

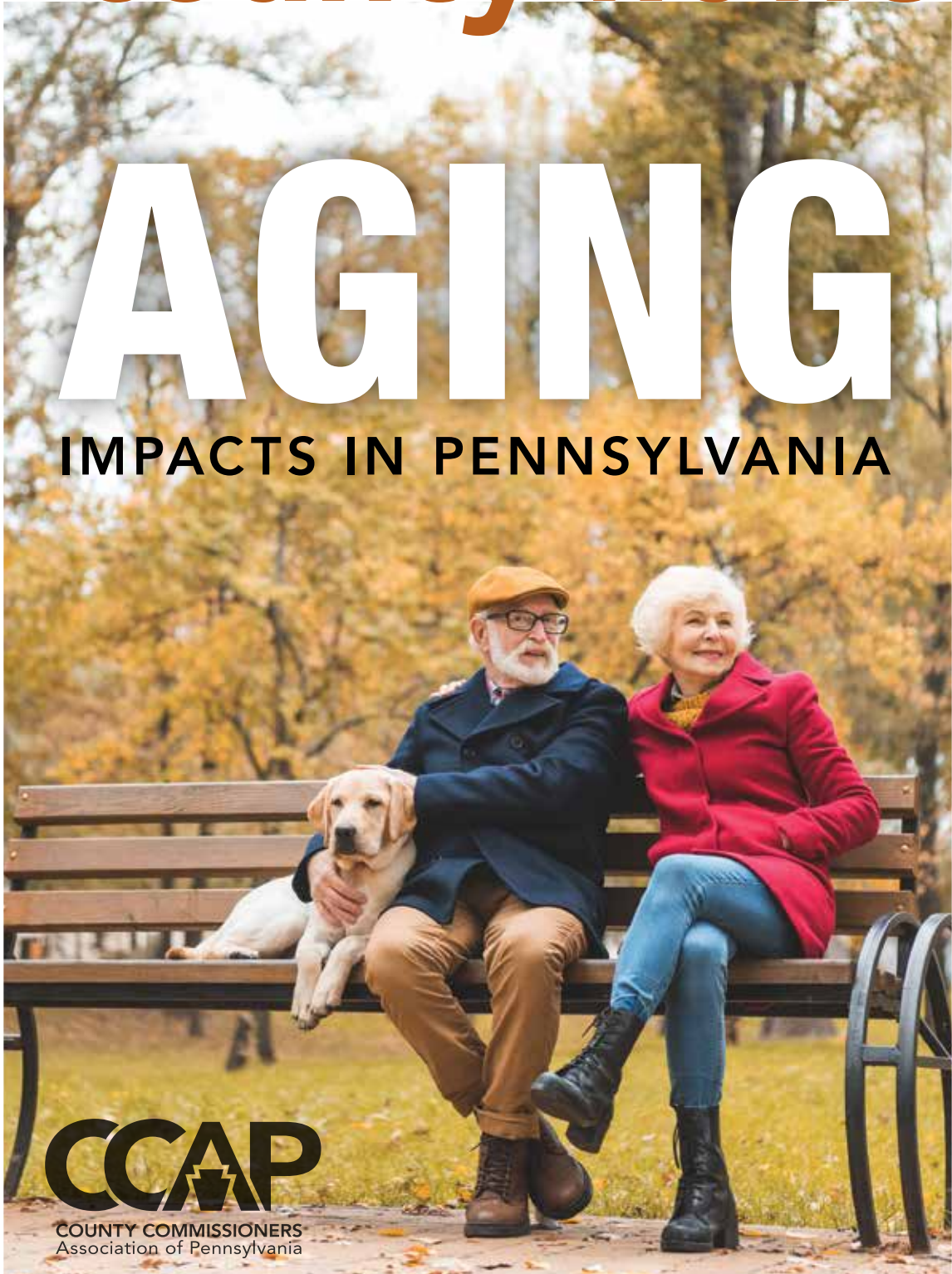
# PENNSYLVANIA county news

WINTER 2019

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# AGING

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The County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania (CCAP) is the voice of county government; a statewide nonprofit, nonpartisan association representing all 67 counties in Pennsylvania. CCAP members include county commissioners, council members, county executives, administrators, chief clerks and solicitors. CCAP strengthens the counties' abilities to govern their own affairs and improve the well-being and quality of life for every Pennsylvania resident. It advocates for favorable state and federal legislation, programs and policies on behalf of counties. CCAP is committed to service excellence through education, information, insurance, technology and other programs that support effective county government. Founded in 1886, CCAP is an affiliate of the National Association of Counties.

To acquire an article idea submittal form for CCAP's *Pennsylvania County News* please email Ken Kroski at [kkroski@pacounties.org](mailto:kkroski@pacounties.org).

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winter  
**2019**

# **PENNSYLVANIA** **county news**

**AGING** The inevitable march of time takes its toll on individuals in our communities. This issue focuses on some of the unique challenges faced by Pennsylvania's older residents and a few of the solutions in place to help them.

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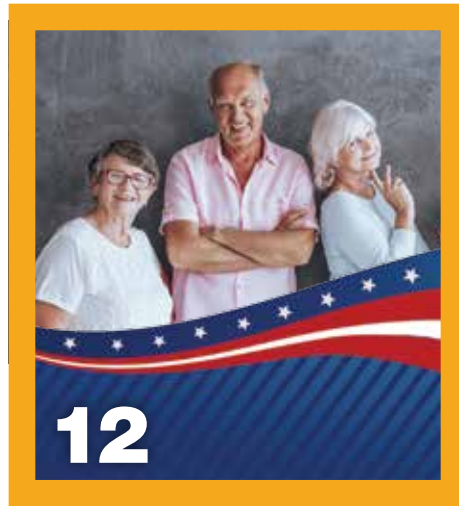
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# president's commentary



## KATHI COZZONE

President, County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania  
Chester County Commissioner

**A**s I begin my official role as CCAP president, I want to thank all of you for the trust you've placed in me and our 2019 leadership team—Jeff Synder, first vice president and Clinton County commissioner; Kevin Boozel, second vice president and Butler County commissioner; and Leslie Osche, treasurer and Butler County commissioner. I'd also like to thank Dennis Stuckey for his service as CCAP president in 2018. I look forward to working with him as he assumes the role of CCAP's board chair this year.

I'm excited to continue our work together to make sure counties have the resources we need to serve our constituents. As we say in the National Association of Counties—Counties Matter. From public safety and infrastructure to voting and human services, we touch each and every one of our citizens. We understand our communities best and provide services effectively and in a cost efficient way. We are the "boots on the ground" representing the needs of our communities with our state and federal governments. And as Carly Simon once said "Nobody does it better."

I believe in CCAP because I believe in the value we *all* bring to the table;

rural, urban or suburban counties; large or small counties; men or women; democrats or republicans. Our willingness and determination to work together regardless of ideology is unparalleled. We've proven time and again that we accomplish great things together. And that work is just as important today as it was in the past and will be in the future.

As a group, we recognize unique challenges that counties face and work to find effective solutions. CCAP's Behavioral Health Task Force, is just one of the many successes we have had. Commissioners, mental health professionals, members of the criminal justice community and many others work together to provide recommendations and resources to reduce the number of nonviolent mentally ill inmates in our jails. The Task Force is continuing that work this year with a focus on the availability of forensic beds. The availability of those "beds" and the services that come with it are critical to the mission of the task force.

The shortage of emergency medical service (EMS) volunteers and the ability to serve a community with reasonable response times is another critical challenge. We have seen these

problems in our rural counties for some time, and we are starting to see similar situations in more populated areas. What we also have in common is the continuation of changes to reimbursements for EMS care that is causing many providers to run in the red. The CCAP membership adopted a resolution in 2018 calling for a review of these challenges to inform the development of innovative ways that counties can help our municipalities meet their EMS needs. Dennis Stuckey and I have assembled a task force for 2019 to address those issues, comprised of members of counties of all sizes and in all regions in the commonwealth.

