



GREENE COUNTY

# SHERIFF



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## Media Release

### **A LETTER FROM THE SHERIFF:**

As the elected Sheriff of Greene County, I have promised to uphold the law and protect the constitutional rights of our citizens. It is my duty and obligation to respond to crime and assist citizens who are seeking law enforcement action.

I want to make it very clear, that when a person enters onto the property of another or remains unlawfully, whether it's a poacher on a farmer's rural land or a person setting up camp on private property in the city, they are trespassing and this is a crime. A property owner / land owner is under no obligation to delay the removal of the trespasser or permit the continued trespassing or occupancy of their property by a trespasser.

During the summer of 2022, I began responding to the outcries of Greene County Citizen's whose private properties within the city of Springfield and outside the city had been overrun by trespassers who had set up illegal encampments. These criminals had damaged and contaminated their land, polluted their waterways, and cut down their trees. These criminals had littered acres and acres of property with garbage, stolen property and hazardous items such as drug paraphernalia, syringes, chemicals and human excrement. These criminals had set up dangerous booby traps and instruments which would seriously harm the property owners or anyone not aware of them.

At the request of private property owners, I responded with deputies to a number of their properties and arrested and removed these trespassers from their land. Leaving behind for the property owners an indescribable, overwhelming amount of hazardous garbage. While some of these property owners have the financial resources to clean up and remove this garbage, most do not. These people are left concerned about local government deadlines and cleanup fines with no resources to help restore their land and properties back to a safe and clean environment.



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On February 10, I responded with deputies to a location in northern Springfield, the site of an illegal encampment. This particular site was made up of several connected parcels, owned by multiple citizens who have spent their entire lifetimes living in this area. These citizens, a grandmother of three, and elderly woman and other neighbors described that they were afraid to enter onto their land or even allow their children to play outside. They expressed fear they would be harmed and requested assistance and protection during cleanup of the most hazardous garbage on their land. Inspecting over twelve camp and debris sites, deputies and property owners worked together to identify and separate the most hazardous garbage from the five worst sites into piles. Sheriff's deputies did not ignite the piles.

Because this issue concerns so many of our citizens, I have recently been contacted by a number of business owners and citizens who have offered to assist. These concerned citizens have offered to provide resources such as dumpsters and equipment to help private property owners clean up and restore their land back to environmentally safe conditions.

In closing, those who claim that land owners should allow transient strangers to take up residency on their land are not being honest about what they would expect from law enforcement if they were in the position of the land owner. Am I to believe that these advocates for trespassing would allow these transient people to pitch tents in their front yards? There are in fact Springfield area property owners who allow and welcome people to camp and live on their property. I am not concerned with the choices made by these property owners; I am simply standing up for the rights of the property owners who do not welcome trespassers and crime.

Sheriff Jim C Arnott