



Cumberland County Board of Commissioners

Gary Eichelberger, Chairman . Jean Foschi, Vice Chairman . Vincent T. DiFilippo, Secretary

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MEDIA CONTACT:

Samantha Krepps, *Communications Director*

O: 717.240.6343 | M: 717.706.0001

skrepps@ccpa.net

Recognizing the Impact of Child Abuse; Cumberland County Honors Child Abuse Victims

Carlisle, PA – Ninety-two pinwheels spin in the wind at the Cumberland County Courthouse as the District Attorney, Commissioners, and county departments today recognized children who are victims of child abuse during Child Abuse Prevention Month.

“One case of child abuse is one too many,” said Cumberland County District Attorney Sean McCormack. “As you watch the blue pinwheels spin in front of our county courthouse, you’ll notice one black one, signifying a fatality.”

Statewide there were 27,603 suspected child abuse cases investigated in 2020. In Cumberland County there were 598 suspected child abuse cases investigated and 92 cases were investigated and met the criteria of child abuse, with one fatality and two near fatalities, according to data from the 2020 Pennsylvania Child Protective Services Annual Report.

“When we receive a child abuse call, staff responds immediately,” said Nikki McElwee, Director of Children & Youth Services. “Our caseworkers respond by going into homes, assess the safety and risk of children while trying to deescalate a crisis.”

Because of the traumatic stress for caseworkers, the Cumberland County Children and Youth Services are now eligible for the First Responder Assistance Program, announced in January 2022, to assist our first responders in the county.

“Along with Children and Youth Services many of our county departments work directly or indirectly with the effects of child abuse in our county,” said Gary Eichelberger, Cumberland County Commissioner. “The effects of abuse on a child can cause toxic stress, the most medically serious form of stress which often effects learning, behavior, and the overall health of a child during their life. These impacts not only degrade the well-being of a child, but sets the stage for ongoing future support needs, often with enormous human and financial costs throughout a lifetime.”

In the county, 44.6% of substantiated child abuses cases were male, and 55.4% were female. Suspected cases are reported to Children and Youth Services. Substantiated cases are reported cases which met the criteria to be indicated for abuses. All cases are investigated.

“As a mother of two children, this is an issue I take very seriously,” said Commissioner Jean Foschi. “We need to protect our children, so they grow up healthy and happy. As parents, it is our duty to keep our children safe,” said Commissioner Jean Foschi.

In Cumberland County, 91.7% of abuse allegations fell under one of three categories, neglect, physical and sexual abuse.

“The Child Advocacy Center (CAC) is the first step in a child’s healing. Kids often tell us that after their appointment at CAC, a huge weight has been lifted from their shoulders. They are reassured that they are not at fault, that they aren’t the only ones who have experienced abuse, and that they can heal and move forward,” said Lynn Carson, Ph.D. director of operations, UPMC Child Advocacy Center of Central PA.

Some of the signs of child abuse include changes in behavior or school performance, the child has not received help for physical or medical issues brought to the parents’ attention, learning difficulties that cannot be attributed to physical or psychological cases.

“As a community, as a county government, and as residents, we are all in this together to help our children,” said Commissioner Vince DiFilippo. “It is vitally important that we bring attention to the violence against children in our county and country, and families and communities work together to prevent child abuse and neglect.”

Childline received 160,743 substantiated calls statewide in 2020. If you suspect a child is in danger, contact the Childline hotline 24/7 at 1.800.932.0313.

The county is flying the Children’s Memorial Flag at the courthouse during April. The flag created by a 16-year-old teen was created to bring attention to child abuse nationwide. And in recognition of Child Abuse Awareness Month, residents are encouraged to join us in wearing blue on Thursday, April 14.

National Child Abuse Prevention Month recognizes the importance of families and communities working together to strengthen families to prevent child abuse and neglect. Through this collaboration, prevention services, and supports, we can help protect children and produce thriving families.

Editors’ Note: All statistics are from the 2020 Pennsylvania Child Protective Services Annual Report, the latest available data. 100 pinwheels provided by UPMC Child Advocacy Center of Central PA.