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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **ALEA Kicks Off ‘101 Days of Safety’ with the Memorial Day Holiday Weekend**

*From the Highways, Waterways and even the Airways*

**MONTGOMERY** – This Memorial Day weekend, the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency (ALEA) is kicking off 101 days of safety throughout the summer months, beginning with the busy holiday weekend on Friday, May 27, and ending on Labor Day, Sept. 5, which, for many, is the last major holiday weekend of the summer season.

The Agency will utilize an assortment of platforms and partnerships with local first responders to implement and convey a variety of safety initiatives along with tips and messages to keep your loved ones safe while enjoying all the summer festivities. From the highways, waterways and even the airways, ALEA will be there to assist and preserve public safety for all.

“After the challenges and restrictions of COVID-19, we realize and understand that Alabamians and citizens from across the nation will be traveling to and through our state to reach their fun-filled destinations to enjoy this holiday weekend with both friends and family. As the state law enforcement agency, we have developed a variety of initiatives to ensure that Alabama’s highways, waterways and beaches are safe for all,” said ALEA Secretary Hal Taylor.

The official Memorial Day travel period begins on 12:01 a.m. Friday, May 27, and concludes at midnight Monday, May 30. Like previous years, all available Troopers within ALEA’s Highway Patrol and Marine Patrol Division will be actively patrolling Alabama’s busy roadways and scenic waterways. However, this year, the Agency is taking safety a step further and utilizing its Aviation Unit to partner with Gulf Shores and Orange Beach to assist with a Summer Rescue Swimmer detail throughout the entire Memorial Day weekend.

“The purpose of this detail is to provide a rapid response water emergency team to enhance the safety for all citizens and visitors on Alabama’s beaches,” said Protective Services Division Chief Stephen Tidwell. “Our Aviation Unit will provide an aircraft and pilot to quickly fly and deploy rescue swimmers from both Gulf Shores and Orange Beach Fire Departments to distressed swimmers. The aircraft will also be utilized to conduct beach safety flights, patrolling in those areas where lifeguards are not available.”

Director of ALEA’s Department of Public Safety (DPS) Colonel Jimmy Helms added, “We know that many citizens across the state are planning to visit and enjoy Alabama’s beautiful beaches, which is why we felt it necessary to coordinate, develop and include beach safety within our Agency’s Memorial Day and summer safety initiatives. We integrated this valuable control measure into ALEA’s safety plan in-conjunction with incorporating it into our messaging

campaign, which includes tips to avoid crashes on both highways and waterways across our state, in an effort to ensure that everyone returns home safely.”

Steve Thompson, Chief responsible for ALEA’s Marine Patrol Division noted, “Along with ALEA Aviation, Troopers assigned to our Marine Patrol Division will also be available to assist with any boaters in distress, not only on the Gulf Coast, but along all Alabama’s waterways. Our state has a multitude of waterways which host a variety of aquatic and marine related activities, so regardless of where you plan to enjoy your Memorial Day weekend festivities, Marine Patrol Troopers will be out patrolling Alabama’s rivers, lakes and beaches. Troopers will be conducting safety vessel inspections to ensure every boat on the water is properly equipped with all the necessary safety equipment including a personal floatation device (PFD) for everyone on board the vessel. Our Troopers will also be on the lookout for indications that vessel operators maybe impaired. Please understand there will be zero tolerance for boating under the influence. We want everyone to relax and enjoy the upcoming weekend, but you must be safety aware while on the water.

“All available Troopers within the ALEA’s Highway Patrol Division will be out in full force before and during this Memorial Day holiday weekend to ensure Alabama roadways are as safe as possible,” Secretary Taylor added.

