

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**SERGEANT JEN PAYNE OF THE STRAFFORD COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE TO CARRY FLAME OF HOPE AT
2018 SPECIAL OLYMPICS USA GAMES**

Manchester, NH -- June 27, 2018 – Before the 2018 Special Olympics USA Games kick off in Seattle this Sunday, July 1, an elite group of individuals will serve as the “Guardians of the Flame” and escort the Special Olympics Flame of Hope on a journey across Washington state. Sergeant Jen Payne of Strafford County Sheriff’s Office is among those who will make up the prestigious “Final Leg” team for the Law Enforcement Torch Run® (LETR) at the 2018 Special Olympics USA Games.

From June 27 through June 30, the LETR Final Leg team will conduct multiple runs and ceremonies in cities, towns and communities across Washington state to raise awareness for Special Olympics and generate excitement for the 2018 USA Games. The 2018 LETR Final Leg culminates on July 1, when the team escorts the Flame of Hope into the Opening Ceremony at Husky Stadium at the University of Washington in Seattle. ESPN, the official media partner of the 2018 USA Games, will telecast the Opening Ceremony live on ABC beginning at 12:30 p.m. PT/3:30 p.m. ET.

Since the first Special Olympics USA Games in 2006, members of law enforcement and Special Olympics athletes from across the United States have carried the Flame of Hope in the LETR Final Leg to usher the start of the national competition.

Payne applied for the role in the summer of 2017 and was selected because of her longstanding dedication to the Law Enforcement Torch Run in New Hampshire. Payne’s involvement began as a volunteer in 2009. Over the years her role grew. In 2012 she began participating in the Winni Dip. In 2013, she started coordinating Law Enforcement at the Somersworth location of Fueling Dreams Day, when Law Enforcement officers and Special Olympics athletes work together to pump gas and raise awareness at Circle K and Irving locations throughout the state. In 2014, she became a Leg Leader of the Torch Run coordinating the run from New Durham to Durham. In 2017, Payne became the regional director for the Seacoast North region of the state and a member of the executive committee.

The Olympic flame symbolizes the light of spirit, knowledge and life. With identical power, the Flame of Hope symbolizes the Special Olympics goal, which is “shining a light on the talents and abilities of people with intellectual disabilities” and the courage and celebration of diversity that the Special Olympics movement represents.

ABOUT LAW ENFORCEMENT TORCH RUN

The Law Enforcement Torch Run® (LETR) is the largest public awareness vehicle and grass-roots fundraiser for Special Olympics. Known honorably as Guardians of the Flame, law enforcement members and Special Olympics athletes carry the “Flame of Hope” into the Opening Ceremony of local competitions, and into Special Olympics State, Provincial, National, Regional and World Games.

Annually, more than 97,000 dedicated and compassionate law enforcement members carry the “Flame of Hope,” symbolizing courage and celebration of diversity uniting communities around the globe. Since inception, LETR has raised more than half a billion dollars and changed millions of attitudes.

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ABOUT THE 2018 SPECIAL OLYMPICS USA GAMES

The 2018 Special Olympics USA Games will be held in Seattle, Washington July 1-6, 2018. More than 4,000 participants representing all 50 states and the District of Columbia, along with the support of tens of thousands of volunteers and spectators, will compete in 14 Olympic-type team and individual sports. The 2018 Special Olympics USA Games will celebrate the Special Olympics movement and its 50th anniversary; promote the ideals of acceptance and inclusion through sport; and showcase athletes from throughout the U.S. and the abilities of people with intellectual disabilities. The 2018 USA Games will also highlight Special Olympics' work in sport, education, health and community-building. For more information on the 2018 Special Olympics USA Games, please visit www.SpecialOlympicsUSAGames.org.

ABOUT SPECIAL OLYMPICS NEW HAMPSHIRE

Special Olympics New Hampshire (SONH) is an accredited program of Special Olympics International (SOI) and is part of an international global movement that changes lives by encouraging and empowering people with intellectual disabilities, promoting acceptance for all, and fostering communities of understanding and respect worldwide. To learn more, visit www.sonh.org.

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