Of course we must continue our support for reforms in human services, elections, taxes, and criminal justice. We know that our constituents succeed when they have access to a full array of services—and from my perspective wrap around services are integral to that success. In some instances those services require a trauma informed solution.

When a person is unemployed, stress regarding financial situations ensues, which affects his or her health. Providing our citizens with access to financial stability, emotional well-

# We are the “boots on the ground” representing the needs of our communities with our state and federal governments.

being, and job skills has proven to be much more successful than simply teaching them to write a resume.

When a person has an addiction disease, quite often they have a co-occurring mental health disorder. Treating one without understanding the other is futile.

When a person is released from jail, if they don't have someplace to live, access to employment and necessary healthcare, then they will, in all likelihood, recidivate.

Women in our jails face different issues to our male population. The WRAP program addresses many of these issues and has proven to help reduce the number of women in our jail as well as lower the recidivism rate. Keeping women in their community and out of prison means families can stay together because women tend to be the primary care giver. Women are the backbone to many communities and putting them in jail disrupts so many lives including those outside of their immediate family. Providing trauma informed programming and support provides these women with the tools they need to succeed.

Childhood experiences, both positive and negative, have a tremendous

impact on lifelong health and opportunity. Studies show that adverse childhood experiences (trauma) can have a profound impact on neurodevelopment and social, emotional and cognitive development which can increase the uptake of health-risk behaviors, increase disease, disability and social problems, and shorten life expectancy. Our health systems understand that adverse experiences can predict health equal to that of one's genetic makeup. We must address the impact of these experiences by building the capacity for trauma informed care and building individual, family and community resiliency.

Counties can—and do—provide these services and they often make an immediate, direct impact on the community.

I look forward to the year ahead, and to seeing you all at our conferences. In the last 11 years I've learned so much from speaking with all of you, sharing successful county programs and services that help to address the challenges of our citizens, and, of course from coming together at CCAP seminars and conferences. I can't wait to see what I will learn this year! ▀

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**For more information about our vendor opportunities, please contact Mandi Glantz, director of member and vendor relations, at (717) 736-4739 or [mglantz@pacounties.org](mailto:mglantz@pacounties.org).**

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Contact: Kimberly Hall

The National Association of Counties (NACo) unites America's 3,069 county governments. Founded in 1935, NACo brings county officials together to advocate with a collective voice on national policy, exchange ideas and build new leadership skills, pursue transformational county solutions, enrich the public's understanding of county government and exercise exemplary leadership in public service. NACo's Programs and Services offer counties unique opportunities to help your residents, your employees and your county meet the needs of the future. CCAP has a long standing relationship with NACo and their sponsoring programs. As a CCAP member you have the opportunity to participate in the following endorsed programs: U.S. Communities Government Purchasing Alliance ([www.uscommunities.org](http://www.uscommunities.org)), NACo Live Healthy-Dental and Health Discount Program ([www.naco.org/health](http://www.naco.org/health)) and NACo 457 Deferred Compensation administered by Nationwide Retirement Solutions ([www.nationwide.com](http://www.nationwide.com)).

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Contact: John Hastings

Headquartered in Denver, Colorado, Dominion Voting Systems is one of the largest and most trusted providers of elections technology solutions. Founded in 2003, Dominion has over 250 employees consisting of a mix of election veterans who understand technology and engineering experts who understand elections. Dominion is committed to producing the highest quality election solutions and delivering the best support services to over 1,200 customers across North America. Various initiatives, such as continuous innovation driven by customer partnerships, on-going certification efforts, and commitment to customer satisfaction, are helping Dominion reach its goal of being the clear partner of choice for election officials.

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Contact: Fred Bean

The Pennsylvania Counties Health Insurance Purchasing Cooperative (PCHIPC) was launched in October 2005 with three counties. Today there are 21 counties that represent 8,847 county employees.

Membership is open to any Pennsylvania county as well as any county agency created under the Intergovernmental Cooperation Act. It is governed by a Board of Directors made up of a representative from each of the member counties. Each member has a vote in governing PCHIPC.

The program has been successful due to total transparency of claim data and surplus returns that have generated cost savings to member counties.

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# the Shared Housing and Resource Exchange (SHARE) Pilot Program

Pennsylvania Department of Aging

**I**n June of 2017, the Pennsylvania Department of Aging launched the Shared Housing and Resource Exchange (SHARE) pilot program in Pike, Wayne and Monroe Counties. In partnership with the Pike County Area Agency on Aging, and with the support of the counties' commissioners, the SHARE program was developed and piloted to provide an alternative, affordable housing option for older Pennsylvanians to remain in their homes and communities.

Improving access to affordable and accessible housing is an objective of the department's 2016-2020 State Plan on Aging. Funding for SHARE was secured through the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services' Money Follows the Person Program, which will support the pilot program through June of 2020.

## A UNIQUE ARRANGEMENT

The program brings together homeowners who have extra space in their home, and individuals in need of affordable housing. Homeowners offer a bedroom and provide access to common areas in exchange for rent, help around the house or a combination of both. The unique arrangement between a homeowner and home seeker is based on their preference and choice, and can include the exchange of a broad range of services. For example, the home seeker can prepare meals, provide transportation or shovel snow in exchange for reduced rent.

Matching participants and creating the home-sharing agreement is facilitated by a local SHARE housing counselor. The counselors meet with participants

separately to discuss needs and preferences, conduct reference and background checks, oversee trial living periods and provide ongoing support during the term of the agreement. Moreover, they also connect participants to other resources available in their community.

To date, SHARE housing counselors have received over 300 inquiries and more than 150 applications have been submitted by Pike, Wayne and Monroe County residents who would like to participate in the program as a homeowner or home seeker. The programs' first successful match occurred in Monroe County Friday, December 8, 2017—successfully keeping one senior in their home and providing housing to another senior facing foreclosure. There have been 14 matches and there are currently eight active matches.



## A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

Home sharing creates a sense of community and allows seniors to grow older at home during a time when life may become more isolating. The Wolf Administration is committed to thinking boldly about developing innovative solutions that respond to the diverse needs of our seniors. Moreover, we appreciate the leadership and willingness of these three rural Pennsylvania counties to collaborate with us in order to pilot a program that will ensure companionship, reduce isolation, save costs, and provide a feeling of security by having another person in the home.

If you would like to learn more about the SHARE program or discuss the possibility of offering it in your county,

please contact the Department of Aging's Division of Housing and Community Services at [ra-paagingservices@pa.gov](mailto:ra-paagingservices@pa.gov).

If you live in Monroe, Pike, or Wayne County, and are interested in participating in SHARE, please contact a SHARE counselor: Monroe and Pike County—Ryan Lohman, [rlohman@pikepa.org](mailto:rlohman@pikepa.org) or (570) 832-0538, or Wayne and Pike County—Larisa Yusko, [lyusko@pikepa.org](mailto:lyusko@pikepa.org) or (570) 832-5133. ▼

The program brings together homeowners who have extra space in their home, and individuals in need of affordable housing. Homeowners offer a bedroom and access to common areas in exchange for rent, help around the house, or a combination of both.



# Older Adults and **Voting**

## **Despite the wide array of challenges that elderly Americans face to get out and vote, they continue to maintain their status as one of the most reliable voting blocs in the country.**

Numerous innovations in the elections marketplace ranging from technological advancements to changes in the available options for eligible voters will ensure that this group of citizens will affect the outcomes of American elections for years to come.

For nearly 40 years, the turnout of voters over the age of 45 has significantly outpaced that of younger Americans. For example, in the 2016 presidential election, 71 percent of Americans over the age of 65 voted, compared with just 46 percent of 18 to 29 year olds.<sup>1</sup> Aging citizens vote more than their younger counterparts for many reasons. There are plenty of explanations and rationales as to why this is the case, including:

### **Protecting Social Security and Medicare**

Maintaining these benefits is a driving force for a retiree to cast their ballot. According to the AARP Public Policy Institute,<sup>2</sup> Social Security saved 22 million people—almost 40 percent of the nation’s senior citizens—from falling below the poverty line in 2013. The same holds true for Medicare. Without this benefit, the cost of health care would be unaffordable for many. It is important for older voters to protect these rights.

