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Newsroom

Alums Take on Child Abuse

A pair of prominent RWU Law alumni, Rhode Island Attorney General Peter Kilmartin '98 and special assistant AG Shannon Signore '00, are tackling child abuse.

From the PROVIDENCE JOURNAL: "[New unit to tackle cases of child abuse](#)" by W. Zachary

Malinowsky, Journal Staff Writer



PROVIDENCE, December 6, 2011 — Attorney General Peter F.

Kilmartin [RWU Law '98, RWU '88] announced on Monday the formation of a Child Abuse Unit whose sole focus will be to prosecute suspects charged with the sexual and physical abuse of children.

The unit will be led by **Shannon Signore [RWU Law '00, RWU '97]**, a special assistant attorney general, and she will have a small staff of prosecutors and victim advocates trained in handling the emotional and psychological effects associated with molestation and other crimes against young people. Until now, the cases were handled by prosecutors in county courthouses who also handle a wide variety of other crimes.

Kilmartin said that will change with the new unit.



"All the referrals are going to go to **Shannon [Signore]**," a state prosecutor for 10 years, **Kilmartin said**. "She is going to make the determination."

Collaborative undertaking

The well-attended announcement was made in the basement of Day One, a private agency in Wayland Square that deals with issues surrounding sexual assault as a community concern. Kilmartin's office will work closely with the Day One staff, along with local police departments, the Department of Children, Youth and Families, and doctors at Hasbro Children's Hospital to tackle the problem of child abuse.

Dr. Amy Goldberg, a certified child-abuse pediatrician at Hasbro, said that she has been waiting 11 years for something like the Child Abuse Unit and the collaborative effort among the various agencies to take hold. She said that physicians at Hasbro annually evaluate about 1,500 children who are possible victims of abuse. According to Kilmartin's office, state prosecutors have charged 40 people with child molestation this year and 34 others face felony counts of child abuse or child neglect.

Law-enforcement officials say it's difficult to gauge whether more children are abused or attacked today than in the past.

Kilmartin said that, historically, children and families were reluctant to report abuse because of the "shame attached." And, in many cases, the abuser is a family member or someone close to the family.

Kilmartin and Margaret "Peg" Lynch-Gadaleta, a former prosecutor who serves as Day One's director of advocacy and legal services, said the Child Abuse Unit will ease the victim's journey through the criminal-justice system. Instead of sitting down for a series of interviews with doctors, police officers and prosecutors, a child will go directly to the unit and tell his or her story.

"These victims are the least likely to be able to stop crimes from being committed against them, report crimes to law enforcement and have the support they need to get through the legal process," **Kilmartin said**. "All of the attorneys and support staff in this unit have both a desire and a commitment to help victims survive the crimes committed against them, and empower them to be involved in the process of punishing the perpetrator of the crime."

Interim Providence Police Chief Hugh Clements hailed the collaborative effort of the police, attorney general's office and other agencies. He underscored the problem in Providence by saying that there are 477 registered sex offenders in the city.

"We take this seriously," he said. "These victims are our most vulnerable."

On another note, officials at Day One announced that its Children's Advocacy Center has been re-accredited by the National Children's Alliance.

"Accreditation not only validates Day One's proven effective approach to responding to allegations of child abuse, but also provides consistency across the child-advocacy movement as a whole," said Peg Langhammer, Day One's executive director.

By the Numbers: Sexual offenses

Day One, the sexual-assault and trauma resource center, supplied the following statistics:

17.6 percent Percentage of women in the United States who say they are victims of a rape or attempted rape. Of those, 21.6 percent of the survivors are between the ages of 12 and 17 years old.

1 in 4 Ratio of girls in the United States who are sexually abused before their 18th birthday.

1 in 6 Ratio of boys in the United States who are sexually abused before their 18th birthday.

Source: Day One

For full story, click [here](#).