

Another indecent assault incident on Penn State campus

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UNIVERSITY PARK, Pa. -- Penn State police on Monday confirmed that they have referred another previous report of indecent assault to the state police for further review.

Campus police said the assault by "a known individual" happened at an outdoor swimming pool building sometime between June 1, 2000, and Aug. 30, 2000. It was reported to university police Wednesday by a person described only as a "visitor" to the pool.

A Penn State spokeswoman would not say whether the "known individual" is Jerry Sandusky or if the victim was one of those named in an indictment charging the former Penn State football coach with sexual assaults and abuse of eight boys over a 15-year period.

Neither a state police spokeswoman nor a spokesman for the state attorney general's office would comment further, citing the ongoing grand jury investigation.

Stronger state laws urged

HARRISBURG -- Child advocates called Monday for changes in state laws they say could have stopped the child sex abuse a former Penn State assistant football coach is accused of committing and would help protect other youngsters.

The advocates cited a range of problems in Pennsylvania laws they have been pushing for action on in recent months, some for years. The laws are designed to protect child victims -- and in many cases have proved effective.

But speakers at a Capitol news conference said state law must be strengthened with respect to reporting suspected abuse to authorities.

"Really, what happened at Penn State is happening to lots of kids everywhere," said Cathleen Palm, executive director of the Protect Our Children Committee.

Ms. Palm and others said everyone who, by law, is required to report suspected child abuse, such as a teacher or medical professional, should be required to contact authorities, not just a superior.

Counties need more resources to investigate and respond to reports of child abuse, and an independent ombudsman's office should be created to help ensure the system is working for victims, the children's advocates said.

Another key issue they raised is the question of how a case is categorized as child abuse.

They say social workers cannot protect a child or provide services in the home, such as family counseling, if county child welfare investigators cannot determine who abused the child.

That means some children end up getting abused again, said Debra Schilling Wolfe, executive director of the University of Pennsylvania's Field Center for Children's Policy, Practice & Research.

"It's one of the narrowest state laws in the country," Ms. Wolfe said.

At least partly because of that narrowness, just 15 percent of the 24,615 calls to ChildLine last year resulted in substantiated cases of child abuse -- among the lowest in the nation, she said.

-- From local and wire reports

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