



# News Release

*Alachua County Sheriff's Office*

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**For Immediate Release:**

**Today's Date:** October 3, 2016

**Prepared by:** PIO Art Forgey

**Release #:** 2016-042

**Media Advisory: Administrative Investigation into the Death of ACSO K9 Robbie Completed**

An administrative investigation into the heat-related death of ACSO K9 Robbie at the home of his handler, Deputy Sheriff Tommy Willcox on July 8, 2016, was recently completed and several violations of Alachua County Sheriff's Office policy and procedure were identified based upon a preponderance of evidence, to wit: Performance of Duty; Neglect of Duty and Driving.

After careful and thorough review of the facts contained within this investigation, and recommendations made by supervisors and commanders within Deputy Willcox's chain of command, Sheriff Darnell has sustained these violations and determined appropriate disciplinary sanctions to include a suspension of six (6) working days without pay; a three (3) month disciplinary probation period; and removal from the Canine Unit are warranted.

When discipline is recommended, the ACSO utilizes a matrix system which takes into consideration the disciplinary history of the employee and the category of internal policy violation, among other factors. In this case, Deputy Willcox has been given the greatest number of suspension days based upon comparative disciplinary histories for similar sustained violations against other employees during Sheriff Darnell's tenure.

Due to the understandable public sentiment K9 Robbie's death has spurred, Sheriff Darnell issued the following statement:

"Nothing can undo the tragedy of Robbie's death. I am convinced there was no intent by Deputy Willcox to cause harm to Robbie. Before placing judgment, I encourage individuals to read the investigations to gain insight into how much Deputy Willcox loved Robbie and considered him a part of his family. Deputy Willcox made a horrible mistake and continues to deal with great regret and despair every day.

Not as an excuse, but as explanation regarding some of the mitigating factors I considered in determining this discipline: Deputy Willcox suffered from significant mental and physical fatigue associated with being called-out on his normal day off to respond as part of our SWAT Team to assist the Gilchrist County Sheriff's Office in apprehending a barricaded

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murder suspect. This call out detail lasted several hours; in addition, upon completion of the detail, Deputy Willcox was preoccupied with resuming a family outing which had been interrupted with no prior notice.

In his interview with the Office of Professional Standards, Deputy Willcox stated that Robbie was his 'best friend' adding that he spent more time with Robbie than he did with his wife and his kids. Their emotional bond is undeniable, and there is no doubt in my mind that Deputy Willcox and his entire family have grieved more than any of us over this heartbreaking tragedy."

Moving forward, the ACSO is in the process of installing additional electronic safety features to all K9 Patrol Vehicles, to supplement existing electronic and physical safety mechanisms already in place, in order to prevent this from occurring again in the future.

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