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Children's Justice Center Joins District Attorney for Visionary Partnership

After the unanimous vote of support from Salt Lake County Mayor Ben McAdams and the entire County Council, the Children's Justice Center (CJC) has shifted their administrative structure from the Salt Lake County Human Services umbrella to the District Attorney's Office for contract and service delivery management. What do the Children's Justice Center program and the District Attorney's Office have in common? Everything. It seemed a natural evolution that the two agencies would eventually merge under the same vision of "no family violence from cradle to grave" and championing improved services for crime victims of all ages.

"I am very excited about this new chapter in our collective commitment to enhance and deliver a victim centered approach," District Attorney Sim Gill said. "This partnership will allow us to build upon the continued success of the Children's Justice Center and will open a host of future possibilities that will allow the District Attorney's Office to better serve those in our community who have been victimized by a crime."

The Children's Justice Center was formerly managed by the Salt Lake County Division of Youth Services providing administrative oversight and many in-kind contributions to ensure the success of the program operations. "We want to personally thank the Division Director Pat Berckman and her talented team for all the great support and personal caring they provided to our program and staff for so many years," CJC Program Director Susanne Mitchell said. "We will continue to maintain a strong collaborative relationship and enduring friendships as we embark on this new path for the benefit of all youth in our county."

The Children's Justice Center helps children and youth ages 17 and under for all types of crimes upon minors to include: sexual assault and internet exploitation, physical abuse and child homicide, abductions and witness to domestic violence. The District Attorney's Office has specialized teams of prosecutors and court victim advocates that work closely with the Children's Justice Center staff to ensure that the best interest of the child is supported through the criminal justice investigative process.

In addition, the CJC connects children and families with specialized medical care and counseling from experts in the community that treat children with extra care and sensitivity to minimize further trauma. These wrap around services include ongoing follow up support to ensure the child is adjusting from their experience and address any ongoing needs. “We hope that all victims will feel safer to speak up and get help and protection from further harm.” Mitchell said.

Prosecutors rely on the good work of the Children’s Justice Center in partnership with local police detectives and Child Protective Services caseworkers to rally a response of safety, protection and caring that makes children feel a sense of courage to speak up so the legal system can take formal action on the offender and protect the community from repeated crimes.

“After experiencing the worst at the hands of adults, these children who come to the Children’s Justice Center get treated to the best—from dedicated and caring professionals,” Salt Lake County Mayor Ben McAdams said. “It’s an invaluable program that you never want a child to need, but couldn’t imagine doing without in your community. All of us in Salt Lake County are grateful for and proud of the service they provide.”

Since its inception 22 years ago, the model of the Children’s Justice Center has proven its effectiveness and since that time 18 more Children’s Justice Centers have been established in other Utah counties under the umbrella of their local county attorney’s office with great success. This transition matches the trend statewide and better aligns comprehensive victim services for enhancements with the ever evolving national best practice methods.

“We are fortunate to have this wonderful opportunity to work more closely with the District Attorney’s Office on a daily basis,” Mitchell said. “We are both serving the same client and our work is closely intertwined. Together we can raise the bar for new innovative methods that better serve the victim, the family and public safety.”

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