

Victims' reps mixed on PSU plan to settle reaction

Advocates for crime victims are torn over Penn State University's plan to negotiate settlements with Jerry Sandusky's victims before year's end.

Sandusky, a retired football defensive coordinator, awaits sentencing for sexually abusing 10 boys on and around the Penn State campus during more than 15 years.

Mai Fernandez, executive director of the National Center for Victims of Crime, supports bringing closure to victims quickly. But she said Penn State's plan could preclude investigations that would help the university ensure the safety of children.

"The victims deserve a full accounting and public releases of facts, relating to the university actions with regard to the crimes," Fernandez said.

That's not part of the plan.

"The university remains committed to resolving the victims' claims in a fair manner that respects their privacy," said university spokesman David LaTorre. "For that reason, the settlement process is designed to be confidential."

LaTorre said the university hired attorney Kenneth Feinberg, a nationally recognized expert who oversaw the 9/11 Compensation Fund and negotiated settlements for the Virginia Tech University shooting victims.

Philadelphia lawyer Tom Kline, who represents "Victim 5," a young man who testified against Sandusky, lauded Penn State's hiring of Feinberg.

"He has a proven track record of negotiating complex and difficult settlements. Of course, it's important to recognize that Penn State has chosen him. He is not an agreed-upon mediator," Kline said.

Cardozo School of Law Professor Marci Hamilton said Penn State should disclose findings from settlement negotiations. Hamilton represents a man who says Sandusky abused him but did not take part in the criminal case.

"Victims need the truth, not just compensation. Penn State needs to understand that," Hamilton said. "(Disclosure) is the only way to ensure this large institution is held to account."

Anne Neal, president of the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, a national group focused on university oversight, on Friday offered 14 recommendations to improve oversight at Penn State in a letter to legislative leaders.

What happened, Neal wrote, “is indicative of a culture far too common at the highest levels of colleges and universities, where reputation is often more important than academic quality, transparency and accountability.”