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PRESS RELEASE

**The Team That Tames
The Child Abuse Monster**

Last week, one defendant pled to murdering a child and another defendant was convicted of molesting a child. In the wake of those strong convictions, the Chester County District Attorney's Office reviewed child abuse reporting statistics for 2018 and announced some other good news. After multiple years of increases in child abuse reports and required forensic interviews, the current statistics show that the number of reports and interviews has stabilized in Chester County.

Chester County District Attorney Tom Hogan stated, "When the law in Pennsylvania changed to vastly increase the number of child abuse reports, Chester County responded immediately. We doubled the number of child abuse detectives and prosecutors. We added bi-lingual investigators. We added support staff. We improved our facilities and technology. As a result, the Chester County child abuse team was able to stay on top of the surge in child abuse reports, continuing our critical mission of protecting children."

In 2013 and 2014, in response to the Jerry Sandusky scandal at Penn State, sweeping changes were made in Pennsylvania laws regarding the reporting of suspected child abuse. The new laws expanded the category of people considered "mandatory reporters" who are required to report any suspected child abuse. Mandatory reporters were expanded to include all school employees, health care

providers, child care providers, and other new categories. The new laws also expanded the definition of “child abuse.”

As a result, the number of reports of child abuse increased dramatically. With the increase in reports, the number of “forensic interviews,” which are interviews of children specifically designated to both protect children and elicit the truth, also increased.

The progression of child abuse reports in Chester County is as follows:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Number of Reports</u>
2014	414
2015	1,306
2016	1,681
2017	1,924
2018	1,983

The number of forensic interviews for the same time period is as follows:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Forensic Interviews</u>
2014	233
2015	251
2016	358
2017	363
2018	346

Megan King, the Deputy District Attorney in charge of the Child Abuse Unit, stated, “In Chester County, we are lucky that the District Attorney’s Office had the resources and foresight to deal with these increases. Working as a team, we have vastly improved our ability to investigate and prosecute child abuse cases. Chester County now stands as a leader in the field of child abuse prosecutions.”

Every child abuse case in Chester County is reported to the Chester County Detectives, the investigative arm of the District Attorney’s Office. The detectives and prosecutors assigned to the Child Abuse Unit then assess the cases to decide which cases should be handled directly by the Chester County Detectives and

which can be addressed by municipal police departments or the Pennsylvania State Police.

The cases are then worked through the Chester County Children's Advocacy Center (the "CAC"). The CAC is a child-focused, facility-based program in which representatives from multiple core disciplines work together, conducting joint child forensic interviews and making team decisions about the investigation, treatment, management and prosecution of child sexual and physical abuse. The CAC includes a safe, child-friendly area for children and their families located in the Chester County Justice Center. The center includes a waiting room, observation room, and a forensic interview room. The interviews are conducted by highly trained investigators, the interviews are recorded, and the center is nationally accredited through the National Children's Alliance.

Sergeant David Sassa, the Chester County Detective who supervises the Child Abuse Unit, said, "We have made outstanding progress in the last few years in our ability to handle child abuse cases. We follow a vertical prosecution model, which has detectives and prosecutors working together the moment a case is reported. We have top-flight medical experts working with us, allowing us to delve deeper into child abuse cases than ever before. I am proud to say that we have created one of the best Child Abuse Units in Pennsylvania."

In 2016, the District Attorney's Office warned the public about the expected increases in child abuse reports. The District Attorney's Office is now announcing that the number of suspected child abuse reports should remain stable for the foreseeable future. The statistics from 2018 bear out this news, with a relatively flat number of child abuse reports and an actual decrease in forensic interviews.

“We weathered the worst of the storm,” stated District Attorney Hogan. “With dedicated prosecutors and detectives who stood their posts and worked together, we emerged as a stronger and more efficient Child Abuse Unit. When things got tough, we never quit. Protecting children is now, and forever will be, one of the top missions of the Chester County District Attorney’s Office.”

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Approved for release:

Thomas P. Hogan