



November 16, 2022

The Honorable Tom Wolf  
225 Main Capitol  
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Governor Wolf

On behalf of the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania and our Human Services Committee, I write to raise our concerns about the ongoing and increasing problems stemming from a lack of appropriate placement options for the children, in particular, children in the custody of county child welfare agencies. While there has been a lack of options for children in the care of counties for many years, the shortage has reached a critical point. There is a desperate need for the Commonwealth to assist in solving this problem, as it is simply too large for the counties to be able to resolve on their own.

In recent years, there have been an increasing number of children in need of mental or behavioral health placements for whom no provider is willing or able to accept. This has created numerous situations where there have been no appropriate placements capable of meeting the needs of the children. In the absence of appropriate placements, the county agencies having custody of these children are forced to find any possible placement, regardless of whether it can meet the needs of the children or not. There have been numerous examples of children sleeping in county child welfare offices and hotels.

We cannot overstate the concern we have regarding children who have been determined to need high levels of mental and behavioral health treatment but are simply being housed due to the absence of such services. Presently, the service array available to provide treatment is limited to private providers who have the option of rejecting a referral. Pennsylvania completely lacks a "No eject, no reject" program where children in need of treatment could go when all the private providers refuse to accept them. Children then get displaced into the child welfare system, which is not the appropriate avenue, and subsequently creates a new form of "foster care drift", as they may then be placed in restrictive settings that are not appropriate or meeting their needs.

In the field of delinquency, the state has recognized the need for such a program and created the Youth Development Camps, thereby ensuring that children in need of placement for whom all providers have refused to accept into their programs are not simply left to be housed without treatment wherever possible. We believe that dependent youth deserve the same level of care.

We have tried to work with the various offices within DHS to arrive at some functional resolution to this issue for many years. There were modest changes to the Complex Case Bulletin, although these changes still left the entirety of the responsibility for ensuring the day-to-day care of these youth on the county. This problem has only grown worse. Children's needs have become increasingly challenging and the lack of any increase on the mental health base funding for the state means that such have become more scarce and less robust.

The situation has reached a crisis point. With children being housed in county child welfare agency offices and hotels, supervised by child welfare caseworkers it is only a matter of time until something terrible occurs. The caseworkers providing supervision are not trained mental health counselors and residential staff. They are not being supervised by clinicians trained to provide mental health services to children in need of treatment. The facilities are not adequate to ensure the children's needs are met. In short, these makeshift housing arrangements are not appropriate settings for these youth. There is simply no appropriate option available.

We are requesting that the Administration and the Department of Human Services take immediate action to resolve these situations. We believe there is a need to address this issue in a productive manner and that while we continue to talk, solutions never seem to materialize. The counties stand ready and willing to work with the state to find a solution however it is clear that this is a bigger problem that the counties can solve alone. There is a need for the department to take some action to resolve this situation.

CCAP stands ready to engage at the earliest possible opportunity. Please reach out to myself or directly to Brinda Penyak, Deputy Executive Director at 717-497-2633 or via email [bpenyak@pacounties.org](mailto:bpenyak@pacounties.org)

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "George P. Hartwick" with a stylized flourish at the end. The signature is written over a horizontal line.

George Hartwick  
Dauphin County Commissioner and Chair of the CCAP Human Services Committee