“Recently, we have seen a dramatic increase in commercial motor vehicle traffic across our state, as various industries continue to move into Alabama, we believe this trend will only increase. Given the influx in commercial vehicle traffic along with the much-anticipated Memorial Day weekend, we may see historic volumes of traffic on Alabama roadways. While we recognize and understand motorists are eager to reach their favorite vacation destination, we cannot stress enough how essential it is to have a pre-trip checklist and include a roadside emergency kit within that inspection. We also remind everyone how important it is to be vigilant when driving on roadways in heavier-than-normal traffic, especially when commercial vehicles are present. You must be a defensive driver because the slightest amount of inattention can have tragic consequences,” said Colonel Jimmy Helms.

ALEA offers the following safety tips to remember:

### **Highway Safety Reminders**

- **Remain attentive around large vehicles and semi-trucks.** Large vehicles such as semi-trucks command a heavy presence on interstates. They have limited maneuverability, longer stopping distances and bigger blind spots.
- **Expect traffic heavier than usual.** Adjust travel plans to accommodate busier roadways and waterways and leave a bit earlier. Avoid speeding, following vehicles too closely and other dangerous behaviors on roadways.
- **Prepare your vehicle.** Get your vehicle’s tires, brakes, exterior lights, battery, air filters, wipers and fluid levels checked before you leave for a trip. Keep an emergency kit available. (Inflated spare tire, first aid kit, jumper cables, phone charger, etc.)

- **Avoid driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs.** If you plan on consuming alcohol pre-plan for a designated driver, call Uber or a cab. Designate a sober driver in advance to get you home safely
- **Buckle up – no matter how short your trip.** Ensure all the vehicle’s occupants are buckled up and children are utilizing a child restraint system. Car seats and boosters provide protection for infants and children in a crash, yet car crashes are a leading cause of death for children ages 1 to 13.
- **Don’t follow other vehicles too closely.** “Following too close” is one of the leading contributing factors behind crashes. Maintaining situational awareness and operating under a defensive driving posture is critical in avoiding crashes especially during high traffic periods.

### **Boating Safety Reminders**

- **Holidays are not the time for novice boaters to learn to operate their crafts.** Operator inexperience is one of the leading contributing factors to boating crashes in Alabama. New operators should consider attending an in-person boating-safety class prior to going to the water.
- **Children younger than age 8 are required to always wear PFDs (unless inside a permanently affixed cabin enclosure).** They also should wear PFDs that are the appropriate size.
- **Be mindful of other boaters.** Avoid passing too closely to boats in motion, boats at idle and persons in the water.
- **Boaters should avoid the use of alcoholic beverages or use the designated operator system.** The sun, wind and other weather conditions already produce an effect on boaters known as “boater fatigue,” and the consumption of alcohol only compounds and intensifies the effect.
- **Avoid boating at night unless familiar with the body of water.** Then, operate at a reduced, safe speed. Make sure all navigation lights are in proper working order and displayed properly. Have a cell phone and flashlight on hand in case of emergency.
- **Inflatable PFDs may not be used by persons at the age of 15 and younger.** They also are not approved for use by skiers, persons being towed on tubes or other aqua-planning devices, or for use on personal watercraft.

### **Beach and Swimming Safety Reminders**

- **Always check surf and weather conditions before heading to the beach and observe beach flags.**

- **Never swim alone.** Always stay in groups. Don't wander too far from shore.
- **Don't swim near piers, pilings, and platforms.** Exercise caution when swimming in areas between sandbars or near steep drop-offs.
- **Do not swim in areas being used by fishermen.** Avoid swimming in areas where schools of fish are present. Diving seabirds are good indicators of areas to avoid.
- **Use extra caution when water is murky.** Avoid being in the water during dusk, nighttime, or twilight hours.
- **Rip currents are most prevalent when the waves crash perpendicular to the beach rather than at an angle.** Rip currents are also common in areas near sand bars, piers, pilings and jetties.
- **One of the easiest ways to spot a rip current is to look for gaps between the waves.** A small patch of calm water surrounded by waves is often a rip current.
- **Look for discolored water near the shore.** Rip currents tend to drag large amounts of sand and sediment back out to sea with them, so many rip currents are easily identified by a noticeable flow of sand extending away from the shore.