### **Senior voters tend to stay in their homes**

Older adults are far less likely than younger voters move from one home

to another, or from one area to another. Many have remained in their same homes for decades or more. They register to vote, know where to vote, and have made voting a part of their routine. It is far more difficult to register and find out where to vote if you are moving on an annual or semi-annual basis as many younger voters tend to do. Aged voters also have more free time than young or middle-aged voters. They are no longer working or juggling the demands of raising a family. A trip to the local polling place with their peers often turns into a social outing that is planned weeks in advance.

### **Sense of Civic Duty**

By and large, older voters tend to view voting as both a privilege and a duty. As a generational demographic, aging voters feel a strong sense of patriotism connected with the act of voting.<sup>3</sup> While citizens over the age of 65 tend to vote in the highest total percentages of any group, they face numerous obstacles in getting to the polls and casting their ballots. “One of the biggest issues for at least some elderly voters is mobility even if it’s possible for them to travel to the polls

on Election Day,” says Daniel Tokaji, an Ohio State University professor who specializes in elections, “especially if that means the prospect of waiting in line for some unknown period of time.”<sup>4</sup> People who no longer drive may face additional difficulties in getting to their polling places or may even have trouble walking or standing for extended periods of time.

## **SOLUTIONS FOR HELPING ELDERLY VOTERS**

There are many ways to ensure that the aging population is involved and able to participate wholly and completely in the democratic process. With mobility challenges, older voters are more likely to rely on absentee voting.<sup>5</sup> This trend is growing rapidly across the nation. Numerous states and jurisdictions are accelerating their efforts to make mail-in voting easier as the population ages.

States vary widely on absentee and mail-in voting rules. At least 22 states have provisions allowing specific elections to be conducted entirely by mail. As of January 2017, three of

those 22 states—Oregon, Washington, and Colorado—conduct elections entirely by mail. In California, some counties are currently permitted to conduct all-mail elections. After 2020, the option will be available to all counties in the state. Other states permit all-mail elections in certain circumstances, such as for special districts, municipal elections, when candidates are running unopposed, or at the discretion of the county clerk.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to vote by mail solutions, there is also a newer option gaining momentum throughout the nation called curbside voting. Curbside voting is intended for voters who are unable to enter their voting place without physical assistance due to age or a physical disability. They are therefore permitted to vote inside the vehicle or in a close proximity to the voting place. These solutions allow elderly voters complete access to their ballots if they cannot enter a polling place to cast their ballot for whatever reason. Remote Accessible Vote by Mail has allowed elderly and disabled voters greater access and equity when casting a ballot.

## ACCESSIBILITY

Other difficulties for senior voters include inaccessible polling sites. The Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act of 1984 generally requires polling places in the United States to be physically accessible to people with disabilities, including the elderly for federal elections. The law also requires states to make available registration and voting aids for elderly constituents, including information by telecommunications devices for the deaf (TDDs), teletypewriters (TTYs), and Audio Tactile Interfaces (ATIs). In addition, as of September 15, 2015,

polling officials can allow voters with physical disabilities or those over the age of 70 to move to the front of the line at a polling place at the specific request of the voter.

In addition to providing greater accessibility and means to elderly voters, actual polling places can be improved in various ways. A 2013 GAO report found that only 27 percent of polling sites nationally were fully accessible, from the parking lot to the voting booth.<sup>7</sup> That number is up from 16 percent in 2000, but still leaves room for improvement for polling sites across the country. Improving the accessibility to actual polling sites helps all voters across the nation, not just elderly voters.

While upgrades to polling places' accessibility and providing more options and channels for elderly people to vote has undoubtedly aided, there are also some very simple solutions on actual voting machines and tabulation units that provide a greater level of convenience and accommodations to aging voters.

## INNOVATIONS

Voting machines currently being utilized in some jurisdictions in areas of Pennsylvania allow a voter to adjust the visual properties of the ballot. Some of these options include adjusting the contrast and color options on a given ballot. In addition

to standard colors, a voter can elect to vote using a black on white ballot, or a white on black ballot while also adjusting to a higher or lower contrast. Whatever level of contrast and color the voter requires, their choices can be accommodated to meet their individual needs.

Voters can also adjust the size of the text to go from a standard font size, to an enlarged font for voters with visual impairments. In addition to adjusting the font, a voter can zoom in on a specific area of the ballot to better visualize any section or portion they are having difficulty reading.

If a voter uses a wheelchair, an ADA accessible voting booth with adjustable height is used to accommodate that voters needs. Truly, there is a solution to help all voters access and cast their ballot regardless of age or disability.

As the population ages and lives longer, it is imperative that all jurisdictions, on both the local and federal level, make a concerted effort to meet the needs of elderly and aging voters. Innovations in technology and in polling place accessibility, in addition to providing more opportunities and options for all citizens to cast their ballots, while maintaining the transparency and privacy of the vote ensure the strength of our democracy and political system. 🗳️

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau

<sup>2</sup> AARP Public Policy Institute

<sup>3</sup> Laurel, Shelly "Seniors and Voting: Trends and Issues that Matter to Them" Process of Aging

<sup>4</sup> Next Avenue, "Why Too Many Older Adults Face Voting Obstacles"

<sup>5</sup> Next Avenue, "Why Too Many Older Adults Face Voting Obstacles"

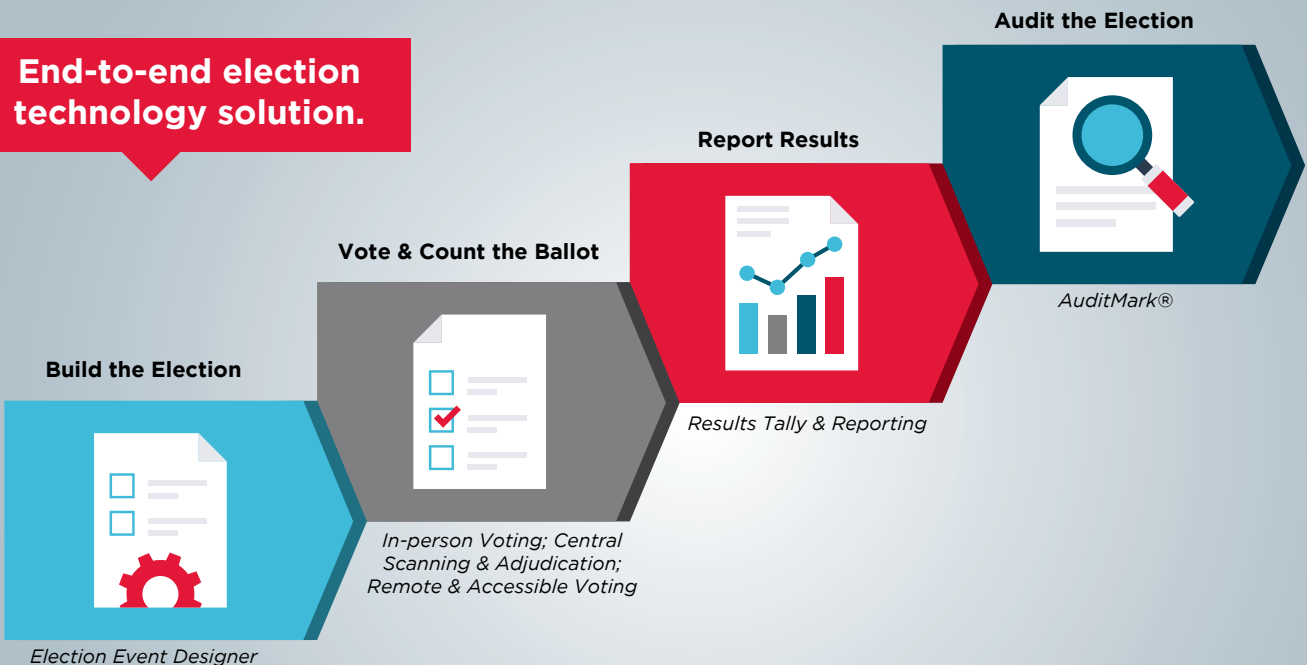
<sup>6</sup> National Conference of State Legislatures

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, "Voters with Disabilities: Challenges to Voting Accessibility"

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# PA Lottery Continues to Have **Positive** **Impact** on Older Pennsylvanians

**Jeffrey A. Johnson**  
Communications Director  
Pennsylvania Department of Revenue



Since ticket sales began in 1972, the Pennsylvania Lottery has raised more than **\$29 billion** to support a broad range of social services for older Pennsylvanians. It remains the only state Lottery that dedicates all of its proceeds to programs that benefit the commonwealth's older residents.

