



Warren C. Evans
Sheriff

Media Alert

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County & State officials get tough with child abusers

◆ *Stepped up enforcement and scrutiny bring agencies together in new ways.*

An expanded effort to protect Wayne County's children from neglect and abuse is bringing more child abusers to justice and is bringing about fundamental changes in the way agencies interact and operate on the issue, officials announced today.



Project Guardian is an effort to significantly improve the system that is designed to protect children from abuse, said Wayne County Sheriff Warren Evans. Those aspects range from apprehending child abusers wanted on warrants to more closely monitoring them while they are on probation and imposing harsher penalties if they violate their probation. The key element, however, involves a much greater level of information sharing among the various agencies.

"Each of us has renewed our commitment to protecting our children from the nightmare of abuse and are working together in new and important ways to accomplish that mission," said Sheriff Evans, speaking on behalf of Project Guardian, which also includes Wayne County Executive Robert Ficano, Prosecutor Kym Worthy, the Detroit Police Department and the Michigan Departments of Corrections (MDOC) and Human Services (DHS).

To illustrate the need, officials point to individuals such as Patrick Thomas Clark, 38, a convicted child sexual abuser from Macomb County. As investigators scoured records of prior offenders, they discovered that Clark had a new parole violation warrant stemming from an unrelated charge. This week, when sheriff's deputies tracked him down at a home in Detroit, they discovered he was living with a woman and her young children - a violation of his sentence.

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“This is exactly the type of case the Project Guardian was set up to find and may have helped us prevent another child from being victimized,” Evans said.

Clark now faces a felony charge for failing to register as a sex offender and for violating his state parole. Armed with the information of his new living arrangement, state authorities now can investigate to determine whether Clark may have abused the kids in his new home.

Wayne County Executive Robert Ficano said that Project Guardian is an expansion of efforts already underway in Wayne County through cooperation between his Department of Children & Family Services (which helps fund a Child Rescue Unit, Missing & Exploited Children’s Task Force), various state agencies, the Wayne County Sheriff and Prosecutor and the Detroit Police Department.

“The Warrant Enforcement Bureau, part of the county’s Children and Family Services department, has the on-going responsibility of providing child-rescue services,” Wayne County Executive Robert Ficano said. “They will play an integral part in Project Guardian. Protecting children from harm is a Wayne County priority.”

Greater Communication

One of the most basic changes made as part of Project Guardian is an improved line of communication between agencies, particularly Wayne County and the State. For example, a new practice has been implemented whereby the Prosecutor will notify DHS of all child abuse-related warrants in its possession. The Michigan Department of Corrections/Sheriff’s Office SPOT CHECK Unit will notify the state DHS of all probationers found to be in violation of their orders of probation related to child abuse convictions. In the past, DHS only received information based on initial complaints and investigations and was not made aware of any subsequent actions that might otherwise have prompted investigation.

Changing the system

Over the course of a months-long research project leading up to the apprehension and home check component of Project Guardian, staff from the Sheriff’s Office and State Human Services Department, which oversees child abuse cases, identified more than 130 individuals with outstanding Child Abuse related warrants in Wayne County.

Since many of them are probation violators, officials felt it was important to establish harsher penalties to hold these individuals accountable, including:

- All child abuse probation violators will be re-arrested once contacted.
- The Prosecutor will advocate for jail time or revocation of probation for probation violators in child abuse cases.
- For those who stay on probation, prosecutors will request a new order of probation compelling the individual to comply with random unannounced home visits by state agents and sheriff's deputies. If a violation is found during a spot check, an arrest warrant may be requested, or, if there is probable cause to believe new abuse has taken place, he or she may be detained at that time.
- Treatment programs for offenders will be recommended when appropriate.

Prosecutor Worthy said she always looks for new ways to protect children from abuse.

"Child abusers continue to attack and exploit our children. It's up to us to find new and more creative ways to intervene," said Prosecutor Worthy. "Any effort to share resources to stop abusers from violating the law is a worthwhile endeavor."

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