



NEWS RELEASE

Prosecutor Camelia M. Valdes
Passaic County Prosecutor's Office
401 Grand Street
Paterson, NJ 07505
(973) 881-4800

Failure to Report Abuse is a Continuing Problem: Penn State University Sex Abuse Scandal not an Isolated Occurrence

PATERSON, NEW JERSEY: December 5, 2011

The Passaic County Prosecutor, like many Americans, finds the alleged institutional neglect by officials at Penn State University unacceptable. Moreover, amid the national discourse, it is important to keep in mind the lifelong physical and psychological impact these alleged acts cause the victims. Child sexual abuse is a risk factor for the development of an array of long-term difficulties, including depression, anxiety disorders, dissociation, personality and eating disorders, and substance use disorders.

Despite the profound issues raised by this tragedy, we view this as an opportunity for positive change. Penn State University's nonfeasance, unfortunately, is not unique. As Victor Vieth, the Director of National Child Protection Training Center, points out: "a number of studies, extending more than 20 years, have found that most mandated reporters, including teachers, social workers, physicians, and physician assistants fail to report the majority of child abuse cases."

Child abuse typically occurs in secret by trusted persons and when exposed, shock, emotions, conflicted loyalty, and a deep misunderstanding of child abuse dynamics impairs nearly everyone's judgment. Unless trained professionals respond immediately, the investigation can quickly become compromised--preventing an honest, fair assessment of the facts. The truth then becomes obscured preventing professionals from reaching a

finding about the abuse. Sadly, this can push the child back into the abusive situation and put future children at risk of abuse.

On the other hand, timely reporting is among the most important factors in determining an investigation's success and in turn, protecting children.

Despite tremendous progress in child abuse prevention, investigation, and education, this fundamental aspect of our response to child abuse is still lacking in many communities. Some institutions and their staff continue to "size up" the situation, sometimes waiting days or even weeks before reporting their suspicions. As Allison Blake, the Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Children and Families recently observed: "in New Jersey the law requires all citizens to report suspected child abuse or neglect immediately to DYFS - it is not the responsibility of institutions or private citizens to screen information to determine its veracity before making the report."

Passaic County residents, including public or private institutions can request assistance from the Passaic County Prosecutor's Special Victims Unit (SVU) to better understand mandatory reporting requirements. Moreover, the SVU can provide technical assistance in evaluating whether an institution or agency's protocol complies with state law.

For more information, contact Passaic County Chief Assistant Prosecutor Joseph A. Del Russo. He can be reached at 973-837-7636 or jdelrusso@passaiccountynj.org. To report suspected child abuse and neglect in New Jersey call 1-877 NJ ABUSE (1-877-652-2873).