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PD Office Highlights Educational Outreach in Second Accountability Forum *Open dialogue with neighborhoods, accessibility to constituents ongoing priority to office*

Jacksonville, FL: A panel of several local and state elected officials, including Fourth Judicial Circuit Public Defender Matt Shirk, unanimously agrees that quality education and strong family support are the key elements to reducing criminal activity amongst Jacksonville's youth population. The idea became the ongoing theme Thursday evening throughout a segment dedicated to 'youth crime prevention' during the *Second Local Leadership Accountability Forum* which was organized by two local community associations who periodically assemble governmental leadership to engage in important dialogue about problems in Jacksonville.

"Traditional and non-traditional education is essential to steering people away from poor decision making," said Mr. Shirk. "School districts have an increasingly difficult job to do but we all must embrace ideas such as fighting truancy and keeping kids in school through 12th grade. In the Public Defender's Office, we do a great deal of



outreach to young people; we aim to educate them about the realities of the criminal justice system and how hard it can become to escape the system once getting a conviction.

Shirk continued, "But education is not just limited to school-aged children. As criminal defense attorneys, we have a keen understanding of how the system works. We put a focus on reaching out to older populations who are re-entering society after serving prison sentences to provide them education about putting their lives back on track."

The Forum took place at Milne Auditorium on the campus of Edward Waters College. The two-hour event featured Mr. Shirk and various other panelists including Assistant Public Defender and senior Capital Crimes attorney Melina Buncome-

Williams, Sheriff John Rutherford, Senator Tony Hill, Representative Mia Jones and City Councilman Reginald Brown. Key staff members from the City of Jacksonville were also present. Close to 50 attendees listened to the moderated discussion and also submitted questions to the panel.

"Our goal is to continue to enrich the community by keeping the lines of communication open between Jacksonville's leaders and its voters," said event chairperson Eunice Barnum of the Sherwood Forest/Paradise Park Community Association. She and co-organizers Lloyd T. Washington of the Coalition of Presidents of Community Associations and Dan Evans who served as emcee indicated the ongoing discussion will continue at a future event.

PAGE 2, PHOTOS “Second Accountability Forum”



A portion of the panelists from the Second Local Leadership Accountability Forum (L-R) Public Defender Matt Shirk, Representative Mia Jones, Senator Tony Hill, Assistant Public Defender Melina Buncome-Williams, Legislative Assistant to Sen. Hill Deborah Parsons.



(L-R) Public Defender Shirk, Second Local Leadership Accountability Forum Chairperson Eunice Barnum and Althea Mikell attendee and member of the Sherwood Forest/Paradise Park Community Association.



(L-R) Accountability Forum co-organizer Lloyd T. Washington of The Coalition of Presidents of Community Associations, Assistant Public Defender Melina Buncome-Williams, Juvenile Mentor for PD Office Sylvester Black.