Honor Thy Children

Archdiocese of Louisville continuing education for the awareness and prevention of child abuse

Kyan's Law to train animal control officers to recognize child abuse passes House Local Government

On February 24, 2026, the Kentucky House Standing Committee on Local Government advanced House Bill 246, widely known as Kyan's Law. Sponsored by Susan Witten of Louisville, the bill aims to strengthen child protection efforts across the Commonwealth by equipping animal control officers with training to recognize and report signs of child abuse and neglect. Animal control officers are often called into homes and neighborhoods where they may observe conditions and family situations that others do not see. Because of this unique access, lawmakers recognize that these professionals can play an important role in identifying early warning signs of abuse.
Under the proposed legislation, animal control officers would receive training on identifying physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, as well as neglect. The training could be delivered either in person or online to ensure accessibility statewide. It would also include education on the well-documented connection between animal cruelty and other forms of violence, including child abuse, domestic violence, elder abuse, and sexual assault. Research consistently shows a strong link between violence against animals and violence against people, particularly children and other vulnerable individuals. By ensuring animal control officers understand these connections and know how to report concerns appropriately, the bill strengthens early intervention efforts. It promotes better coordination with child protective services and law enforcement.
The legislation is named after Kyan Higgins, a young Louisville boy who tragically lost his life in 2021. Public records later revealed that animal control officers had been called to the home multiple times before his death. His story has inspired advocates — including youth leaders across Kentucky — to work toward meaningful systemic change.
"Kyan's Law" reflects a shared commitment to prevention, collaboration, and vigilance. By expanding training and improving communication between agencies, the bill seeks to ensure that warning signs are recognized earlier and that coordinated action can be taken to protect children before situations escalate.
As this legislation moves forward, it serves as a reminder that safeguarding children is a shared responsibility — and that equipping professionals with the right tools and training can help prevent future tragedies.

Archdiocese of Louisville

Feb/March 2026

If you need support or someone to talk to:

- ☺ Prevent Child Abuse Kentucky or Indiana:
  800.CHILDREN/
  800.422.4453
  www.pcaky.org
  www.pcain.org
- ☺ Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline
  800.4.A.CHILD
  800.422.4453
  www.childhelp.org

Are You Safe Environment Compliant?

Are you working regularly with children?

If so you must have attended an Archdiocese of Louisville Safe Environment Training.

Has it been 5 years since your initial in person training? You must complete your 5 year refresher training

You must also have a satisfactory background check not older than 5 years.

See your Safe Environment Coordinator today to verify your compliance!

Martine Siegel, a nurse who serves the archdiocese, honored for career in mental health

Article courtesy of "The Record" & Olivia Castlen

For Martine Siegel, faith and career cannot be separated.

"My faith is the core of who I am, and there is no removing that," she said in a recent interview. "I cannot separate myself from my faith, even in my positions."



Siegel has served as director of counseling services and as victim assistance coordinator for the Archdiocese of Louisville's Family and Life Ministries Office since 2013.

But the Louisville native has served the archdiocese for 26 years — first as a counselor at Holy Trinity School and then as pastoral associate of Holy Trinity Church, where she is a parishioner.

As director of counseling services, Siegel offers support to counselors serving in the archdiocese's Catholic schools.

She's always available to assist them in their needs, no matter the time of day or night, she said.

The counselors know, "If they need to call me in the middle of the night, they are going to get an answer," she said.

She also serves as a resource to pastors who may need assistance setting up counseling for parishioners with mental health challenges or marriage and family issues.

Within her role as victim assistance coordinator, Siegel teaches the archdiocese's Safe Environment Training program and processes background checks, among other duties. Every diocese in the United States has a victim assistance coordinator available to assist victims in making a formal complaint of abuse to the diocese and to aid survivors in receiving support.

But Siegel doesn't just have one career.

On evenings and weekends, Siegel also serves as the triage coordinator for psychiatric services in Norton Hospital's emergency room, evaluating psychiatric emergencies. She's spent more than 45 years in the psychiatry field — a career she began building as a nursing student at Spalding University following her graduation from the old Holy Rosary Academy.

At the heart of her dual careers in nursing and counseling is a love for people, she said.

"I love my patients. I love helping them and trying to help them navigate life," she said. And she loves working with the Archdiocese of Louisville's school counselors, who she called "top-notch."

That doesn't mean her jobs don't have their challenges, she said, noting, "All of my jobs are difficult because you are seeing people hurting."

The mental health field has "changed tremendously" during the course of her career, she said.

"Psychiatry has changed tremendously in the past 40 years — new medications, new treatments, new knowledge about psychiatric care."

Additionally, societal changes have increased the anxiety in children and adolescents, especially, she noted.

"We're dealing with a lot more stress in society," she said. "There are a lot of changes" that "created a lot of anxiety," such as the COVID 19 pandemic, changes in family dynamics and a rise of drug and alcohol abuse, she said.

