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Governor Corbett, General Assembly Urged to Create a Child Protection and Accountability Task Force

Call to action originally issued in April renewed in the wake of the PSU child abuse scandal

CONTACT: Cathleen Palm – 610-488-5059 or 717-215-1440

November 14th - We, the undersigned, are deeply pained by the shocking allegations by at least eight children that they were sexually assaulted by a former Penn State University football coach.

We are equally disturbed by the fact that this serial abuse against children may have been widely known but not reported, even when it should have been. Also quite troubling is the fact that Pennsylvania's Child Protective Services Law – pre and post 2006 – did and does not go far enough to protect child victims like these.

In April, we joined together calling on Governor Tom Corbett and leaders of the General Assembly to create a Child Protection and Accountability Task Force.

We envisioned then, and with even greater urgency now, an objective and intentional effort that would bring together representatives of the Corbett Administration, the Pennsylvania Senate, Pennsylvania House of Representatives, and a panel of experts to examine and make timely recommendations about the very foundation of this state's child protection efforts.

This Task Force would be directed to objectively examine core issues related to the defining, reporting and investigating of child abuse, as well as whether the response to child abuse is child-centered, with safety and well-being being paramount.

We renewed our call at an August hearing of the Senate Aging and Youth Committee.

It is our understanding that the Pennsylvania Senate, as a result of the leadership of Senator Kim Ward, is committed to a bipartisan review of these issues. We applaud her leadership and the Senate's commitment to prioritize these important child protection issues.

Pennsylvania is a statistical outlier in the investigation and determination of child abuse, i.e., it investigates child abuse 8.3 per 1,000 children versus 40.3 per 1,000 children nationally, and then determines a child is a victim of child abuse 1.4 per 1,000 children versus 9.3 per 1,000 nationally.

As the nation was tragically reminded this past week, too often – despite a report of child abuse and investigation by a children and youth agency – Pennsylvania's children remain exposed to repeated physical or sexual injury or a pattern of harm.

We believe that this past week's Grand Jury Presentment reinforces the legitimacy of, and the need for, objective bipartisan and bi-cameral review of our state's core front-end child welfare laws and practices.

We believe strengthened leadership within our Commonwealth is urgently needed to better protect our children. The Task Force we have called for is the first step in securing that leadership.

We stand ready and willing to work with Governor Corbett and his administration and the General Assembly to ensure that Pennsylvania becomes a national leader in how it promotes and measures the safety, well-being and permanency of our children.

Individuals/organizations endorsing this statement and a call for a Child Protection and Accountability Task Force include:

A Child's Place at Mercy –Allegheny County Children's Advocacy Center

Mary Carrasco, MD, MPH, FAAP, Director
Joan Mills, Manager

ACCESS-York/Victim Assistance Center Programs of the YWCA-York

Rick Azzaro LCSW, Chief Services Officer

Adams County Children's Advocacy Center
Joddie Walker, Executive Director

Alice Paul House
Lou Ann Williams, Executive Director

American Academy of Pediatrics - PA Chapter
Jamie Calabrese, MD, FAAP, President
Allen Nussbaum, MD, FAAP, Vice President
Suzanne Yunghans, Executive Director
David Turkewitz, MD, FAAP - Immediate Past President

CASA of Philadelphia County
Wendy Aguirre, MSW, Executive Director

Center for the Prevention of School-Aged Violence at Drexel University
Charles A. Williams III, PhD, Director

Central Susquehanna Valley Children's Advocacy Center
Dr. Pat Bruno, M.D., FAAP, Medical Director

Child Watch of Pittsburgh
Christopher P. Smith, Executive Director

Children's Advocacy Center of Lawrence County
Sue Ascione, Executive Director

Children's Advocacy Center of Northeastern Pennsylvania
MaryAnn LaPorta, Executive Director

Children's Alliance Center of Berks County
April Reed Schmehl, Vice President

Children's Coalition of the Lehigh Valley
John Reynolds, Chair

Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh of UPMC
Rachel P. Berger, MD, MPH, Child Advocacy Center
Janet Squires, MD, Child Advocacy Center

City Church York
Rev. Aaron Anderson, Pastor

Crime Victim Center of Erie County, Inc.
Paul A. Lukach, Executive Director

Dauphin County Victim Witness Assistance
Jennifer Storm, Executive Director
Vikki Palmer, Child Abuse Advocate

Disability Rights Network of Pennsylvania
Sallie Lynagh, Children's Project

Family Design Resources
Brenda Lawrence, Executive Director

Field Center for Children's Policy, Practice & Research
Debra Schilling Wolfe, Executive Director

Fight Crime: Invest in Kids – Pennsylvania
Bruce Clash, State Director

Former PA Victim Advocate
Mary Achilles

HAVIN (Helping All Victims in Need)
Jo Ellen Bowman, MSW, LSW, Executive Director

Juvenile Law Center
Robert Schwartz, Executive Director

KidsVoice
Scott Hollander, Executive Director
Jen Staley, Program & Policy Coordinator

Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania
The Rev. Amy Reumann, Director

Lutheran Congregational Services, Inc.
The Rev. Dr. Dennis S. Ritter, Executive Director

Luzerne County Office of Human Services
Joe DeVizia, Director

Maternity Care Coalition
JoAnne Fischer, Executive Director

Mental Health Association in Pennsylvania
Sue Walther, Executive Director

Mission Kids Child Advocacy Center of Montgomery County
Abbie Newman, Executive Director

National Association of Social Workers – PA Chapter
Jenna Mehnert, Executive Director

Network of Victim Assistance (Bucks County)
Barbara Clark, Executive Director

Nurse-Family Partnership National Service Office
Tara Dechert, Program Developer

PathWays PA
Carol Goertzel, CEO

Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence
Peg Dierkers, Executive Director

Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape
Delilah Rumburg, CEO

Pennsylvania Community Providers Association
George Kimes, Executive Director
Connell O'Brien, Policy Specialist

Pennsylvania Council of Churches
The Rev. Sandra L. Strauss, Director of Public Advocacy

Pennsylvania Court Appointed Special Advocates

Dennis Hockensmith, Executive Director

Philadelphia Children's Alliance

Chris Kirchner, MSW, Executive Director

Pressley Ridge

Tammy Relken, Senior Director

Prevent Child Abuse PA

Teresa Olsen, Director

Protect Our Children Committee

Cathleen Palm, Executive Director

Public Citizens for Children and Youth

Shelly Yanoff, Executive Director

SEIU Local 668

Kathy Jellison, President

St. Christopher's Hospital for Children

Carolyn Jackson, CEO

Maria D. McColgan, M.D., Medical Director, Child Protection Program

Sexual Assault Resource and Counseling Center

Jenny Murphy-Shifflet, President/CEO

Strategic Health Institute

Wanda D. Filer, MD, MBA

Support Center for Child Advocates

Frank Cervone, Executive Director

York County Children's Advocacy Center

Deborah Harrison, Executive Director

York County Cribs for Kids Program

Michael H. Goodstein, MD, FAAP, Director (and Attending Neonatologist at York Hospital)

Individuals

Deb Beck (Dauphin County)

Beth Docherty (Allegheny County)

Dr. Paula George (Berks County)

Patti Gilbert (Cumberland County)

The Rev. Karl Jones (Schuylkill County)

Ruth Kolb (Allegheny County)

Colleen Masi (Erie County)

Sheldon Schwartz (Franklin County)

Patricia Sonne (Northampton County)

Gary Shuey (Cumberland County)

Lucy Johnston-Walsh (Cumberland County)

Clay Yeager (York County)

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