

*Protect Children . . .
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ALLEN COUNTY CHILDREN SERVICES BOARD TERMINATES CONTRACT OF DIRECTOR, ACCEPTS STAFF RESIGNATIONS FOLLOWING INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATION

The Allen County Children Services Board today terminated the contract of the agency's executive director and accepted the resignations of two other employees following an independent investigation.

Executive Director Cynthia Scanland and Program Administrators Brent Bunke and Staci Nichols, who were on paid leave, will no longer work for the agency effective immediately.

The investigation found reason to believe that agency staff failed to follow established protocol by not reporting out allegations made about Jeremy Kindle and Scott Steffes on two occasions prior to their arrests in May. The investigation found no evidence that any employee thought that sexual abuse was occurring and covered it up. Rather, it appears that close relations between the foster parents and the agency clouded these employees' perceptions.

Executive Director Cynthia Scanland signed a separation agreement that will provide her with three and a half months' pay. Her contract included seven months' payment at termination. The board negotiated this agreement to avoid that larger payment or lengthy and costly litigation.

Allen County Children Services Board President Dr. Jennifer Hughes called it a disappointing, but necessary, decision.

"Our top priority is to keep kids safe and that means zero tolerance when employees show poor judgment as in this case," Hughes said. "I believe our employees had the best intentions, but procedures – especially these – are in place for a reason and by board action today we sent the message that we will not tolerate deviation from our own internal rules and common sense."

Under Ohio Administrative Code, allegations of sexual abuse like those made in this case require reporting to a third party or law enforcement.

IT TAKES a COMMUNITY to PROTECT a CHILD

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Hughes said that the board will work to ensure new safeguards are in place to avoid this type of incident in the future. She said a system would be in place where employees can go outside the chain of command if they feel pressure over reporting. She also said that the agency would undergo some changes in structure to ensure transparency and allow for open dialogue among staff. This situation will also be incorporated into training for existing and all new employees as part of the orientation process.

“It’s important to remember that Mr. Kindle and Mr. Steffes are the ones accused of terrible crimes in this case and we continue to cooperate with law enforcement,” Hughes said. “The agency has worked hard during these trying times to continue our mission of serving the children of Allen County, and we’re committed to doing our best to ensure that something like this never happens again.”

The agency will continue to be led by Interim Executive Director Sarah Newland while the board considers a permanent replacement.