

CONTACT: Amy Kobeta, PCCY
amyk@pccy.org, 347-607-1058 mobile

DELCO ADVOCATES FOR CHILDREN ADD THEIR VOICE TO CALL FOR MORE REFORMS

Vacating Lima Detention Center Just the First Step to Protecting Kids in Care

PHILADELPHIA (April 19, 2021)—Twenty organizations and many prominent individuals in Delaware County sent a list of six demands to county and state leaders to ensure that the abuse that occurred at the Delaware County Juvenile Detention Center never happens to a child again and to call for better policies that improve community safety and respond to the needs of youth who break the law.

“Sending a child to a detention center where they are mistreated and abused is not making our communities safer,” said Leigh Anne McKelvey, Executive Director, CASA Youth Advocates. “We are asking the county and the courts to work on much more effective ways to improve community safety and promote the healthy development of children.”

“Complaints were made. Abuses reported. And the facility continued to operate,” said Laurie Dow, PCCY Director of Vulnerable Youth Policy. “Where was the government in monitoring these problems and taking immediate action to respond to reports of abuse or taking notice of what was going on in a facility under its supervision?”

Advocates called on the Delaware County Council to:

1. Close the detention center permanently and find safer options for youth that rehabilitate youth with restorative practices and evidenced-based trauma supports.
2. Redirect as much as possible of the \$4.6 million budgeted to operate the Lima Detention Facility on effective diversion programs for children charged with crimes that do not merit secure detention.
3. For any Delaware County youth sent to detention, follow the research and make sure youth are placed close to home so they can remain connected with their family.

Advocates noted that the Attorney General has begun an investigation, but more state action is needed including:

1. Performing an immediate on-site review of the facilities where Delaware County children have been sent to assure youth are not exposed to further abuse, and to immediately commit to provide the Court, the County Children and Youth Office, Defenders, and the District Attorney’s office access to real-time incidence reports at each of these facilities.
2. Hiring a third party to conduct a full-scale investigation inside the Department of Human Services to expose how reports could have been filed yet no actions were taken to protect the children housed at the Lima facility.

"The experience at the detention center tells me there is a systemwide problem. The public needs to have confidence that the state DHS is doing its job to guarantee the safety of children in state licensed facilities. We support the call that the state must immediately conduct a top-to-bottom review of any facility where children of Delaware County are being held," said Alyssa Poole, Chief of the Juvenile Unit, Office of the Delaware County Public Defender.

The Delaware County Juvenile Detention Center in Lima was vacated by order of the Court in March 2021 after the Public Defender's Office wrote to the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services detailing allegations of physical, sexual, and psychological abuse by staff. Lima is a county-run youth detention facility for youth ages 10 to 18. The facility was vacated but not formally closed.

PCCY is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that works to improve the lives of children in Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia counties by developing initiatives and advocating for quality health care, child care, public education, and family stability. Learn more on our website (www.pccy.org), Twitter (@pccyteam), and Facebook page (PCCYPage).

(Letter attached)



child's world
America



SCCALaw.org



April 19, 2021

The Honorable Josh Shapiro, Attorney General of Pennsylvania
Teresa D. Miller, Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services
The Honorable Kevin F. Kelly, President Judge of the Delaware County Court of Common Pleas
The Honorable Brian P. Zidek, Chair of the Delaware County Council
The Honorable Dr. Monica Taylor, Vice Chair of the Delaware County Council
The Honorable Kevin M. Madden, Member of the Delaware County Council
The Honorable Elaine Paul Schaefer, Member of the Delaware County Council
The Honorable Christine A. Reuther, Member of the Delaware County Council

RE: Delaware County Juvenile Justice Center

To Whom It May Concern:

As citizens and organizational leaders concerned about the safety and well-being of every child in our county, we are appalled that any child would be subjected to the conditions that were described in the county-run detention facility in Lima.

We are deeply concerned that, after numerous reports of child abuse and outreach to the state, it took a letter from the Office of the Delaware County Public Defender to initiate the commendable order by the Court to remove children from the facility. At a minimum, this situation is a bright red flag that much more must be done to protect our children.

