



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Ghost Joins MTU 7 as Central Illinois' Newest Therapy K9

Abandoned Puppy Becomes Beacon of Support

SPRINGFIELD, IL – A remarkable journey has brought a 10-month-old Labrador mix named **Ghost** to Mobile Training Unit (MTU) 7, where he will serve as a dedicated therapy K9 providing critical emotional support and a calming presence for law enforcement officers across Bureau, LaSalle, Marshall, Peoria, Putnam, Stark, Tazewell and Woodford counties.

Ghost's story began in December 2024 when he was found abandoned in Cicero, Illinois, at just two and a half months old, along with his brother. Despite efforts by local animal control, he went unclaimed. His path soon led to a transformative opportunity through the **Cook County Sheriff's Office Tails of Redemption program**. This life-saving program provides professional dog training through a partnership with incarcerated individuals, giving both dogs and handlers a second chance.

Through rigorous training and maintaining a naturally calming, friendly, and intuitive demeanor, Ghost proved to be the perfect candidate for therapy work. He has successfully earned certifications from both the Cook County Sheriff's Office and the American Kennel Club (AKC), demonstrating his readiness to provide comfort and support.

"We are incredibly excited to welcome Ghost to MTU 7 and integrate him into our officer wellness efforts," said **Brian Fengel, MTU 7 Director and Ghost's handler**. Mr. Fengel, a retired Chief of Police with 30 years of law enforcement experience and an extensive background managing K9s brings a unique blend of familiarity to his role. "Having been around K9s my entire career, I've seen firsthand the profound impact dogs can have. Ghost is more than just a dog, he's an ice-breaker, a source of comfort, and a silent supporter for our officers facing daily stressors. Even in these first few days, his presence has already brought smiles and joy to the entire community."

Ghost's gentle nature is immediately apparent. Nothing seems to phase Ghost, such as his calm reaction to fireworks and his easy interactions with children at a local store, where he allowed them to playfully hang on his ears without issue. His calming temperament makes him ideally suited to alleviate stress and provide a safe outlet for officers.

Together, Ghost and Mr. Fengel will promote crisis intervention training, offer direct mental health support, and serve as an approachable presence at community events and in classrooms.

"The inclusion of therapy K9s like Ghost is a critical component of our comprehensive approach to officer wellness across Illinois," said **Jennifer Wooldridge, State CIT Coordinator**. "This innovative program,



developed by the Illinois Law Enforcement Training and Standards Board (ILETSB), will create a vital network, ensuring that officers statewide have access to these invaluable resources. Ghost, and the affiliated teams, provide crucial emotional support and serve as a testament to our ongoing efforts to prioritize mental health within our ranks."

Ghost is already "on duty," ready to provide comfort and connection. He will soon participate in a training class at Illinois Central College, interacting with students, and is available for rapid deployment to support officers during critical incidents throughout MTU 7's service area.

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About ILETSB

The Illinois Law Enforcement Training and Standards Board is the state agency mandated to promote and maintain a high level of professional standards for law enforcement, correctional, and court security officers. Its purpose is to promote and protect citizen health, safety, and welfare by assisting municipalities, counties, special districts, universities, colleges, and other local governmental agencies of this state in their efforts to upgrade and maintain a high level of training and standards for law enforcement personnel.