"We have long emphasized that the Pennsylvania Lottery benefits older Pennsylvanians—every day," said Lottery Executive Director Drew Svitko. "It's a critical element of our brand, and we are very proud that the programs we support have such a positive impact on the lives of older residents."

The programs the Lottery supports include:

- The PACE and PACENET programs, which offer low-cost prescription medications to qualified residents age 65 and older.

- The Property Tax and Rent Rebate Program, which provides rebates up to \$975 to eligible Pennsylvanians age 65 and older; widows and widowers 50 and older; and people with disabilities 18 and older.
- Care services for qualified older residents, including long-term living services provided at home, in the community or in a care facility.
- Free and reduced-fare transportation.
- The 52 Area Agencies on Aging that serve residents of all of Pennsylvania's 67 counties and coordinate services at the local level.

In the last fiscal year, the Lottery sold a record of more than \$4.2 billion in games, which generated more than \$1 billion to benefit older Pennsylvanians. This money is allocated through the state's budget process and shared among state and county-based agencies. An emphasis is placed on serving residents who are in the greatest need.

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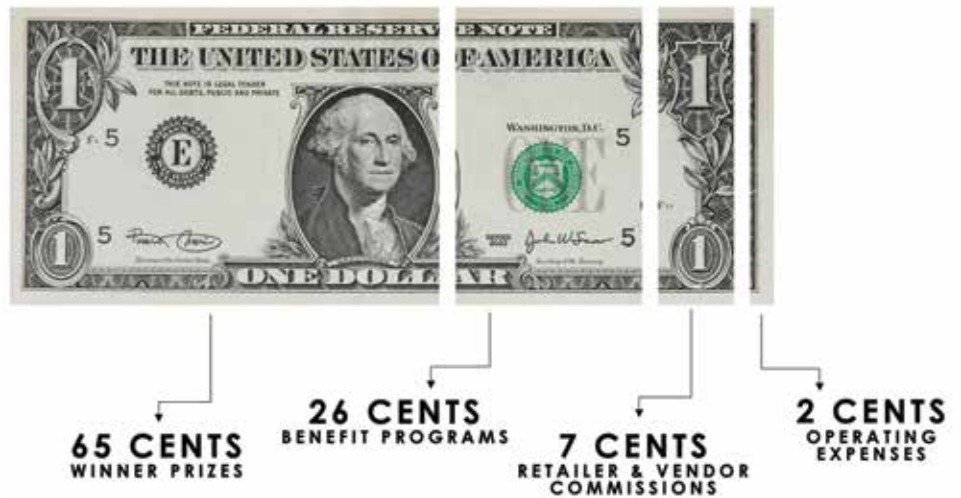
**17,200**  
prescriptions

"To many people, \$1 billion can seem like an abstract amount, so we work hard to illustrate how each dollar is invested to help real people, every day," Svitko said.

Specifically, during the 2017-18 fiscal year, each day the Lottery:

- Provided more than 29,300 meals served at senior centers or delivered to older adults' homes.
- Helped to fill nearly 17,200 prescriptions.
- Provided more than 101,000 free and reduced-fare shared rides through numerous transportation services.
- Returned \$714,290 in property tax and rent rebates to qualifying households.
- Provided nearly \$684,000 in long-term health care services to thousands of individuals.

A detailed breakdown of county-specific contributions and benefits is available through an interactive map on the Pennsylvania Lottery website.



The Pennsylvania Lottery is also working on several new initiatives to keep pace with increased demand for services and position itself to remain relevant and competitive in a rapidly changing business environment.

Earlier this year the Lottery introduced iLottery, which are games purchased and played online or through a mobile device, and monitor-based games, including virtual sports and Keno. Together, iLottery and monitor-based games are projected to generate \$30 million in the 2018-19 fiscal year. These new gaming initiatives are also estimated to generate up to \$221 million in new revenues through the 2022-23 fiscal year.

The ultimate goal is to continue providing funding for the vital benefit programs that Pennsylvania's older adults rely upon. That becomes even more important when one considers that one in four Pennsylvanians will be age 60 or older by 2020, according to the Pennsylvania Department of Aging.

"When Lottery players recognize that every game they play helps an older adult in their community or perhaps their own family, that's what we consider a 'win' for everyone," Svitko said. "Those of us who work at the Pennsylvania Lottery are honored to support the services and programs that benefit older Pennsylvanians." 🍷

**\$714,290**  
in property tax  
and rent rebates  
to qualifying  
households.

more than  
**101,000**  
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shared rides through  
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transportation  
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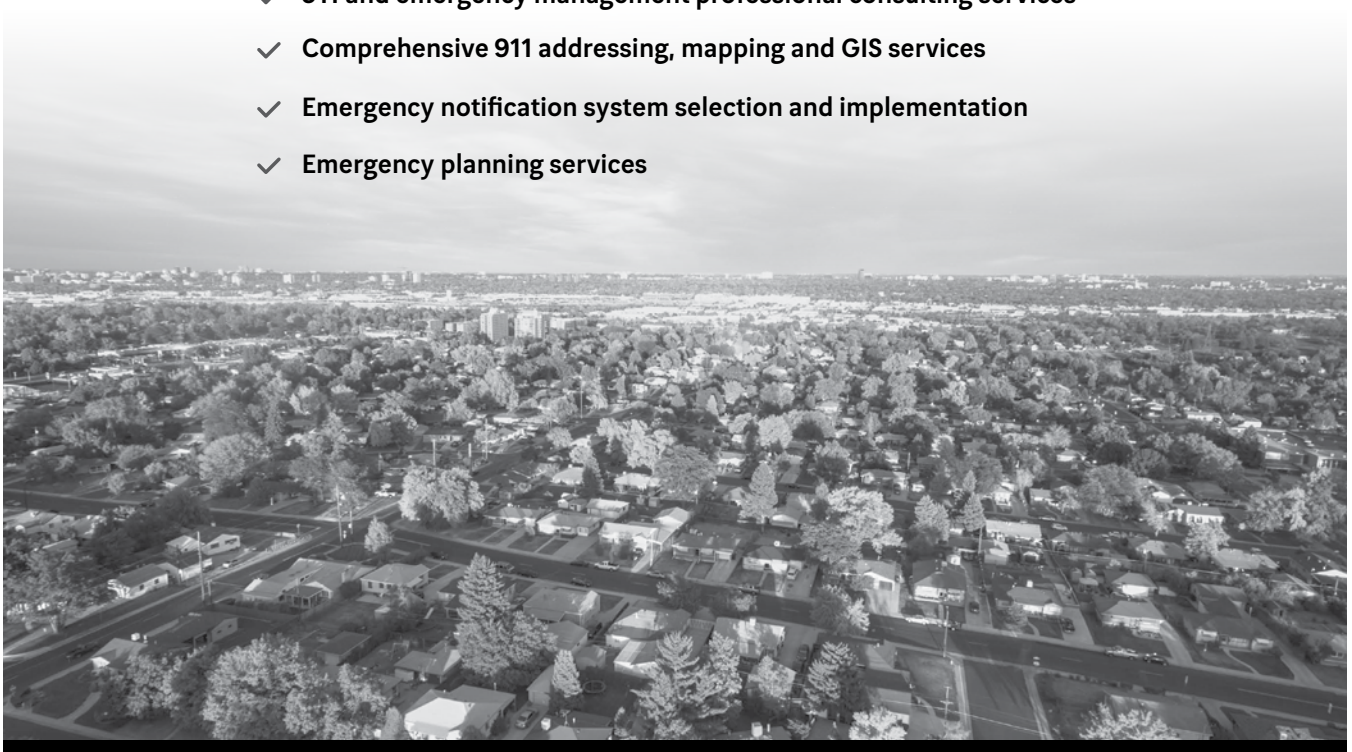
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PA 2-1-1 HELPS RESIDENTS OF 33 COUNTIES

