



## OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY

**KEVIN R. STEELE**

DISTRICT ATTORNEY

**EDWARD F. McCANN, JR.**

FIRST ASSISTANT DISTRICT ATTORNEY

**COUNTY OF MONTGOMERY**

COURTHOUSE

P.O. BOX 311

NORRISTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA

19404-0311

**SAMUEL J. GALLEN**

CHIEF COUNTY DETECTIVE

**JESSE S. KING**

CHIEF OF STAFF

**DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE**

**DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S FAX**

**COUNTY DETECTIVE BUREAU**

**(610) 278-3090**

**(610) 278-3095**

**(610) 278-3368**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Kate Delano 610-312-3487 cell

### **CHILD ABUSE REPORTS DOWN 61.5% IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY IN APRIL; DA ASKING FOR PUBLIC'S HELP**

NORRISTOWN, Pa. (May 12, 2020) — Montgomery County's suspected child abuse reports to the ChildLine child abuse reporting system were down 38% in March and an even more alarming 61% in April in Montgomery County, prompting District Attorney Kevin R. Steele to ask for the public's help in reporting suspected child abuse.

ChildLine is the Commonwealth's system for reporting child abuse and general well-being concerns. All calls to the 800 number (800-932-0313) and online reports related to Montgomery County are forwarded to the Montgomery County Detective Bureau for vetting and investigation. In March 2020—half of which was following the closure of schools statewide—ChildLine received 170 referrals versus 278 referrals in March 2019, a decrease of 38.8%. In April, the situation worsened with just 100 referrals versus 260 in April 2019, a decrease of 61.5%.

“In these difficult times, child abuse, unfortunately, doesn't just suddenly stop happening in such a dramatic way so this significant decrease in reports seem to indicate that the child abuse that is occurring is simply not being reported,” said DA Steele.

Typically, the majority of suspected child abuse reports come from teachers, counselors and other school officials; medical personnel such as doctors, dentists and nurses; and adults involved in programs for children, such as sports programs. But these mandatory reporters are not seeing children as much as they did prior to the COVID-19 crisis, leaving children living in an abusive situation without an important link to the world outside of their homes. Yet, anyone can report suspected child abuse or report a child who they think might need help. Children can anonymously report themselves or a friend who might need help using the Safe2Say app or website. Adults can call 911, call ChildLine at 800-932-0313 or use the anonymous Montco Crime Tips app.

**Children can report.** Safe2Say Something is a program children are familiar with from school, where they are taught that they can anonymously submit anything that

“makes them feel uncomfortable”—from fearing that a friend could harm himself to online bullying. But the program can be used to report anything, including a child being abused at home. School officials will receive the tip and then forward the information to law enforcement. Safe2Say is accessible from the website at [safe2saypa.org](http://safe2saypa.org), by calling 844-saf2say or through the app (downloadable from the App Store or Google Play). During the past week, DA Steele reached out to teachers and school administrators to ask that they remind children of the Safe2Say app as well as look for signs of child abuse during their limited screen time with their students.

**Adults can report child abuse.** In an emergent situation, calling 911 is the best approach. But if someone suspects that a child is being abused, they can call ChildLine, which is not just for use by mandated reporters. The 800-932-0313 toll-free number is available 24/7/365 and all information will be forwarded to law enforcement for investigation. To anonymously report child abuse or any crime, Montgomery County residents can download the STOPit! app from the App Store or Google Play, then insert code MONTCOPA to get the Montgomery County, Pa., version of the app. Then text what they know. All texts go to the 911 call center for distribution to appropriate law enforcement, and it is completely anonymous.

“Neighbors or friends sometimes hear or see something that indicates child abuse but they don’t want to get involved in a ‘family matter.’ Violence against a child is never a family matter. It’s a crime where a young victim needs our help, and someone needs to act to help them,” said Steele. “If you know something, say something by using one of these avenues to get the information to people who can help stop the child abuse.”

Approved for release:

Kevin R. Steele