DA Sets Up Online Reporting of Suspected Student Abuse in Schools

New Task Force to Review Reports of Sexual, Physical Abuse as Well as Failure to Report Abuse

Every student in San Diego County deserves to have a safe and nurturing educational environment, free of sexual and physical abuse. But when that kind of abuse does happen, it’s critical that students, parents and teachers have a trusted way to report it. And, prosecutors say, it’s even more important that those reports don’t fall through the cracks.

Recognizing that gaps exist between the multiple agencies and systems currently addressing abuse, the San Diego County District Attorney’s Office today announced a new, online reporting system of suspected sexual or physical abuse of students, along with a newly-established DA Student Safety in School Systems Task Force.

“The idea with both the online reporting and the task force is to eliminate inefficiencies and close gaps so our students can feel safe and thrive at school,” said District Attorney Summer Stephan. “This initiative complements reporting to other agencies and acts as a safety net to make sure information is shared and followed up on. We wanted a way for the public to directly contact our experienced prosecutors and trained investigators if there is a concern of abuse within our school systems, or a concern that those who should be reporting abuse and protecting children are failing to do so.”

The Student Safety in School Systems Task Force will:

- Welcome and receive submissions from any member of the public who is concerned about the safety of students in a school system
• Facilitate any member of the public who is navigating multiple agencies and departments when an incident involving a child has occurred in a school setting
• Reduce the public’s confusion by giving them direct access to the District Attorney’s Office so allegations and complaints can be tracked
• Cross-reference allegations and complaints with law enforcement, Child Welfare Services, and educational institutions and programs where appropriate
• Refer members of the public to services that may be available to those experiencing trauma as a result of an incident that has taken place within a school system
• Offer and provide outreach and training to the public on issues and concerns surrounding possible physical and sexual abuse perpetrated by an adult or minor on a student in an educational setting
• Criminally prosecute those who fail to comply with mandated reporting laws where the evidence of such failure is sufficient

This task force will not serve as a substitute for a mandated reporter’s duty to report abuse. Mandated reporters still must follow their duties under the law to report to the proper authorities under the Penal Code.

Referrals can be reported made here on the DA’s public website.

Once a referral is made, the task force members will evaluate and investigate the claim, law enforcement will be notified to investigate allegations when appropriate, and families will be connected with trauma-informed resources and support. An investigation into whether a mandatory report was made may be initiated.

Over the past several months, the District Attorney’s Office has sought feedback from the community and various stakeholders, who expressed concern that students are too often victims of harassment and that victimization is not properly reported. Many parents feel they’re not being heard when they do report. Meetings with Black Men and Women United were key in sparking the idea of the new task force and online reporting.

The District Attorney’s Office has also been working closely with school districts across the county to remind mandated reporters of their responsibilities.

“Mandated reporters must make a report when there is any reasonable suspicion of abuse, based on facts,” DA Stephan said. “Mandated reporters typically won’t see the actual sexual abuse, but they often notice “grooming behaviors” that accompany or precede the sexual abuse.”

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About the San Diego County District Attorney’s Office
The San Diego County DA’s Office prosecutes all felony crimes in the county and misdemeanor crimes committed outside the City of San Diego. The office files about 40,000 criminal cases a year and balances prosecution with numerous crime prevention programs. District Attorney Summer Stephan leads the office of more than 1,000 dedicated employees who pursue fair and equal justice, and support victims daily across San Diego County.