# Connect to Home

**Kristen Rotz**  
President  
United Way of Pennsylvania





## THE VISION IMPLEMENTED

On January 24, 2018, the Eastern Pennsylvania Continuum of Care (CoC) implemented its vision for a coordinated entry system throughout its thirty-three county service area. More than 6,000 people have contacted Coordinated Entry since that date, over half of whom (3,333) were assessed for literal homelessness and placed on a prioritization list for housing interventions. As a result of using a single “front door” for people in crisis to access housing and services, the system now has better data to prioritize scarce resources and target services where they are needed the most.

The system has also identified that the majority of people experiencing homelessness have a self-reported mental health diagnosis. Unfortunately, the majority of the people waiting for housing supports cannot be enrolled into a supportive housing program because of the affordable housing crisis throughout the region.

Housing and homelessness system partners in these counties, which encompass much of the north central and south central, as well as northeastern part of Pennsylvania, joined together to develop a coordinated entry system in response to HUD funding requirements. The continuum adopted common assessment tools across the thirty-three counties. And then the governing board looked for a partner which would serve as the phone entry point for all individuals who are homeless or immediately at risk of being homeless.

An elderly woman experiencing homelessness had been living in her car for two years before the development of Coordinated Entry.

When Coordinated Entry started, a Cumberland County Housing Authority staff member reached out to the woman and encouraged her to call 211 to complete the intake process to be placed on a list for subsidized housing based on her vulnerability. Within a matter of days, a case manager used this list, called the Community Queue, to enroll the woman into a program called Rapid Re-Housing. **Sixty days later, the woman moved into her own apartment in Carlisle and is no longer homeless.**



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## ACCESS

The Eastern Region continuum wanted one phone access point where clients would receive assessments during normal business hours. But they also sought a partner who could provide 24 hour per day access to emergency and triage services for people experiencing homelessness in the 33 county region. PA 2-1-1 emerged as the partner of choice from a competitive RFP process, and the CoC is beginning its second year of a successful partnership with PA 2-1-1.

2-1-1 offers an easy to remember, toll-free call option for people experiencing a housing crisis, with a live voice response 24 hours per day, seven days a week. 2-1-1 also offers a free texting option for people in housing crisis, which is of benefit to people who may be out of minutes on their phone but can text with a 2-1-1 resource navigator using a free public Wi-Fi connection. In addition to dialing 2-1-1, clients have the option to walk-in to local access sites during business hours in order to be assessed for services.

## PA 2-1-1-STAFF

PA 2-1-1 has a team of housing specialists who are trained in Coordinated Entry assessments. They all use a common, statewide database and housing intake tools. The 2-1-1 housing specialists are located at three PA 2-1-1 centers and answer calls from all 33 counties in the Eastern Continuum. Staff at the 2-1-1 centers work with the regional queue managers and attend local housing meetings to stay abreast of housing needs and to work collectively to make the system as responsive as possible. When an individual calls 2-1-1 during Coordinated Entry

intake hours (9-4, weekdays), the call is answered by a housing specialist in one of the three regions. Using a cloud-based phone system, 2-1-1 is able to route the call to the first available housing specialist to reduce waiting time.

The Coordinated Entry work that 2-1-1 is doing dovetails with the work that 2-1-1 has always done, every day to answer calls and texts from individuals and families who need help with basic needs, whether that be finding shelter, or paying rent or a utility bill. The issues related to housing have long been a major focus of the work done by 2-1-1 staff: 75 percent of the calls to 2-1-1 are related to basic needs.

“Now we are able to promptly assess the immediate housing needs of the caller and to place them on the Community Queue so that the housing agencies can work with them to resolve their housing needs. It saves time for the person who needs immediate help when they are literally homeless and do not know where to turn. Any time we can make the process easier for people we increase the likelihood that they will stay engaged and get the help that they need,” says Anne Fogoros, PA 2-1-1 Statewide Operations Director.

## ASSESSMENT AND PRIORITIZATION

For HUD-funded services, the days of agency-specific assessments and individual agency waiting lists are gone. Now, whether the individual presents by phone or text to 2-1-1, or in person at one of 17 access sites located across the geographic territory of the Eastern Continuum, he or she will be assessed using the same tools. The client first receives a pre-screen to determine if they are eligible



**2-1-1** offers an easy to remember, toll-free call option for people experiencing a housing crisis, with a live voice response 24 hours per day, seven days a week.

**2-1-1** also offers a free texting option for people in housing crisis, which is of benefit to people who may be out of minutes on their phone but can text with a 2-1-1 resource navigator using a free public Wi-Fi connection.

# 211

Since every client is scored using the same tool, individuals can be placed on the community queue and prioritized for placement in service relative to the urgency of their circumstances.



for HUD-funded services, and if they are, they receive a second in-depth assessment called the VI-SPDAT. The VI-SPDAT measures vulnerability and determines types of services that will meet the needs of the client.

Since every client is scored using the same tool, individuals can be placed on the community queue and prioritized for placement in service relative to the urgency of their circumstances. Five dedicated regional coordinated entry managers staffed by agencies throughout the CoC are instrumental in connecting people to housing agencies which can serve them when they have available capacity. These regional coordinated entry managers also help to assure that coordinated entry policies are applied consistently, and they help to outreach and build relationships necessary for the Coordinated Entry System of Eastern PA.

## REFERRALS

In the 33 county continuum, as is the case across Pennsylvania, there are currently not enough housing services to meet the need that exists, but coordinated entry systems are an effort to connect people to the right solutions as quickly and effectively as possible. But as a result of coordinated entry and the 2-1-1 partnership, more data is available to drive decisions, planning, resource allocation and performance evaluation. The community knows all people experiencing homelessness by name. And 2-1-1 can refer people to homeless prevention services

or emergency shelter or other emergency services as they are available.

Every day, 2-1-1 collects real-time data that measures the needs of the community, including those which cannot be met through existing community resources. Through the first year of the Connect To Home project, the continuum's various partners rapidly identified that the region needs more diversion services for individuals experiencing a housing crisis. As a result, United Way of PA has stepped up to partner with the Continuum on a diversion project which will assist households and individuals seeking to avoid homelessness by maintaining their current housing situation or being diverted to an alternative option that is not an emergency shelter.

## THE RIGHT SPACE FOR 2-1-1

Jeffrey E. Rich, President of the Eastern PA Continuum of Care, says, "Partnering with the United Way of PA and PA 2-1-1 enables the Eastern PA Continuum of Care to provide an effective, efficient, and consistent link to services throughout a very large and diverse geographic region. PA 2-1-1 provides the triage necessary to connect those in housing crisis to the correct service providers in their area. In turn, this allows those agencies to focus on delivery of program services instead of intake and initial assessment; saving valuable program dollars and allowing service providers to help a greater number of clients."

