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In his New York Times best seller, *A Child Called It*, author Dave Pelzer said that "childhood should be carefree, playing in the sun; not living a nightmare in the darkness of the soul." Unfortunately, we know all too well that doesn't always happen. A report issued by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services noted that in Federal Fiscal Year 2017 in the United States, approximately 674,000 children became victims of child abuse. To place that number into context, that is enough children to fill every seat in the 7 largest NCAA football stadiums. According to the same report, 1,720 children died from abuse or neglect during the same time period. That averages out to roughly 5 children each day. These figures are staggering, gut-wrenching, and unacceptable. In very recent history, our own community has been rocked by tragic and senseless child fatalities. Those include, but are not limited to, Lauren McConniel, Marie Pierre, and Jensen Wallace.

In 1983, President Ronald Reagan formally declared April as Child Abuse Prevention Month. Every year since, the nation has come together to bring awareness to the child abuse epidemic plaguing our country. The vast majority of child abuse and neglect cases result from conditions that can be prevented through community programs, support, and interventions. Child abuse prevention is possible through partnerships among families, social service and healthcare organizations, schools, religious and civic groups, law enforcement agencies, and the entire community devoted to the safety of our children.

Every April, Child Abuse Prevention Month is an opportunity to learn about the signs of child abuse and how to prevent it. Communities around the nation come together to support families and children by reinforcing strategies that are working. In order to adequately protect children and prevent abuse, we must acknowledge that child abuse and neglect come in many forms. Child abuse refers to affirmative acts by a perpetrator which include words or actions that cause physical, sexual or psychological harm, potential harm, or threat of harm to a child. Child neglect refers to acts of omission, meaning the failure to provide for a child's basic physical, emotional or educational needs or to protect a child from harm or potential harm. While most forms of child abuse and neglect are readily identifiable and acknowledged, there are subtle types that may go unnoticed. This includes Abusive Head Trauma (otherwise known as Shaken Baby Syndrome), bed-sharing and other unsafe sleep practices with infants. There are effective prevention programs that prevent these forms of abuse and neglect. For example, the PURPLE Crying program is an evidence-based

Shaken Baby Syndrome prevention program available since 2007. The program approaches Shaken Baby Syndrome prevention by helping parents and caregivers understand the frustrating features of crying in normal, healthy infants that can lead to shaking or abuse. The program provides the opportunity for parents to learn about the crying characteristics from over 50 years of research on normal infant crying conducted by scientists worldwide. Additionally the ABC's of the safe sleep initiative seeks to reduce infant fatalities due to unsafe sleep practices. Infants and babies should always sleep Alone, on their Backs, and in a safe Crib. Despite the wide spread availability of these prevention programs, locally we continue to see these types of child abuse and neglect. Make no mistake about it, shaking a child can irreparably harm a child. Approximately 25% of children who have been shaken die from their injuries. Among the survivors, approximately 60% are left with neurologic effects ranging from mild learning disorders to persistent vegetative states. Moreover, sleeping with the infant in an adult bed can result in the fatal smothering of an infant. Contrary to the belief of some, sleeping in adult bed with your infant or, engaging in other unsafe sleep practices is, by definition, child neglect.

I often speak to various groups in our community about the legal ramifications of child abuse and neglect. Generally speaking, prosecutions involving child abuse and neglect fall into one of three categories: (1) an individual who actually perpetrates the abuse or neglect, (2) a parent or caregiver who knows abuse or neglect is occurring, but does nothing to stop it; and (3) a person who has reason to believe that a child is being abused or neglected, but fails to report their suspicion. Rest assured, the Delaware County Prosecutor's office has and will continue to prosecute all three of these categories. To that end, April is an opportunity to remind the public that each and every one of us have an absolute legal duty to immediately report suspected child abuse or neglect. Failure to do so, may subject you to arrest, prosecution, and up to 180 days imprisonment in jail. I challenge and encourage everyone in our community to join me and stand up for children: we must protect those who cannot protect themselves. If you suspect that a child is or has been the victim of child abuse or neglect you must immediately call the child abuse hotline at 1-800-800-5556, or make a report through your local law enforcement agency. Pick the phone, make a report. Not only are you legally required to do so, but you just might save a child's life.

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