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Erie County to combat child sexual abuse

Submitted

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Erie County District Attorney John J. Flynn announced Erie County has become the sixth county in New York to launch the "Enough Abuse" campaign.

Under the umbrella of "Prevent Child Abuse New York," the "Enough Abuse" campaign aims to educate members of the community and to develop new strategies to prevent child sexual abuse before it ever happens.

DA Flynn announces 'Enough Abuse' campaign in

The Lee Gross Anthonie Child Advocacy Center was approved as the host agency in Erie County. Along with partner agencies, free educational training will be provided to parents, educators, students, therapists, social workers, child protection workers, public health officials, faith-based institutions and law enforcement. Trainers will educate anyone over the age of 12 with facts on child sexual abuse and steps every person and organization can take to prevent it.

Erie County has the second-highest number of cases of child abuse in New York, with approximately 9,000 cases reported per year. In 2017, the Child Advocacy Center assisted nearly 1,100 child victims.

These numbers represent a small fraction of the actual cases of abuse, most of which are never reported. It is estimated 90 percent of child sex abuse cases are unreported. Through the campaign, adults will be educated on how to identify and react appropriately to incidents of abuse.

"We need to stop being silent about crimes committed against children," Flynn said. "Our community needs to be proactive in educating the public on how to identify these potential predators before a crime is even committed. If an abuse towards a child does occur, the crime needs to be reported immediately in order for these sexual predators to be taken off of the street. My office is committed to educating the public about child sex abuse, and prosecuting those who take advantage of these most vulnerable victims."

The district attorney's office special victims bureau is responsible for the prosecution of all cases involving sexual assault, child abuse, internet crimes against children, and sex offender registration violations. Its mission is to aggressively pursue justice on behalf of the most vulnerable victims while being sensitive to the dynamics associated with sexual assaults and child abuse. Those assigned to the special victims bureau receive specialized training and prosecute cases through a multidisciplinary approach designed to minimize trauma suffered by the victim.

The Erie County district attorney's office is not only responsible for prosecuting these cases, but is committed to preventing child sexual abuse. The office is part of a communitywide initiative to prevent horrific crimes against children. Special Victims Bureau Chief Rosanne Johnson has completed the "Enough Abuse" Campaign training. Additional members of the DA's special victims bureau staff have committed to participate in the training and will provide a minimum of three trainings per year to adults and students in Erie County.

Those interested in learning more about the "Enough Abuse" campaign or participate in an upcoming training can contact Laurie Syms, outreach and education coordinator at Best Self Behavioral Health, at 716-886-5437 or lsyms@bestselfwny.org.

Flynn announced the community-wide initiative on Wednesday. He was joined by Johnson; Syms; Rebecca Stevens, director of the Lee Gross Anthonie Child Advocacy Center; Jessica Pirro, CEO of Crisis Services; Lt. David Mann of the Buffalo Police Department sex offense unit; Marni Bogart, director of legal affairs for Erie County Department of Social Services; Sharon Rochelle, first deputy commissioner of Social Services; and Jessica Ceniccola, CPS worker and trainer for "Enough Abuse."

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