



DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE OF CHESTER COUNTY

201 W. MARKET STREET, SUITE 4450

POST OFFICE BOX 2748

WEST CHESTER, PENNSYLVANIA 19380-0991

TELEPHONE: 610-344-6801

Thomas P. Hogan
District Attorney

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PRESS RELEASE

**Chester County District Attorney's Office
Continues to Address Spike in Child Abuse Reports**

Chester County District Attorney Tom Hogan announced that child abuse reports are continuing to surge in Chester County.

District Attorney Hogan stated, "With the change in Pennsylvania laws regarding mandatory reporting of child abuse after the Sandusky case, we expected to see an increase in child abuse reports. This spike mirrors increases across the Commonwealth. More cases are being reported and the District Attorney's Child Abuse Unit has grown in size and sophistication in order to address the new case load."

The District Attorney's Child Abuse Unit receives child abuse reports from multiple agencies, including the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare and the Chester County Department of Children, Youth and Families. The increase in child abuse reports is shown below.

The yearly total of child abuse reports in Chester County are as follows:

Chester County Child Abuse Reports

<u>Year</u>	<u>Reports</u>
2013	291
2014	414
2015	1,306
2016	1,681

The increase in reports has resulted in a corresponding increased workload for the Child Abuse Unit and the local police departments. When there is a report of serious child abuse, the child victims usually are interviewed at the Children’s Advocacy Center in the District Attorney’s Office, a safe location specifically designed to be kid-friendly. The interviews are conducted by forensic interviewers, detectives who are specially trained to deal with children.

The number of forensic interviews of children conducted in Chester County also increased significantly. The chart below shows this increase.

Chester County Forensic Interviews

<u>Year</u>	<u>Reports</u>
2014	233
2015	251
2016	358

In order to address the additional work, the District Attorney’s Office has prioritized child abuse resources. In 2013, these were two prosecutors and two detectives (one investigator and one supervisor) assigned to the DA’s Child Abuse Unit. As of 2017, the Child Abuse Unit has four prosecutors and four detectives (three investigators and one supervisor) assigned, effectively doubling in size. The Chester County Commissioners previously authorized hiring an extra detective specifically to address child abuse cases.

Michele Kichline, Chair of the Chester County Commissioners, stated, “As the District Attorney has noted, we expected to see an increase in reports of child abuse because of the change in state laws, but those expectations don’t make it any

easier when we see the actual numbers. One of the main priorities of the Board of Commissioners is public safety, especially the safety of our children. I thank the DA and his staff for prioritizing their resources and doing everything that they can to protect the children during the grueling and emotional – but necessary – process of investigation and prosecution.”

The rise in number of reports also has led to a rise in the number of child abuse cases being prosecuted. These cases are often complex, leading to an increased burden on prosecutors and the courts. The cases are always traumatic for the child victims, who are forced to re-live their abuse in court.

District Attorney Hogan added, “In Chester County, we are fortunate to have the resources to deal with the complex issue of child abuse. In addition, we are surrounded by elected officials and civic leaders who understand the importance of protecting our children. However, talking to colleagues around Pennsylvania who already are overwhelmed by the heroin and opioid epidemic, it is clear that many rural counties and urban centers lack the resources to address the spike in child abuse cases. More resources need to be devoted to the investigation and prosecution of these cases. Even one child being hurt is one too many and no child predator should be allowed to roam the streets.”

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Approved for release:

Thomas P. Hogan