

Chester County District Attorney's Office

DEBORAH RYAN
DISTRICT ATTORNEY



201 W. Market St., Suite 4450
Post Office Box 2746
West Chester, PA 19380-0991
Phone: 610-344-6801
Fax: 610-344-5905

NEWS RELEASE

For more information contact Michelle Bjork, Director of Communications, at mbjork@chesco.org or 610-344-6820.

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DAO INCREASES SIZE OF CHILD PREDATOR TASK FORCE TO COMBAT A 400% INCREASE IN CASES

The Chester County District Attorney's Office announces a more than three-fold increase in the size of the Chester County Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Force. The Task Force investigates child sexual abuse and exploitation across the county, which has increased 400% since 2015. New Task Force members include investigators from Phoenixville, Oxford, East Brandywine, West Whiteland, North Coventry, Willistown, and Kennett Square Borough.

DA Deb Ryan said, "Chester County law enforcement is putting child predators on notice that we are coming for you. There has been an explosion in child sexual abuse cases over the past six years that must stop now. Too many children are out there suffering at the hands of men and women who think nothing of using a child for their depraved sexual gratification. So to those individuals, know this: You cannot run or hide. We will find you and put you behind bars for as long as possible."

In the past six years, the number of reported child sexual abuse cases that come through Chester County ICAC has nearly quadrupled – from 39 in 2015 to 139 to date, and Chester County Detectives predict as many as 150 cases by the end of 2021.

Over the years, investigators have arrested teachers, daycare workers, coaches, fathers, mothers, babysitters, and others. Abusers are across all vocations and socioeconomic levels.

David Sassa, Chief County Detective, stated, “The people we arrest are sexually violent predators who very often have unreported assaults on children. Their continued viewing and trading images and videos of the sexual abuse of children not only perpetuates the cycle of abuse but makes it easier for offenders to normalize their behavior. With this outstanding addition and commitment of our law enforcement partners, we will be able to multiply our efforts to root them out.”

The Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force (ICAC) was created to help federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies enhance their investigative responses to offenders who use the Internet, online communication systems, or computer technology to sexually exploit children. The program is funded by a grant from the Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice, and Delinquency Prevention. Pennsylvania’s ICAC Task Force is administered through the Delaware County District Attorney’s Office, Criminal Investigation Division since its inception in 2000.

Detective Sergeant Joseph Walton was the sole member of the Chester County ICAC Task Force when it was formed in 2001. Walton stated, “We are dealing with hundreds of predators who jeopardize the safety of our children. Over the past 20 years, we have seen predators collecting millions of images of child pornography, sexually assaulting children, and sharing the images with others. We won’t stop working until our children are safe.”

With today’s announcement, the Task Force grows to a total of ten investigators and includes:

- Detective Nick Natale, Phoenixville PD
- Detective Chris Coverly, Oxford PD
- Detective Corporal Dan Orris, East Brandywine PD

- Detective Michael Buchman, West Whiteland PD
- Detective Tim Prouty, North Coventry PD
- Detective Sergeant Steve Jones, Willistown PD
- Detective Chris Gravina, Kennett Square Borough PD
- Detectives Ben Martin and Jerry Davis, Chester County Detectives
- Detective Sergeant Joseph Walton, Chester County Detectives

The DAO offers free virtual Stewards of Children workshops that teach adults how to recognize, react, and respond to child sexual abuse. For more information or to signup for a class, contact County Coordinator Katie Walters at kwalters@chesco.org or 610-344-6115.

Call Childline if you suspect child abuse: 1-800-932-0313.

Approved for release by Deborah Ryan, District Attorney