traffic and civil traffic cases he oversees stem from drivers with suspended or no valid driver's licenses. He has assisted people in these situations for some time and is optimistic KEYS 2 Drive will provide further help.

"I do think it will be beneficial to the court system, but most importantly I think it will benefit defendants who take advantage of the program," said Poole.

Participants with these types of violations often find themselves in a cycle of suspensions, fines, and fees after repeated infractions. With the support of the Nassau County Clerk of Courts, participants will now have a feasible path toward meeting their financial obligations. The Clerk's office has partnered in the program to provide case-specific payment plans for participants, including the opportunity to pull delinquent fines and fees from collections — a step that can save participants up to 35% of what they owe.

“We are excited about the many benefits it will bring to Nassau’s public safety and economy by putting licensed drivers back on our road,” said Nassau County Clerk of Courts John Crawford.

Law enforcement is the first point of contact with drivers who drive illegally. Nassau County law enforcement leadership fully supports the problem-solving program.

“I am definitely supportive of the KEYS 2 Drive program,” said Nassau County Sheriff Bill Leeper. “It gives people an avenue to get back on the road legally and alleviates overcrowding in our jail.”

And Fernandina Beach Police Department Chief James Hurley said that as a public safety agency, enforcement strategies always focus on education and compliance.

“We are always looking for smart solutions to problems that force confrontation between citizens and police officers,” said Hurley. “The KEYS 2 Drive program promises to address a longstanding obstacle for many people caught in the cycle of forced recidivism because they have no realistic path out.”

For more information on KEYS 2 Drive, visit www.sao4th.com or call Court Options, the case managers for the program, at (904) 903-4293.