PA 2-1-1 and United Way believe that the future of 2-1-1 includes partnering with state and county government to offer residents of our communities a better way to access help whenever they need it. United Way of PA is committed to increasing the quality and consistency of the 2-1-1 service on a statewide basis. Ninety-seven percent of PA residents can now pick up the phone to call 2-1-1 and find out what local resources are available in their area.

The vision for 2-1-1 has always been as the place to turn for help with any health or human services need regardless of the hour of the day. 2-1-1 is working to build omnichannel access in order to meet customers where they are. 2-1-1 is there for the single working mom who prefers to privately text for help with her

utilities from her cubicle at work (where a phone conversation would be overheard), and to receive her referrals by text to follow up at her own convenience. A Millennial or a Gen Xer who is accustomed to self-serve information on demand through powerful smart phones is our customer who wants to easily search a public resource database from his or her phone. A stressed out baby boomer may prefer to call and speak to someone when trying to find resources to support their aging parent in their home.

United Way is looking for more partners who want to leverage the 24/7/365 power of 2-1-1 across all communication channels while increasing the effectiveness of public investments in human services. 📌

**Connect To Home: Coordinated Entry System of Eastern PA (CES)** coordinates and manages access, assessment, prioritization and referral to housing and services for any person(s) experiencing or at imminent risk of homelessness in the following counties: Adams, Bedford, Blair, Bradford, Cambria, Carbon, Centre, Clinton, Columbia, Cumberland, Franklin, Fulton, Huntingdon, Juniata, Lebanon, Lehigh, Lycoming, Mifflin, Monroe, Montour, Northampton, Northumberland, Perry, Pike, Schuylkill, Somerset, Snyder, Sullivan, Susquehanna, Tioga, Union, Wayne and Wyoming.

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# For Human Services, It's Groundhog *Déjà Vu* All Over Again

County Demands Increase,  
Funding Fails to Follow Suit

**Lisa Schaefer**

Director of Government Relations  
County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania

## **Pennsylvania County Human Services Are:**

- Human Services Administration
- Children and Youth Services
- Mental Health/  
Intellectual Disabilities
- Drug and Alcohol Programs
- Nursing Homes and Long-term Care
- Juvenile Justice Services

To learn more, go to [www.pacounties.org](http://www.pacounties.org) and look for the PA County Human Services Are fact sheet on the Legislative Action Center.

**O**ver the last ten to fifteen years, it's been easy to see that demand has grown for any number of products and services, such as the latest electronic gadgets or online retail opportunities. What is probably less clear to many people, though, is that over the same time period, counties continue to struggle to meet a similarly growing demand for human services from their residents, in part due to increased caseloads and in part due to the state's diminishing commitment of funding support.

## **WHAT EXACTLY ARE "HUMAN SERVICES"?**

Human services protect our most vulnerable citizens, such as children suffering from abuse, those fighting substance abuse addictions, individuals with mental illness and developmental disabilities and seniors in need of long-term care. They provide housing support and transportation assistance, coordinate care, and work with schools, hospitals, law enforcement and other stakeholders to promote safe, healthy communities. In short, county human services programs assist our citizens, often regardless of income, recognizing that any family can be impacted by drug abuse, mental illness, developmental disabilities and child abuse and neglect.

Sometimes, the increased demand is simply a reflection of current community issues. The opioid crisis has increased the need for county Single County Authorities (SCAs) to develop and coordinate prevention, intervention and treatment programs. And untreated and unaddressed mental health needs are often the catalyst to entry into the criminal justice—and the reason individuals continue to cycle back through the system.

Other times, the demand for human services is a result of new legislative or regulatory mandates. For instance, nearly 30 new child welfare laws were enacted in 2015 that brought increased and timely attention to child abuse prevention and treatment. But as a result, county children and youth offices have seen a significant increase in referrals and workloads

## OVER AND OVER AND OVER AGAIN

Even though counties provide these and many other services on behalf of the state, an analysis by CCAP has shown that even as there is a critical need for additional funding for human services, counties face the ever-present reality of stagnant—or even declining—state funding. And this is not a new phenomenon, as these trends in funding support have been occurring for a decade or more. A ten percent aggregate cut to seven line items that impact core services in all 67 counties in FY 2012-2013 only compounded an already dire situation. That cut has yet to be restored, challenging counties to meet today’s needs with funding that was already inadequate six years ago.













For the full historical funding analysis developed by CCAP, including highlights of key county line items and a sampling of other mandates that contribute to the overall impact on county budget loads, visit CCAP’s Legislative Action Center at <https://www.pacounties.org/GR/Pages/LegislativeActionCenter.aspx>.

As in Yogi Berra’s famous quote, “It’s déjà vu all over again,” counties find themselves living the same scenario over and over again each February at the beginning of each state budget cycle: advocating to prevent state funding for human services from being cut, while hoping

to achieve the increases that are so critically needed just to catch up from years of underfunding. For this reason, human services funding is continually one of counties’ top priorities each year.

## A PICTURE IS WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS

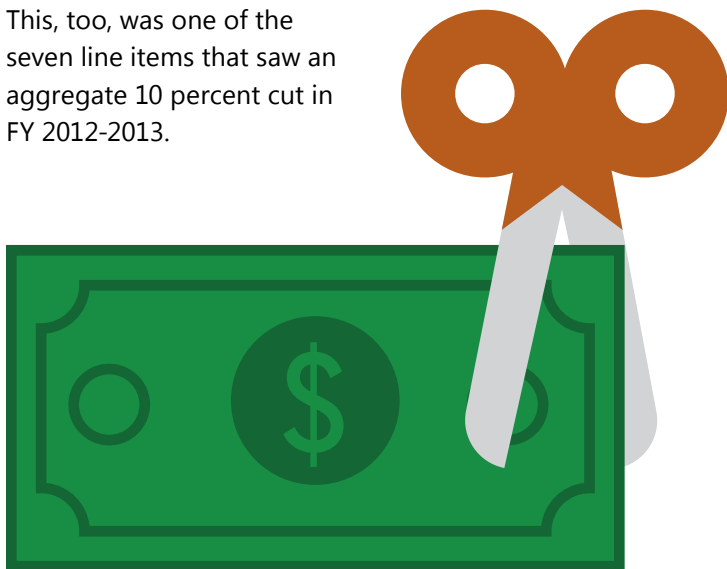
The old adage maintains that a picture is worth a thousand words, and when it comes to demonstrating the state funding decline for human services that is certainly true. For instance, take the Human Services Development Fund, one of the counties’ most flexible funding tools that they can use to reduce costs to human services programs through prevention and support measures for multiple populations. Unfortunately, while HSDF has the potential to save money at both the county and state level, funding has been dramatically cut over the past decade, and was one of the seven line items that saw a ten percent aggregate cut in FY 2012-2013.

Human Services Development Fund (Numbers in thousands)		
2007-2008		\$35,035
2008-2009		\$35,035
2009-2010		\$25,346
2010-2011		\$23,478
2011-2012		\$14,956
2012-2013		\$13,460
2013-2014		\$13,460
2014-2015		\$13,460
2015-2016		\$13,460
2016-2017		\$13,460
2017-2018		\$13,460
2018-2019		\$13,460

Or look at Act 152 funding, which funds residential drug and alcohol services for people eligible for Medical Assistance, but not yet enrolled in HealthChoices.

Act 152 Funding (Numbers in thousands)		
2007-2008		\$16,227
2008-2009		\$16,227
2009-2010		\$16,227
2010-2011		\$16,227
2011-2012		\$14,727
2012-2013		\$13,254
2013-2014		\$13,254
2014-2015		\$13,254
2015-2016		\$13,254
2016-2017		\$13,254
2017-2018		\$13,254

This, too, was one of the seven line items that saw an aggregate 10 percent cut in FY 2012-2013.



## WORTH MORE THAN A THOUSAND WORDS

Sometimes, though, the situation is not as straightforward as the examples above; sometimes a picture needs even more words to understand the nuances of how funding is appropriated within a particular line item.

