

Police change 'molester alert' policy

By Mario Chestnut
staff writer

Clarenceville school district parents concerned about their children's safety, were unable to convince the Livonia Police Department to issue a general media alert when a known child molester attempts to abduct a child in Livonia.

Although he would not agree to a regional alert, Livonia police deputy chief Lee Grieve did agree to change notification procedures.

The exchange took place last Thursday evening in Botsford Elementary's gymnasium — filled with parents who complained to police about the department's information policy.

Grieve said police will now alert either Livonia Public Schools or the Clarenceville School District, depending on where the incident occurs. The Clarenceville district covers an area in the southern corner of the city of Farmington Hills.

In that notification has been only to the school closest to where the abduction or molesting attempt takes place.

Such an alert recently went out to parents in the Botsford Elementary School area. Police stopped a motorist reportedly calling to students near the school and determined he was a convicted child molester on probation.

Area parents learned of the incident the same day via a letter from school principal Jesse Baker.

But, believing police should have issued a regional-wide alert to parents through the press and TV, parents in the Botsford attendance area formed the Livonia Coalition of Concerned Parents.

The group said the alert should be regional because suspects can travel from Livonia to Downriver or East Detroit in a matter of minutes. They said parents in all areas should hear the alert, not just parents in the school area involved.

"We need information and we're not getting it freely from the police department," said Jean Thompson.

THE GROUP also has asked Mayor Robert Bennett to order Livonia police to issue an informational alert to the media in two instances. They are:

- If an attempted or actual abduction of a child takes place by a known child molester.
- If repeated attempts are made by the same person, whether or not the person has a prior record.

"Our police department, as effective as they are, cannot be in all places at once," the group wrote Bennett. "The alerting of our citizens to watch and be careful is what

will thwart further attempts."

Bennett said he will review the department's current information policy before determining whether change is needed.

He said the department's new policy of notifying the school district should improve the entire informational network.

"Apparently the schools' own network is not working."

CLARENCEVILLE SUPERINTENDENT Jerry Montecillo said superintendents of four districts — Livonia, Farmington Hills, Clarence-

ville and Redford Union — should meet soon to decide how to disseminate information given to them by Livonia police.

He said he will arrange a meeting within the next two weeks.

The school boards in each district will have to approve the policy put forth by the superintendent.

Livonia Superintendent Dr. Joseph Marinelli said the districts will have to walk a fine line between getting the information out and becoming unduly alarmist.

"We don't want to become alarmist and create an uproar in the com-

munity over an isolated incident," Marinelli said. "We need balance."

Thompson said the group now will pursue its goal on two fronts. The parents will continue to lobby Bennett to get a regional-wide alert. Individual school boards to adopt a policy that will include a regional alert.

A recent rash of "suspicious man" incidents in the Redford Union School District led Superintendent Dr. Kenneth Erickson to ask Redford

police for information on every incident that takes place in his district.

"Information was not always given to us," Erickson said. "In the past it was sporadic. Now we will be informed."

Erickson said the seriousness of the incident determines who is notified. Some alerts might not go beyond school crossing guards, bus drivers and school principals. Other alerts might wind up in the hands of all the district's parents.

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