We join others to call for the Attorney General's office to investigate this matter and also ask that the state and county take action. State and local leaders who are responsible must do more to protect our children. We are asking that the following local and state actions be taken, now.

We ask county leaders to:

1. Close the detention center permanently. Do not re-open this facility for admissions. There has been a clear and systemic failure to ensure that the children who are detained there are protected from systemic and atrocious abuses and neglect.

2. Redeploy the more than \$4.6 million in the County's budget heretofore used to operate the facility to create community diversionary and other options needed to help youth who come in contact with the juvenile justice system. Develop programs by working with local agencies to utilize culturally relevant, strength-based approaches that incorporate restorative justice principles, licensed clinicians, and collaborative decision-making so that we heal rather than harm our children.
3. Rapidly return children home or find alternative local placements that utilize strength-based approaches incorporating restorative justice principles for the youth who were removed and transferred out-of-county when the Delaware County Juvenile Detention Center was shut down. From this day forward, we must dedicate ourselves to ensuring that no child is ever detained in a facility where they are denied their rights or are physically, sexually, or psychologically abused.
4. Prevent further harm to children who enter the juvenile justice system by committing to give these youth treatment and services that are rehabilitative and incorporate principles of restorative justice.

We ask state leaders to:

1. Commence an on-site review of the facilities where the Delaware county children have been sent so that we can have some confidence they will not be further abused in those locations. And give the Court, the County Children and Youth Office, Defenders, and the District Attorney's office immediate access to the last 24 months of incident reports at each of the facilities where the Delaware County children have been placed so the authorities can assess the safety of these alternative locations for themselves.
2. The Department must hire a third party to conduct a full-scale review of what transpired in this situation, expose all internal and related contractor breakdowns, and recommend structural changes so that regardless of the facility, the state's obligation to protect children in these facilities is not abrogated. The results of the investigation must be released publicly.

We and our fellow residents expect every adult in our county to have the highest standard of professionalism when tending to the care of children in our schools, community services and most importantly in their custody. From this day forward, we must dedicate ourselves to ensuring that no child is ever detained in a facility where they are denied their rights or are physically, sexually, or psychologically abused.

Signed,

Laurie T. Dow
Public Citizens for Children and Youth
Vulnerable Youth Policy Director

The Honorable Jennifer O'Mara
Pennsylvania House of Representatives
District 165

The Honorable Tim Kearney
Pennsylvania Senate
District 26

The Honorable Barbarann Keffer
Upper Darby Township
Mayor

The Honorable Rafi Cave
Borough of Yeadon
Councilman

Eileen Kemske
CAADC, Inc. (Community Action
Agency of Delaware County, Inc.)
Director of Social Services

Leigh Anne McKelvey
CASA Youth Advocates
Executive Director

Alexia Clarke
Chester Community Coalition
Executive Director

Joan G Broadfield
Chester Friends Meeting
(Religious organization)
Recorder/Corresponder

Colleen McNichol
Child Guidance Resource Centers
CEO

Bill Clark
Child's World America
Founder

Mckayla Warwick
Collective Climb
Executive Director

Jennifer Santisi
Delco MPAC
(Municipal Police Accountability Coalition)
Convener - Nether Providence

Will Richan
Delco MPAC
(Municipal Police Accountability Coalition)
Member

Ashley Dolceamore
Delco Resists
Co-founder

Suzanne O'Connor
DELCO Trauma Alliance
Coalition Leader

Julie Avalos
Domestic Abuse Project of Delaware
County
Executive Director

Deborah Klehr
Education Law Center
Executive Director

Megan Reilly Keeler
Pinwheels DTS
Owner

Ellen Morfei
Progressive Conflict Solutions
Mediator, Restorative Practitioner

Lauren Kossler
Restoration Counseling Services, LLC
Owner

Frank P. Cervone
Support Center for Child Advocates
Executive Director

Lydia E. Munoz
Swarthmore United Methodist Church
Lead Pastor

Dr. Joan Duvall-Flynn
Trauma Informed Education Coalition
Chair

Dyamond Gibbs
UDTJ (Understanding, Devotion,
Take Action, Justice)
President

Brian Taussig-Lux
Untours
President