Take mental health base funding. Counties are required to provide an array of community-based mental health services, such as community residential programs, family-based support, outpatient care, crisis intervention and mobile therapy. Looking just at the raw numbers, such as one might see in the state budget, one might think that funding levels for county mental health services have increased, at least in some recent years.

Mental Health Base (Numbers in thousands)		
2007-2008		\$723,659
2008-2009		\$732,665
2009-2010		\$728,730
2010-2011		\$694,865
2011-2012		\$717,213
2012-2013		\$662,311
2013-2014		\$690,469
2014-2015		\$732,141
2015-2016		\$768,057
2016-2017		\$789,027
2017-2018		\$761,807
2018-2019		\$776,853

This picture, though, does not tell the whole story by itself. In fact, beginning in FY 2013-2014, the increases in this line have been used for purposes such as offsetting federal funding reductions, annualizing state hospital CHIPPS beds and other non-county initiatives, and so have not resulted in increased adjustments for counties.



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### WHO IS PTG?

- Founded in 2006, PTG and its software technologists have maintained a 100% success rate in implementing PensionPro. Implementations have been on time, within budget, and within 8 - 14 months.
- PTG is the leading provider of web-based pension administration software systems serving the public employee retirement community.
- PTG PensionPro is currently being utilized by over 100 public employee pension funds to assist in serving the needs of their membership.



### WHAT IS THE PTG PENSION PRO?

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A similar type of story is told through the average fee for service Medicaid reimbursement rate for county nursing homes, where 80 to 90 percent of residents use Medicaid to pay for their care. A look at the numbers suggests a trend of increasing Medicaid rates over the past decade.

Average Fee for Service Medicaid Reimbursement Rate County Nursing Homes		
2007-2008		\$200.39
2008-2009		\$202.40
2009-2010		\$204.42
2010-2011		\$206.41
2011-2012		\$206.41
2012-2013		\$206.41
2013-2014		\$210.53
2014-2015		\$214.11
2015-2016		\$214.11
2016-2017		\$214.11
2017-2018		\$214.11
2018-2019		\$216.25

Behind these numbers, the reality is two-fold—first, these increases are only minimal, totaling about eight percent over the past 12 years even as costs have exceeded what Medicaid provides, and second, after four fiscal years of flat rates, the modest one percent increase in FY 2018-2019 applies only to those counties where Community HealthChoices has not yet been implemented. It remains unclear whether facilities in the southwest and southeast regions, where CHC has already been implemented, will see any increases from the managed care organizations in response to this.

## THERE'S BAD NEWS AND THERE'S GOOD NEWS

Unfortunately, this trend extends beyond human services to other services counties provide at the behest of the state. County court costs were cut by 34 percent in FY 2016-2017. Adult probation, which counties utilize to support community supervision options for non-violent offenders, has been flat funded for seven consecutive fiscal years following five years of cuts.

Other examples exist outside the state's general fund budget. The Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency suspended reimbursement after July 1, 2017, based on depletion of the funds available to provide the reimbursement for county sheriff and deputy sheriff training activities. As of September 2018, counties were owed almost \$1.5 million in reimbursements for sheriff and deputy sheriff training activities for FY 2017-2018, which will not resume until fund collections become sufficient. Because the surcharge that funds these obligations is set by statute, legislative action is needed to adjust the surcharge to the level needed to meet current and future training fund obligations.

But it is not all bad news. Counties have worked in partnership with the state in recent years to secure much-needed increases in funding in certain key areas, such as 911, through an increase in telephone subscriber fees that took effect July 1, 2015. That increase helped to address a significant and growing backfill of local property tax dollars needed to keep 911 systems operational.

The comedy of the movie Groundhog Day is in its experience of being stuck in the same day, over and over again, but the repetition of the state budget impact on counties is far from laughable.

## BREAKING THE CYCLE

The comedy of the movie Groundhog Day is in its experience of being stuck in the same day, over and over again, but the repetition of the state budget impact on counties is far from laughable. To break the cycle and find a different tomorrow, counties seek to re-engage the administration and General Assembly in understanding and respecting the state-county partnership in service delivery.

County government and the commonwealth must develop and maintain the close working relationship necessary meet these challenges and prioritize a commitment to additional and sustainable funding for all human services programs. Otherwise history will keep repeating itself—until the safety net becomes so frayed it can no longer support those who need it most. 🍷

## CCAP UPCOMING EVENTS

### Spring Conference

March 24-26, 2019 • Harrisburg Hilton

### Solicitors' Conference

May 3, 2019 • CCAP Office, Harrisburg

### County Administration Conference

May 29-30, 2019 • Penn Stater Hotel and Conference Center

### Annual Conference and Trade Show

August 4-7, 2019 • DoubleTree by Hilton, Reading

### PA Cybersecurity Summit

October 7, 2019 • Penn Stater Hotel and Conference Center

### Newly Elected Officials Workshop and Fall Conference

November 23-26, 2019 • The Hotel Hershey

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# FOCUS ON **Forest** *County*

## **Rowan Rose**

Director  
Forest County Community and Economic Development

Two men in orange hats and camouflage coats sit down at a table in the small café and are immediately greeted by a waitress with a carafe of piping hot coffee. “You having any luck?” she asks with a smile. “Not today,” they reply as they laugh and tell the tale of a freezing cold early morning spent in their tree stand. She drops off menus, and heads to another table. As they sip their coffee and discuss finding someone who can deliver a load of firewood to their camp, a couple at another table overhears and happily chimes in with the name and number of their “wood guy”. This is not an uncommon scene in any restaurant in Forest County. The hunters could be locals or first-time visitors; the warm welcome and helpful attitude would be the same. This is Forest County—a place that embodies the best qualities of rural Pennsylvania.

Forest County is a small rural county in Northwestern Pennsylvania comprised of 430 square miles. It was originally formed in April 1848 from land previously part of Jefferson and Elk Counties. Act 15 in April of 1851 placed the new county in the 18th Judicial District, with Marienville established as the county seat. Then in 1866, five additional townships were detached from Venango County and the county seat was transferred to Tionesta. The cornerstone for the current courthouse was laid on July 4, 1868. Upon completion in 1870, it became the first brick building in Forest County.

## **BRINGING THE FOREST BACK TO LIFE**

Early industry in the area included lumber mills, oil and coal extraction, tanneries and trapping. With the advent of railroad expansion and the wood chemical industry, unchecked exploitation of the area’s natural resources decimated many species, including much of the forest. That changed in 1923, when the federal government designated 739,277 acres of land to become the Allegheny National Forest. It marked the beginning of conservation efforts that slowly brought the forest back to life, and created the clean water and abundant ecosystem as we know it today.

A significant portion of Forest County lies within the boundaries of the Allegheny National Forest, Cook Forest State Park, and numerous Pennsylvania State Game Lands. This abundance of public lands is a key attraction for outdoor enthusiasts, and brings many visitors to the county annually. It is estimated that during peak tourism seasons the number of persons within Forest County doubles. However, with more than 50 percent of Forest County comprised of non-taxable land, the county budget is limited. “It’s a real balancing act,” says Robert J. Snyder, Jr., chairman of the Forest County commissioners. “We have to consider the need for growth and economic progress, while continuing to take steps to protect our valuable natural assets.”



Cornplanter  
State Forest  
(Photo by  
Rowan Rose)

Sportsmen have always been attracted to the natural beauty of Forest County. “There are generations of families who have been hunting and fishing here for decades,” says Commissioner Norman J. Wimer. “This is a very special place. Once they’ve been here, they want to come back.” Good working relationships with the U.S. Forest Service, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Pennsylvania Game Commission and the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission are essential. “We partner with some fantastic people,” says Wimer. “Their dedication helps keep Forest County the unique place it is.”

