September 5, 2019

Subject: The District Attorney’s Student Safety in School Systems Task Force

Dear Superintendent:

I know and appreciate that your students’ safety is of paramount concern to you. I am confident that we share a common goal of providing the safest, most nurturing educational environment for our youth. Assuring that students are safe from sexual and physical abuse and that school systems methodically comply with mandated reporting laws in order to stop the abuse and prevent students from being harmed is of critical importance to all of us. I have great respect for the dedicated educators and others who work every day toward this goal.

With this common goal in mind, I am proud to announce a new District Attorney Task Force borne out of one of our key priorities to ensure the safety of children from sexual and physical abuse: The District Attorney’s Student Safety in School Systems Task Force.

As you know, my office recently spearheaded in schools countywide—in partnership with law enforcement and the County Office of Education—a Mandated Reporting card, brochure and informational video with key facts about the law and how to properly report suspected child abuse. With that helpful foundation having been laid, the DA’s Office is now ready to take the next step in prioritizing the reporting and safety of children in school districts and we look to you as a critical partner in support of your work to keep your students safe.

Why establish this DA Task Force? Community members have repeatedly brought valid concerns to me regarding how reports of child abuse in educational settings are reported, investigated and processed. Currently, multiple systems designed to address suspected abuse exist, but our team has identified significant gaps within those systems. Members of the public often have difficulty navigating the existing channels or receiving information as to whether or not their concerns were being addressed. Since last year, I have been working on a solution to address these gaps. As you know, the District Attorney’s Office has countywide jurisdiction as the People’s prosecutor and intersects with every law enforcement agency, school district and child welfare agency throughout the county which allows us to support better public safety practices consistently throughout the county.

Through this Task Force, we intend to assist you and the communities we serve together to make sure reports of suspected abuse are being documented where the law mandates such documentation. Further, our goal is to reduce the public’s confusion by giving them direct access to the District Attorney’s Office via this Task Force so allegations and complaints can be tracked by the individuals who submit them.
A public web page created by the District Attorney’s Office will enable members of the community to submit inquiries or complaints directly to my team for review. A submission form will allow for inquiries or complaints of any alleged physical or sexual abuse perpetrated by an adult or minor on a student in an educational setting. This Task Force will not replace reporting to the legally required agencies.

The Task Force will review and respond to all submissions. The submissions will be cross-referenced with law enforcement, Child Welfare Services, and educational institutions and programs where appropriate. Allegations of abuse or misconduct will be referred by the Task Force to the proper investigative authorities if that has not already occurred. In rare circumstances, the District Attorney’s Office itself may initiate investigations where it is appropriate—such as with investigations of failures to comply with mandated reporting laws.

If you have any questions about this initiative, please feel free to contact me. You will be receiving further information as we prepare to introduce the Task Force to the public. In the meantime, inquiries to the Student Safety in School Systems Task Force can be submitted to studentsafety@sdcda.org. We look forward to working with you to inform your students, parents and staff of the existence and the availability of our Task Force.

Thank you for your continuing commitment to the well-being and safety of our county’s students.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

SUMMER STEPHAN
San Diego County District Attorney