

LINCOLN COUNTY  
811 MANVEL AVE., SUITE 1  
CHANDLER, OK 74834  
(405) 258-1674



POTTAWATOMIE COUNTY  
400 N. BROADWAY AVE.  
SHAWNEE, OKLAHOMA 74801  
(405) 275-6800

**ADAM R. PANTER**  
DISTRICT ATTORNEY  
DISTRICT 23

**ADAM KALLSNICK**  
FIRST ASSISTANT DISTRICT ATTORNEY

March 14, 2025

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**RE: Investigation Into Oklahoma Department of Human Services**

One of my highest priorities as District Attorney is to ensure the protection of our children's health, safety, and welfare. When our children become victims of heinous crimes, many times at the hands of those who were supposed to love and protect them, it becomes my job to prosecute those offenders and seek justice on behalf of those victims. I believe that child victims are especially vulnerable and all instances of suspected abuse against children need to be treated with the utmost importance. To do this effectively I must rely on my law enforcement partners and other agencies to properly and diligently do their jobs. Recently, I have become aware that the Oklahoma Department of Human Services (OKDHS) has systematically and repeatedly failed to follow State laws designed to protect children suspected of being sexually or physically abused or neglected. That failure to follow the law and policies put in place to protect children has led to subsequent and continuing sexual and physical abuse of children which would otherwise have been prevented. Despite multiple efforts made to obtain compliance, OKDHS has failed to correct their behavior, and I cannot stand to see another child unnecessarily victimized.

Under Oklahoma law, OKDHS must promptly respond to and investigate any report of child abuse or neglect pursuant to Title 10A Oklahoma Statutes § 1-2-105(A). When initiating an investigation, "[t]he primary purpose of the investigation or assessment **shall** be the protection of the child." (emphasis added) Title 10A O.S. § 1-2-105(B)(5) goes on to require OKDHS to investigate reports of child sexual abuse or serious physical abuse using a multidisciplinary team approach provided in Title 10A O.S. § 1-9-102 along with notifying and exchanging investigation information with law enforcement.

Title 10A O.S. § 1-9-102 requires each District Attorney to develop a multidisciplinary child abuse team (MDT) in their district. An MDT is comprised of the District Attorney, law enforcement agents with experience in child abuse investigations, medical personnel with child abuse injury experience, mental health professionals, OKDHS child protective services, and Child Advocacy Center personnel. This team is required to intervene in ALL reports involving child sexual abuse or child physical abuse or neglect in an effort to ensure coordination and cooperation between agencies involved and to minimize further trauma on an abused child. This law also requires a joint investigation between law enforcement and OKDHS child welfare staff when these

reports are made. Such investigations must follow MDT protocols when interviewing those child victims. MDT protocols dictate that a child suspected of being abused must be interviewed by a trained child forensic interviewer following approved forensic interview protocols, preferably recorded at a Child Advocacy Center. This ensures that children are interviewed by trained professionals for potential law enforcement or child welfare investigations, reduce the number of times a child will have to relive their trauma, and ensure that all agencies that should be aware of the alleged abuse are placed on notice, amongst other reasons.

What has been brought to my attention is that in many cases, OKDHS is receiving reports of suspected sexual or physical abuse of children and going out on their own and conducting forensic interviews of those children in the field. Based on these field interviews, which OKDHS is not properly trained to do, OKDHS determines for themselves whether the allegations are credible, and based on this opinion, will close the investigation without ever following the statutory procedures by notifying law enforcement and the child abuse experts of the MDT. I have now been made aware that multiple cases where this has occurred have resulted in children being placed back in the home of their abusers, where they have been subjected to further sexual or physical abuse. There have even been cases where OKDHS received multiple reports of abuse over a period of months, never notifying law enforcement, leaving the children in the home to suffer repeated abuse. Some of these cases were only discovered when vigilant staff at our local Child Advocacy Center notified law enforcement when those same children were later brought in for interviews and medical care due to subsequent abuse.

After being made aware of this, my office and our local Child Advocacy Center began comparing numbers of reports of suspected abuse versus the numbers of children receiving services at the Center. Fortunately, the Child Advocacy Center of Central Oklahoma (CACCO), which is the Child Advocacy Center based in Shawnee and primarily serves District 23, Pottawatomie and Lincoln counties, is very attentive and keeps thorough records. What was extremely concerning were the comparisons between the 2024 CACCO numbers with OKDHS numbers. One example is that in 2024, in Pottawatomie County and Lincoln County combined, OKDHS received 511 reports of physical abuse on children. The number of children who received services from the CACCO in 2024 for suspected physical abuse was 64. That means less than 8% of the reported child physical abuse allegations to OKDHS in that time led to those children receiving services at the CACCO as required by law. In 2024, the number of reports to OKDHS of alleged sexual abuse, physical abuse, or neglect in the district totaled 2,532. During that same period, the number of children receiving services at the CACCO for those reports was 389. That leads to a reasonable conclusion that potentially 2,143 reports of abuse or neglect were never brought to the attention of the CACCO or law enforcement, leaving children allegedly abused in unknown circumstances. This is incredibly alarming, as it indicates a likelihood that OKDHS has failed to follow the law for these types of cases at a much higher rate than previously thought.

After repeated attempts made by law enforcement and child advocates to correct this, OKDHS continues with this behavior. Recent meetings with OKDHS to urge their

compliance with the law have led to some constructive conversations which will hopefully lead to meaningful change. But the willingness to fix these problems does not negate the need to hold OKDHS accountable for their past failures. I have no reason to believe that my district is the only one facing this problem. This failure by OKDHS is likely happening across the state and is a direct reflection on the leadership of OKDHS from the top down. Because it is likely a statewide problem, within the next week I will formally request Attorney General Drummond utilize the Multicounty Grand Jury to investigate this issue to determine if criminal charges are warranted and what steps should be taken to ensure no more children are harmed. Should Attorney General Drummond find this issue unique to Pottawatomie and Lincoln Counties, I will seek to empanel local grand juries within my district to begin investigating or have my own District Attorney Task Force initiate a criminal investigation.

My anger towards those who fail to protect children is only eclipsed by my anger towards those who harm them, and I plan to deal with each accordingly. Therefore, I will not let this issue rest or be ignored until justice is obtained for every one of the children who suffered preventable rapes, sexual assaults, physical abuse, or extreme neglect due to OKDHS failures. As for those who perpetrated the abuse in the first place, they will be prosecuted as harshly and as aggressively as the law allows.

**Adam R. Panter**  
District Attorney  
District 23