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CONTACT: Barbara Robinson  
(310) 539-0508, ext 230  
[bkrobinson@robinsonheli.com](mailto:bkrobinson@robinsonheli.com)

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## **Ohio's Butler County Switches to R44 Police Helicopter**

**Torrance, CA** — The Butler County Sheriff's Office has just purchased a new Robinson R44 Police Helicopter to replace the aging government surplus helicopters it has operated for the past five years. Sheriff Harold "Don" Gabbard's aviation unit will use the helicopter for scheduled patrols on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights, and it will be "on call" for emergencies 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The County's old helicopters were acquired as part of the Federal 1033 Program (formerly the 1208 Program) that permits the Secretary of Defense to transfer, without charge, excess U.S. Department of Defense property (supplies and equipment) to State and local law enforcement agencies. The County accepted the surplus military helicopters with the understanding that the County would operate the helicopters for a minimum of five years. As that five-year period came to an end, it became clear that the aging OH58 helicopters were too costly to operate; only two of the five aircraft were still flying, and the other three were being used for spare parts; operating costs were increasing to the point where the aviation unit would no longer be able to sustain itself. In addition, because military surplus aircraft don't have airworthiness certificates, they are restricted under public use laws, which prevented the County from performing certain missions and from recouping expenses when assisting agencies in other jurisdictions.

The County considered purchasing a light turbine helicopter like the Bell 206 or a used MD 500, but ruled that out, because "the acquisition cost is more than twice as much as the Robinson R44, and operating and maintenance costs didn't make much sense economically," reported Deputy Dave Pratt, Chief Pilot for the Aviation Unit. "The R44 provides performance similar to the OH58s, but with new technology and at a much lower cost. After looking at those factors, it was just a matter of evaluating our primary mission – search, search and rescue, surveillance, and drug eradication – and determining that the R44 has the capabilities we need." Bids were solicited, and the County purchased the new R44 from All Star Helicopters based at Dayton International Airport. The helicopter is equipped with an infrared system, police radios, moving map displays, "all mission-essential equipment," says Pratt, "and still at no additional expense to the taxpayers. With the proceeds from the sale of the military surplus helicopters, we

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were able to buy the new R44 helicopter, and still have funds left over for future operational costs.” The helicopter also has a Lojac stolen car recovery system, and the Sheriff’s aviation unit is working with All Star Helicopters to develop a moving map display that will allow faster location of specific addresses relayed from a dispatcher to the helicopter.

The citizens of Butler County have enthusiastically supported the aviation unit since its inception in 1995. It has been instrumental in numerous law enforcement operations over the years, including vehicle pursuits resulting in the apprehension of felons, recovery of stolen cars and property, and locating lost individuals who would have succumbed to the elements had they not been located by the helicopter. The unit received a Life Saving Award from the Ohio Attorney General’s Office for using its helicopter’s infrared system to find a lost 9-year-old boy in 1998. The new helicopter will also be used by the County Engineer’s Office for development of new roadways throughout the County, by the Environmental Services to check on projects, and extensively by the Sheriff’s Office to assist detectives with investigations and crime scene photographs. As one of only two agencies in southwestern Ohio with aviation assets, Butler County assists all agencies in the region with disaster relief and police assistance when needed.

Robinson Helicopter Company is the world’s leading manufacturer of civil helicopters and builds the two-seat Model R22 and the four-seat Model R44. Robinson helicopters are used throughout the world for a variety of private, business and commercial operations. For more information about Robinson, visit us on-line at [www.robinsonheli.com](http://www.robinsonheli.com).

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