

October 8, 2013

Dear Dr. Starr and Members of the Board of Education,

I am a Montgomery county resident and the mother of two Montgomery county public elementary school students. I am reaching out to you to open a discussion regarding the way in which the county addresses the sexual abuse of its students and children.

This weekend, the media documented yet another arrest of an MCPS staff member for allegedly sexually abusing a student.

A brief review I conducted this morning of media reports (from 2012 and 2013) quickly revealed eight criminal cases that led to charges being pressed against MCPS staff:

1. October 2013 - Richard Shemer, teacher Albert Einstein High School
  - one felony charge of sex abuse of a minor
2. August 2013 – Lawrence Joynes, teacher at New Hampshire Estates elementary school.
  - Arrested from sexually abusing 15 students. Charged with 14 counts of sex abuse of a minor, one count of sex offense in the third degree, child abuse and second-degree rape.
3. June 2013 – Benjamin Cano, teacher at Mario Loiederman middle school.
  - Arrested for the sexual abuse of 3 girls. Charged with three counts of sexual abuse of a minor and three counts of committing a 3rd degree sex offense.
4. April 2013 – Timothy Krupica, teacher at Meadow Hall elementary school.
  - Arrested on multiple charges for the sexual abuse of 4 girls. Charged with two counts of sexual abuse of a minor and faces several other sexual offense charges
5. October 2012 – Cuyler Cornell, teacher at Neelsville middle school.
  - Arrested for sexually abusing 1 boy. Charged with two counts of committing a third degree sex offense and one count of sexual abuse of a minor
6. September 2012 – Daniel Picca, teacher – numerous schools in MCPS.
  - Numerous children involved. The state board upheld his firing. In the 1990's, allegations also resulted in an investigation of Picca by the county's Child Protective Services Division, which found that his actions "indicated child abuse." That finding, though contested by Picca, was upheld twice by another state administrative law judge. Picca remained in the classroom, according to the reports. For 17 years, he was warned and reprimanded by Montgomery County Public Schools over his "inappropriate" conduct with male students.
7. May 2012 – Aaron Lamere, teacher at Northwood high school.
  - Charged with three counts of possession of child pornography, Four counts of sexual solicitation of a minor, Four counts of committing a third degree sex offense, Three counts of sexual abuse of a minor, One count of committing a fourth degree sex offense, Two counts of indecent exposure.
8. February 2012 - Scott Spear, coach at Richard Montgomery High School
  - a fourth degree sex offense over allegations he twice had sex off campus with a student who was on the track team

This was not a comprehensive review and obviously does not include criminal complaints that did not lead to charges being pressed, nor does it included cases brought to the attention of Child Protective Services as their records are not open to the public.

Over the past year and a half, I have been trying to gather information to understand clearly what the school system and county are doing to prevent abuse (via the education of staff, parents and children) as well as to address concerns, allegations and reports of child abuse, specifically child sexual abuse. I have been unable to find information regarding what, if anything, MCPS is doing to help engage parents in either helping prevent abuse from occurring in the first place or in reporting abuse when they have suspicions or knowledge it has occurred. I am bewildered by why a lengthy search on MCPS website, meetings with principal and vice principal of my children's school, multiple emails, phone calls (to numerous county departments and agencies) cannot provide me with anything other than superficial information on this matter.

In May of 2013, County Executive Isiah Leggett kicked off a child abuse prevention campaign called The Power of One in which he stated, "This campaign emphasizes that one person can save a life, making a choice to make a difference, whether it is through reporting suspected abuse or caring for an at-risk child. We all must do our part to help children in our community."

As a resident of the county, as a parent of children in the county school system and also as a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (MD & VA) & Certified Sex Offender Treatment Provider (VA) with 20 years of experience in working on the issue of child abuse, I would like to join in the Power of One campaign and am asking for your support, help, cooperation and guidance in making our county and our schools a safe place for our children and families.

I would like to know if the following is in place in the schools and if it is not, I would like to be part of implementing the following:

- A clear and easy to access place within MCPS with information regarding child abuse. This would include information regarding what type of screening of employees, volunteers & programs is being done. It would include red flags / signs & symptoms of abuse. It would include links and information regarding how to report said concerns to the schools, police and CPS. It would include how each of those agencies respond to concerns, allegations and reports.
- A clear and easy to access site within MCPS with the school and county policies regarding such things as: What are the guidelines / rules / regulations for electronic communication / engagement between staff and students? On a county level, what are the regulations for documenting concerning behaviors of staff? What is the protocol / regulation for how departments / agencies share concerns / findings / convictions (i.e. between schools, administration, police and CPS)? Have the loopholes that allowed part-time staff not be held to the same standards as full time staff been closed?
- Education for parents regarding child sexual abuse.
- Education and prevention for children in our schools.

I would welcome the opportunity to meet with any of you to discuss this complex and critically important issue facing the county. Please contact me at your earliest convenience. I look forward to hearing from you and thank you in advance for your time and consideration of this matter. I may be reached either by email (xxxxxxx) or cell phone (xxxxxxx).

Sincerely,

Jennifer Alvaro