



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Today, we would like to announce the transition of an important resource in Berks County used to assist children who are victims of sexual and physical assault. The responsibility for the operation of the Children's Alliance Center of Berks County will change from Opportunity House to the Berks County District Attorney's Office.

After 16 years under the umbrella of Opportunity House, and 8 years under the leadership of Vice President Melissa Haydt, the Children's Alliance Center is transitioning to the District Attorney's office as of January 1, 2021.

Melissa commented, "The CAC has served thousands of sexually abused children and their families over these years, and I truly believe the District Attorney's office will continue to deliver the same quality of services to the families of Berks County."

Modesto Fiume, President of Opportunity House also welcomes this transition, "We recognized that with Melissa's impending retirement and District Attorney Adams ardent support of the CAC over the years that this transition to the DA's Office would be a great way for the high level of care for abused children to continue."

Child sexual and physical abuse plagues our country and Berks County is no exception. Children Advocacy Centers (CAC) were developed in order to provide child victims with a private, safe and supportive environment. Children are able to tell their story to a trained interviewer who knows how to ask questions without re-traumatizing the child. This approach helps to minimize duplication of interviews for the child. The CAC model brings together child abuse professionals who support the needs of the child and their family.

The original CAC model was created by the National Children's Alliance Center in Huntsville, Alabama. Since early 2000, a multi-disciplinary team consisting of the Children's Alliance Center, Berks County District Attorney's Office, Berks County Children and Youth Services, Tower Health, Mental health professionals, Victim advocacy agencies and Law enforcement have worked together to build a CAC model that can make the residents of Berks County proud. In 2007, the Children's Alliance Center accomplished national accreditation and continues to complete re-accreditation every 5 years.

District Attorney Adams commented, "My office looks forward to taking on the everyday challenges and operation of the CAC and I am confident that we will be able to maintain its high standards. Additionally, I would like to thank the members of our multi-disciplinary team for their continued dedication and response to victims of child abuse. We are also grateful to the Berks County Commissioners whose support of this project was necessary to accomplish the change in leadership of the Children's Alliance Center. As a result, the Children's Alliance Center will continue to be able to assist children who have been victimized. We would also like to thank Opportunity House for their role in leading the Children's Alliance Center since 2000. We are grateful to take over the reins from them moving forward."

Amy Sundstrom, new Director of the CAC stated, "It is an honor to be named by District Attorney Adams as the Director of the Children's Alliance Center in Berks County. Over the past twenty years I have dedicated myself to the field of victim services, as a social worker for the Children's Home of Reading and later becoming the Supervisor of the Berks County District Attorney's Victim/Witness Unit. As the new Director of the CAC, I will strive to reduce the trauma that children and families suffer from child abuse and lead them to a path of recovery."