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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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### Hometown Hero Takes the *First Step*

Jacksonville native Samuel Barrington has decided to take the *First Step*. Long known for his prowess on the field and his philanthropic efforts off it, the much-acclaimed linebacker for the Green Bay Packers who most-recently received the Pop Warner 2016 Humanitarian Award, is teaming up with a small, but mighty group of volunteers and community leaders in implementing a program that invites everyone in the community to take the *First Step* in creating a better, stronger, and more cohesive community. And you can join the fun and take the *First Step*, too, on Saturday, June 11<sup>th</sup>, at 1 p.m., at Justina Road Elementary School Park. State Representative Mia L. Jones will join Barrington, State Representative Larry Lee, Junior, St. Lucie County Sheriff Ken Mascara, Christina Phillips president of Precision Sports Management Group and a few surprise guests for a free afternoon filled with fun, games, and community-building.

The *First Step* program had a humble start last year a couple hundred miles south of Jacksonville in Fort Pierce, Florida. In an effort to create a safer community in Garden Terrace, an area of Fort Pierce once known as “Little Vietnam” because of the violence, Scott Van Duzer, a pizza shop owner widely-publicized for bear-hugging President Barack Obama and St. Lucie County Sheriff Ken Mascara started visiting the Garden Terrace every Tuesday afternoon. The pair brought a football, a few friends, and a few pizzas. They asked for nothing except some company on the long-neglected playground. Before long, the pair had been joined by dozens of kids of all ages from the community and other community members who also wanted to take the *First Step* towards a stronger community.

Since the *First Step* program began, crime rates in the area have plummeted, and the relationship

between law enforcement officers and a neighborhood that was historically known for its distrust of cops has become one of mutual trust and admiration. “Statistics recently released show the crime rates in the community have dropped by nearly fifty percent,” said Van Duzer, “and what’s amazing is the relationships that have developed between members of the community, law enforcement officers, and the residents and children of the Garden Terrace neighborhood.”

Because of the tremendous success, Van Duzer and Sheriff Mascara, along with Fort Pierce Mayor Linda Hudson, State Representative Larry Lee, and Port St. Lucie Police Officer Carmine Izzo, have been asked to replicate the *First Step* program nationally. But because of the relationship with Barrington and the support from Precision Sports Management and Palm Beach Autographs, they’re getting some heavy-duty support from some big names in the NFL, including Michael Thomas of the Miami Dolphins, Jared Cook and Samuel Barrington of the Green Bay Packers, Jeremy Mincey of the Dallas Cowboys, Coty Sensabaugh of the LA Rams, and Jonathan Meeks of the Buffalo Bills, the famous footballers have committed to helping take the *First Step* national, beginning on Saturday, June 11<sup>th</sup> with a free event in Linebacker Samuel Barrington’s hometown on Jacksonville, Florida at the Justina Road Elementary School Park.

From 1 p.m. to 3 p.m., Barrington, Van Duzer, Mascara, and a whole group of other surprise guests, will gather at the park, play a little informal ball, hang out, share free refreshments provided by members of the *First Step* program, and just spend a little quality time together. For Sheriff Ken Mascara, sharing some of the success gained in St. Lucie County because of the *First Step* program is a way to help other communities see positive change, too. “This is our first step in developing a positive relationship with the youth of the community,” he said, referring to the humble beginnings of the St. Lucie County initiative which has garnered double-digit drop in crime rates and helped invigorate a sense of community in Fort Pierce. “We would love to invite Sheriff Williams, law enforcement officers and committed citizens from all over Jacksonville to join us in taking the *First Step* to creating a stronger, safer, and more vibrant community.”

If you'd like information on the June 11<sup>th</sup> event, which is open to the public, please contact Van Duzer at 772-528-3467. If you'd like to arrange a media opportunity with Barrington or the other participants, please contact Christina Philips at Precision Sports Management Group at [christinaphill@aol.com](mailto:christinaphill@aol.com). Please join on Saturday, June 11<sup>th</sup>, as the community of Jacksonville takes the *First Step*.