

# WAYNE INDEPENDENT

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## Child Advocacy Center planned

By Peter Becker / Managing Editor

Posted Feb 3, 2017 at 12:01 AM

MILFORD - The Pike County Commissioners approved hiring a person trained to conduct interviews of children in difficult cases handled by the County's Children & Youth Department (C&Y).

A "Child Advocacy Center" is being set up, District Attorney Raymond Tonkin explained, which will allow a single interview of the child, rather than put the child through the trauma of going through the interview process repeatedly with multiple agencies sharing in the investigation.

Tonkin discussed the plan at the February 1st meeting of the Board of Commissioners. This followed the passing of a motion to acknowledge the hiring of Molly Carson, as a Forensic Interviewer/ MDIT Coordinator for the District Attorney's Office. MDIT is the acronym for Multi-Disciplinary Investigative Team.

The interview is recorded both with audio and video. The child is alone with the interviewer in the room.

Representatives of other agencies in the investigation, including the State Police, C&Y, the D.A.'s Office are watching from a separate room. The interviewer will ask at some point if any of the other agencies have more questions.

This newly created full-time job is effective February 6, 2017. Annual pay was set at \$42,000.

Funding for the position has come through the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime & Delinquency (PCCD) from two grant streams. One is a \$2 million allocation approved a couple years ago by the Legislature. Other funding comes from proceeds from the fine paid by Penn State University in the Jerry Sandusky case (former Penn State assistant football coach convicted in a child abuse scandal).

Until now, Pike County has made use of the Lackawanna County Child Advocacy Center, and to a lesser extent the center in Monroe County. This involved “some travel” for the families and staff, Tonkin noted. The counties would bill Pike for the services.

The other part of the Child Advocacy Center is providing a medical examination for the child. The County has a nurse who is a certified Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) with a pediatric focus. Tonkin said they are working on getting this funded.

The Pike County District Attorney’s Office had partnered with Safe Haven of Pike County to start the Child Advocacy Center. There has been some delay Tonkin said, because Safe Haven has been in the midst of being re-structured. The D.A.’s Office and the County Commissioners worked together to help the project and get underway.

Carson, the district attorney said, has a background in social work and is working towards a master’s degree. She has been specially trained to conduct these interviews and had to undergo an apprenticeship with other forensic interviewers.

If there is a criminal proceeding, Tonkin said the child would be the one to testify in court. There could be instances where the forensic interviewer would be called upon to testify, but he added that is why they record the interview. Commissioner Steve Guccini, who as an attorney, had been involved with numerous C&Y cases, said it was very important to have the interviews done locally. He commended D.A. Tonkin for pursuing the matter.

Pike County Commissioners meet on the first and third Wednesday at 9 a.m. at the Administration Building, 506 Broad St., Milford.