



Polk State College

Vulnerable Persons Act

Protecting Children is Everyone's Job.

House Bill 1355 by Representative Chris Dorworth and its companion bill, Senate Bill 1816 by Senator Lizbeth Benacquisto, were filed during the state legislative session following the child sexual abuse scandal that rocked Pennsylvania State University. At that university, officials and administrators were made aware of serious and ongoing sexual abuse of children perpetrated by one of the assistant coaches that spanned numerous years. Administrators failed to report the suspected child abuse to the authorities, thus allowing it to continue against many victims. As a result, Florida leaders were determined that should such terrible acts occur in one of Florida's institutions of higher education, public or private, there would be mandatory reporting of the abuse or suspected abuse. There would also be significant penalties for the institution if a failure to report was proven. Florida Statute 39.205 now mandates a **\$1,000,000 fine for each failure to report**, applying to both institutional administrators and the institution's law enforcement agency, if applicable. Furthermore, the individual who fails to report such crime **commits a felony of the third degree**. Governor Rick Scott signed this bill into law following passage by the Florida Legislature.

What Does This Law Mean to You?

Ultimately, this law was designed to give us the tools necessary to help protect children from abuse and/or neglect. As citizens of the communities we serve, we need to be looking out for children and reporting any suspected abuse or neglect. At Polk State College we have daily contact with children who are charter school students or dual enrolled as students in college courses, who are participating in college activities, and who are otherwise present on our campuses or at college activities. This law requires that we all have a heightened awareness for the welfare of these children.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: I have heard that there is a new Florida law which would permit a \$1 million fine to be imposed on a Florida college if it fails to report child abuse. Is there such a law?

A: Yes. Effective October 1, 2012, Florida law includes a provision that requires everyone, including college administrators, to report known or suspected child abuse, abandonment, or neglect committed on College property or at College events or functions to Florida Department of Children and Family Services (DCF).

Q: What is child abuse, abandonment, or neglect?

A: "Abuse" means any willful act or threatened act that results in any physical, mental, or sexual injury or harm that causes or is likely to cause the child's physical, mental, or emotional health to be significantly impaired. This includes both affirmative acts and omissions to act.

"Abandoned" or "abandonment" means a situation in which the parent or legal custodian of a child or, in the absence of a parent or legal custodian, the caregiver, while being able, makes no provision for the child's support and has failed to establish or maintain a substantial and positive relationship with the child.

"Neglect" occurs when a child is deprived of, or is allowed to be deprived of necessary food, clothing, shelter, or medical treatment, or a child is permitted to live in an environment when such deprivation or environment causes the child's physical, mental, or emotional health to be significantly impaired or to be in danger of being significantly impaired.

Q: What is the legal definition of a "child"?

A: A child is a person under the age of 18 who has not been emancipated by court order.

Q: For Florida colleges, does the new law just impose a reporting requirement on college administrators?

A: Any person who knows or has reasonable cause to suspect that a child is being abused, abandoned or neglected by a parent, legal custodian, caregiver or other person responsible for the child's welfare as defined in

this chapter is required to report such suspicion or knowledge to DCF. Any person who fails to do so **commits a felony in the third degree**.

Q: To whom is this report to be made?

A: The required report is made to the Florida Department of Children and Families through:

- Florida Abuse Hotline: **1-800-962-2873**
- Fax: **1-800-914-0004**
- Online reporting: <https://reportabuse.dcf.state.fl.us>

Once your report is filed, you will receive a confirmation number that must be sent to the Director of Human Resources.

Q: What if I am unsure if I have seen evidence of child abuse or neglect?

A: If you suspect that you are witnessing evidence of child abuse or neglect, you should immediately contact your campus Provost or the respective Vice President. All persons with knowledge of the abuse must make the report to the DCF via phone or web, which are the preferred methods of reporting. Polk State College has zero-tolerance for the failure of any College employee to timely report to the appropriate authorities child abuse, abandonment or neglect committed on College property or at College events or functions.

We all need to be committed to protecting vulnerable persons within our community and at activities and functions at Polk State College.

Important Phone Numbers

Florida Abuse Hotline	800.962.2873
Main College Phone Number	863.297.1000
Campuses:	
Winter Haven Campus Provost	863.292.3627
Lakeland Campus Provost	863.297.1094
Clear Springs Advanced Technology	863.669.2326
Lake Wales (JDA) Center	863.298.6830
VP, Academic Services	863.292.3605
VP, Student Services	863.298.6828
Director, Human Resources	863.297.1076
Director, Equity and Diversity/Title IX Coordinator	863.292.3602

Campus Security Emergency Number

Campus Security Contact for All Campuses	24/7 Number: 863.297.1059
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Polk State College is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) Commission on Colleges to award baccalaureate and associate degrees, as well as specialized certificate programs. Contact the Commission on Colleges at 1866 Southern Lane, Decatur, Georgia 30033-4097 or call 404.679.4500 for questions about the accreditation of Polk State College.

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