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Community support essential to stopping rise in suspected Pa. child abuse cases, says PFSA CEO

Latest DHS report coincides with surgeon general's advisory on parental stress being a public health concern; PFSA to offer free virtual trainings in September for mandated reporters

HARRISBURG, Pa. – The Pennsylvania Department of Human Services this week released its [2023 Child Protective Services Report](#), which shows a slight increase from 2022 to 2023 in suspected child abuse cases. The Pa Family Support Alliance (PFSA), the commonwealth's leading statewide child abuse prevention organization, says that intervention and helping families is the first step to stop the numbers from increasing any further.

"We know that parental stress increases the likelihood of a child being abused or mistreated. 'It takes a village' is an old adage but it's one that we should all adhere to if we want to stop child abuse and neglect," said Angela Liddle, PFSA President and CEO. "Being a parent is harder than ever: screens and devices are everywhere for both parents and kids; mental health services and resources are scant; parents are working more than ever; and it's hard to find affordable childcare, housing and food. A child being mistreated isn't a family matter; it's an illustration that we as a society must do better for our most vulnerable citizens."

The release of the report coincides with U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy this week issuing an advisory calling parental stress a public health concern. In his [New York Times essay announcing the advisory](#), Dr. Murthy wrote, "The stress and mental health challenges faced by parents — just like loneliness, workplace well-being and the impact of social media on youth mental health — aren't always visible, but they can take a steep toll.

"It's time to recognize they constitute a serious public health concern for our country. Parents who feel pushed to the brink deserve more than platitudes. They need tangible support."

The report notes that parents continue to be the persons' most responsible for abuse of their children. Liddle stressed that supporting parents and caregivers begins with every Pennsylvanian stepping up to help children and youth. [The Front Porch Project®](#) from PFSA is a community-based primary prevention initiative that trains neighbors and community members on how to protect and support their community's children and families.

According to PFSA, mandated reporters — those required by Pennsylvania's Child Protective Service Law to report suspected child abuse and neglect — are often the only link between a child and safety from abuse. The DHS report showed that mandated reporters were the source of 82% of all suspected child abuse reports in 2023, a 1.3% increase from the previous year.

Training available for mandated reporters

Continued, regular training for mandated reporters is essential to protecting Pennsylvania's children, according to Haven Evans, PFSA's Director of Programs. With child neglect on the rise in Pennsylvania and across the nation, PFSA is hosting three-hour [Recognizing and Responding to Child Abuse and Neglect trainings](#) throughout September at no cost to mandated reporters. These trainings, Evans said, along with PFSA's training on Responding to Disclosures of Child Abuse, are essential for anyone who works with children, volunteer or otherwise.

"These specialized trainings provide mandated reporters with essential knowledge and direction," Evans said. "It's crucial for mandated reporters to identify signs of abuse and neglect and to respond appropriately when a child discloses abuse."

"Although there was a slight decrease in substantiated cases, even one child suffering from abuse or neglect is too many. Continuous education and alertness are key to creating a safe and nurturing environment for all children."

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About Pennsylvania Family Support Alliance

[Pa Family Support Alliance](#) prevents child abuse and protects children from harm by helping parents learn positive parenting techniques, educating professionals and volunteers who work with children to recognize and report child abuse, and helping community members learn how they can play a positive role in keeping children safe. To learn more about our programs, schedule a training, or donate, please visit pafsa.org, or call 800-448-4906.