

Child Abuse Awareness

April 24, 2015

As Pennsylvania wraps up Child Abuse Awareness Month, the Department of Human Services (DHS) highlights child abuse prevention efforts in the Commonwealth. DHS believes that protecting Pennsylvania's children from abuse and neglect is a vitally important responsibility.

FY 2015-2016 Proposed Budget Initiatives

- \$387.6M for expenditures associated with prevention/reunification services; an increase of \$32M from FY 2014-15
- Of the \$32M increase, \$4.6M associated with Child Protective Service Law changes

"In 2013, there were 26,944 reports of suspected child and student abuse received. That's 26,944 too many," said DHS Acting Secretary Ted Dallas. "It's everyone's job to help make Pennsylvania a better place for children and families. By ensuring that parents have the knowledge, skills, and resources to care for their children, we can keep kids safe and help them grow into successful adults."

In 2014, DHS partnered with the General Assembly to enact 23 pieces of legislation and hired additional staff to improve Pennsylvania's response to child abuse and neglect cases. These pieces of legislation will ultimately strengthen the state's ability to protect children by amending the definitions of child abuse and perpetrator, streamlining and clarifying reporting processes, increasing penalties for failure to report abuse, protecting those reporting abuse, and better tracking child abuse data. Additionally, DHS continues to work with the General Assembly and key stakeholders to formalize and streamline processes aimed at making the laws work for children and communities throughout the Commonwealth.

Efforts at ChildLine



One law that went into effect December 31, 2014, expanded the number of individuals who must obtain child abuse clearances. Due to the high number of individuals seeking these clearances, ChildLine experienced a backlog in processing requests. DHS developed and implemented a four-pronged approach to improve the clearance process and eliminate the backlog:

- Increase permanent and temporary staff to process the high volume of clearance requests;
- Improve technological programs to ensure efficient processing;
- Monitor the management and productivity of staff to ensure effective distribution of work; and
- Encourage the public to utilize the online application for faster processing.

The department reduced the average number of days it takes to process a clearance application to 6 days, which is a significant reduction from the highest reported average of 26 days. The law requires an average of 14 days. DHS continues to work to improve the processing of clearances and ensure best practices for child abuse prevention and reporting. To learn more about the updated Child Protective Services Laws visit www.KeepKidsSafe.pa.gov.

For more information about the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, please visit www.dhs.state.pa.us.