"Kids take all that on," she said. "We're seeing so many anxiety disorders in children that we've never seen before."

She loves her jobs, though, because she sees all of them as ministries that are "extremely fulfilling," she said. "I have felt called to do both."

Last month, Siegel was honored with the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Lifetime Achievement Award at the alliance's annual Spirit of Peace Awards Dinner.

The award "recognizes an individual who, over the course of their whole career or lifetime, has advanced the NAMI mission to build better lives for people living with mental illness and their families," according to nami.org.

Siegel served on NAMI's board of directors from 2019 to 2024 and continues to support the alliance's programs in Louisville.

"They just do so much," she said, from raising awareness of mental illness to offering support groups for children and adults to providing suicide prevention training. NAMI has more than 650 local affiliates and 49 state organizations, making the organization the "largest grassroots mental health organization" in the nation, according to nami.org.

The award is "a reflection of the value that Martine has brought" during her long career in the mental health field, said Nancy Brooks, executive director for NAMI Louisville, in an email.



"Martine Siegel's work directly intersects with the work of NAMI Louisville, making her both an excellent resource and advocate," she said, adding that Siegel has "one of the biggest hearts for those we serve that I have ever seen."

Child Abuse Prevention Month in Kentucky

A new federal report shows Kentucky continues to face one of the most serious child abuse and neglect challenges in the country. The state's victimization rate stands at 14.1 per 1,000 children—nearly double the national average of 7.2. That means about 14 out of every 1,000 Kentucky children experienced abuse or neglect in 2024.

Neighboring Indiana also exceeds the national rate at 13.4 per 1,000, highlighting a broader regional concern.

Infants are the most vulnerable. Nationally and locally, children under age 1 account for the highest rates of abuse and neglect. Indiana, in fact, leads the nation for infant victimization, with about 52 victims per 1,000 infants.

One of the most troubling issues in Kentucky involves infants born with prenatal substance exposure. Federal law requires that these newborns leave the hospital with a "plan of safe care," but the report shows only 23.7% of Kentucky's screened-in cases had such a plan—ranking among the lowest in the nation. Child health experts say this gap has been linked to some of the state's most severe abuse cases, including fatalities and near fatalities.

Substance use also plays a significant role more broadly. Nearly 40% of Kentucky cases involve caregivers with substance use disorders, compared with about 25% nationally.

Despite these concerns, there are some encouraging signs. The total number of child victims in Kentucky has dropped by 13% since 2020—a meaningful improvement, even as the overall rate remains high.

The state is also making progress in identifying psychological maltreatment, a form of abuse that can be difficult to prove but has serious long-term effects. Increased awareness and better documentation are helping bring more of these cases to light.

Even with that progress, experts stress that Kentucky remains in crisis—and that prevention must be the priority.

Child abuse prevention starts with supporting families before problems escalate. When parents and caregivers are overwhelmed, children are at greater risk. Community members can play an important role through small, practical actions: offering to watch a child for a few hours, helping with errands, or simply checking in on a stressed parent. These moments of support can reduce pressure and create safer environments for children.

Parents and caregivers are also encouraged to take care of themselves. Stepping away during stressful moments, reaching out to trusted friends or family, and understanding typical child development—like why infants cry—can make a meaningful difference.

If you suspect child abuse or neglect in Kentucky, you are required by law to report it. Call (877) KY-SAFE1. You can also contact the Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline at (800) 4-A-CHILD for confidential support and guidance.

This Child Abuse Prevention Month, the message is clear: protecting children starts with stronger families, supportive communities, and a commitment to act before harm occurs.



Upcoming Trainings

Check www.archlou.org/safe for the most up-to-date schedule.

All trainings begin at 630 p.m. unless otherwise noted

4.16.26
Immaculate Conception LaGrange (Gym)

4.20.26
St. Margaret Mary (Church)

5.12.26
St. Margaret Mary (Church)

5.18.26
Flaget Center (Gym)

5.19.26
St. Patrick (Schindler Hall)

5.27.26
St. Joseph (Bardstown) (School Cafeteria)

6.3.26
Sacred Heart Ursuline Arts Center (6:00 PM)

6.8.26
St. Margaret Mary (Church)

6.15.26
St. Gabriel (Church)

6.24.26
Flaget (Gym)

6.29.26
St. James (E-Town) Batcheldor Hall

7.2.26
St. Aloysius-Pewee Valley (Gym)

7.27.26
Flaget (Gym)

Archdiocese of Louisville
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No child or adult should ever experience abuse by anyone, especially a church minister. We all have the right to be treated with dignity and to expect our church to reflect the goodness of God in all of its dealings.

We hope that this information is helpful to all in our communities who are working to prevent and respond to childhood sexual abuse. Please let us know if you need further assistance or information by calling or emailing our victim assistance coordinator, Ms. Martine Siegel, at 502/636-1044; victimassistance@archlou.org

We must heed God's call to care for the most vulnerable among us and to continue our efforts toward wholeness and health in dealing with sexual abuse.

