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For immediate release

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# Second Judicial District Prosecuting Attorney Scott Ellington announced several members of the Second Judicial District Organized Criminal Activity Task Force attended a gang investigator certification session held by the Tennessee Gang Investigation Association in Millington, Tenn.

The eight-hour course, held April 26, trained officers about the history, organization, structure and activities of gang members. Several officers received their Basic Gang Investigator certification upon completion of an exam.

“Arkansas does not have a gang investigator certification process,” Craighead County Chief Deputy Prosecutor Grant DeProw said. “We reached out to Tennessee. We’re excited to bring certified gang investigators to Northeast Arkansas. This training will improve investigations and, ultimately, convictions.”

The Organized Criminal Activity Task Force was created in January after a fatal shooting in a downtown Jonesboro venue in May 2017 that police said was gang-related. The task force’s purpose is to identify and target criminal groups that conduct drug trafficking, money laundering, alien smuggling, arms trafficking and possession, crimes of violence, murder and aggravated assault, robbery and street gang activities. The force gathers, maintains and shares intelligence information about gang-related activities. Arkansas Code Annotated § 5-74-101 et. seq. allows the levying of higher charges against gang members.

“Our goal of the task force is to create a focal point of contact for each city and county,” said Lt. Kenny Oldham, a Jonesboro Police Department detective and operations commander of the force. “The training was a massive help in helping us understand how gangs work.”

The force is comprised of law enforcement from the Second Judicial District Prosecuting Attorney’s office, the Jonesboro Police Department, the Craighead County Sheriff’s Department, the Craighead County Juvenile Department, the Mississippi County Juvenile Department, the Osceola Police Department, the Blytheville Police Department, the Paragould Police Department, the Poinsett County Sheriff’s Department, the Arkansas Department of Community Corrections, the Trumann Police Department, the Arkansas State University Police Department and federal partners.