## AN AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCE

The county’s appeal doesn’t stop with hunters- outdoor enthusiasts come in all shapes and sizes. “We’re seeing an increase in younger people vacationing here,” says Rowan Rose, Forest County Community & Economic Development Director. “Cross-country cyclists, avid kayakers, hikers and mountain bikers are choosing Forest County because it offers a rare chance to have an authentic experience in a natural setting. This isn’t a manufactured experience—it’s as real as you can get.”

But tourism is only part of the bigger picture in Forest County. The sense of community here is strong. People who have lived here their whole lives and have raised

their families here are now aging here. In addition, seasonal residents and visitors are choosing to retire here. The demographics have been changing over the years; the median age in Forest County is currently 42.8.

As our residents age, communication, transportation, health and safety issues become more pronounced- especially with the dispersed nature of our population. With the exception of Tionesta Borough and the Village of Marienville, located in Jenks Township, the county has minimal areas with substantial population concentrations; most housing is scattered along rural roadways or on isolated private lanes. “This means consistently putting effort into making sure our residents have access to the services they need to stay healthy and safe,” says Commissioner Snyder. “We’ve been very successful in utilizing grant funds to make our older buildings accessible to people with handicaps and to install sidewalks and curb cuts to make our downtown areas easier to navigate.”

The county now offers Enhanced-911 service countywide, and is providing dispatch services through cooperative agreements with the adjacent Warren and Clarion Counties. Forest County is also working towards the development and installation of dry-hydrant systems in various areas that are not easily accessible for local fire departments.



*Pigeon Run Falls (Photo by Cody Magill)*

"We're also very invested in the expansion of broadband connectivity in the county. It's a crucial component that will not only benefit our residents and visitors, but will make this area more competitive when it comes to attracting industry," says Snyder. The availability of reliable internet connectivity could also make Forest County a more powerful draw for young professionals who want to live in a more affordable, rural setting but are able to cybercommute to a better paying job than the area can provide.

## **EXEMPLARY SUPPORT**

"It's important that we do all we can to serve everyone in the county," says Commissioner Basil D. Huffman, "but I have a special interest in helping our elderly and our veterans." Commissioner Huffman has spent many years working with local vets to help them navigate the system and get them the services they need. In addition to Veterans Affairs, Forest County runs a successful local transportation program. The program is designed

to meet the transportation needs of veterans, senior citizens, persons with disabilities and those on medical assistance at no or low cost. The program is also available to any resident for a fee. "I'm very proud of the work we do here," says Huffman. "We're one of the smallest counties in the commonwealth, but I think we provide exemplary support to our residents."

The dispersal of housing units also has a significant impact on the number of persons served by public water supplies and sewage disposal services. Installing and maintaining infrastructure to provide public services to remote locations is typically not financially feasible for the small municipalities within Forest County and glaciated soils and slope effects limit the efficiency of on-site sewer systems.

While the county has leveraged Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds to help defray the cost of upgrading existing public water systems and creating small sewage treatment systems, this will be an ongoing

problem as more municipalities implement their Act 537 Sewage Management Program. Bringing malfunctioning and out-of-date systems up to code is a positive thing for Forest County as a whole but the financial burden of repairing or replacing the systems may be a hardship for many of our residents.

## CAPITALIZING ON OPPORTUNITIES

Although Forest County is essentially rural, agriculture has not played the key role in its development that might be expected. However, the county's natural resources have always played a vital role in its economic history. Timber, oil, and gas have been, and continue to be, important. With the recent expanded interest in the Marcellus Shale, oil and gas development has regained some importance to the local economy.

In June of 2016, Royal Dutch Shell announced it was building a \$6 billion ethane cracker plant in Beaver County. This will create thousands of jobs in Pennsylvania while expanding and creating market opportunities for downstream manufacturing and job creation. With the appropriate planning and investment, Forest County has the opportunity to capitalize on some of these downstream opportunities.

Historically, Forest County did have a manufacturing base—evident in the Glass Containers Corporation operation in Marienville and the Evenflo/Crator plant in Tionesta. When both of these industries left the area in the mid-1980's and mid 1990's, the county's unemployment rate soared above state-wide averages. "The county continues to market itself to manufacturing and industrial concerns," says Rowan Rose, "but the county's remote location and limited highway access make it a hard sell sometimes. So in addition to courting larger industries, we're putting a lot of effort into supporting the growth of small businesses."

## BRAND AMBASSADORSHIP

In the past, the Forest County Industrial Development Authority utilized Growing Greener funds to create the Tionesta Market Village in downtown Tionesta. Opened in 2013, the village is comprised of several custom-built small scale retail buildings designed to look like 1800's storefronts, surrounding a small park and walkway for shoppers. The purpose of the project was to help temporarily replace the retail offerings lost in the

devastating fire that leveled that block in 2003, to attract investors to purchase the property, to attract traffic to the downtown area and to provide opportunities for local small businesses. It is open seasonally from Memorial Day to Labor Day, and has been a great success. All of the shops have had tenants each season, with an ongoing waiting list for space. There has been interest in creating another railroad-themed Market Village on the other side of the county in Marienville, near the historic train station.

"The Forest County Business Alliance (FCBA) has always been about promoting area businesses," says Amanda Hetrick, FCBA Secretary and Forest Area Superintendent of Schools, "but in the last year or two we've redefined our mission to focus on grass-roots, hands-on business development along with more traditional 'chamber of commerce' activities." The FCBA has had great success with year one of their multi-year EMPOWERS project, made possible by a USDA grant. The focus of EMPOWERS is the motivation, support and education of area business owners. This year, EMPOWERS has presented multiple workshops on a variety of topics to local residents and business owners. They also brought in rural Economic Development consultants Becky McCray and Deb Brown (saveyour.town) to tour the county and give several presentations in the community and in the schools.

The Business Alliance is also hard at work producing a series of videos that local businesses can use to help educate owners and their staff on customer service and brand ambassadorship. "Rural small business owners don't have the time or manpower to attend a series of workshops," says Ms. Hetrick, "and they are sometimes resistant to new information. So we wanted to present this information, created by locals for locals, in a format that they could access online whenever they had the time."

## POSITIVE CHANGE

The Forest Area School District offers a full range of programming including options for early college credits, vocational training, and business education. Programming begins at the Pre-K level and continues through grade 12. "Because the district is nestled in the Allegheny National Forest, there is a strong focus on environmental education with an exposure to entrepreneurship since independent, start-up small businesses tend to be the most successful ones in our region," says Ms. Hetrick.



*Fishing on  
the Allegheny  
(Photo by  
Rowan Rose)*

The strong partnership between the Forest County Business Alliance, the Forest County Community & Economic Development department, the Forest Area School District and the Forest County Commissioners is fundamental to the continued growth of the county. “I really look forward to sitting down at the table to solve problems with these people,” says Ms. Rose. “We all understand the unique issues that rural communities have, and we are all dedicated to making positive change happen.”

Forest County Community & Economic Development department has recently received a grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission for Phase I of revitalization efforts in both downtown Tionesta and Marienville and will be convening stakeholder groups in both communities to begin the process of determining the scope of work. “I’m anticipating that our revitalization Master Plan will be completed by 2019,” says Ms. Rose, “and then I’ll start the work of identifying and applying for implementation funding.”

Another exciting project underway in Forest County is the Four Season Trail Hub in Marienville, on the east side of Forest County in Jenks Township. Part of the larger Knox-Kane Rails to Trails project, the Four Season Trail Hub will connect users to the Cooks Forest area via the Baker Trail, the North Country Trail to the south and the Kinzua Bridge State Park to the North. There will be a large parking area for winter motorized and equestrian trailers and a separate area for non-motorized users. Snowmobiles will be able to park at the hub and ride as far as Kinzua Dam or Allegheny State Park in New York on the extensive ANF trail system. A pavilion, picnic tables and benches will also be available at the Hub, all within walking distance of several restaurants, lodging and fuel.

## SYNCHRONIZED FIREFLIES

And economic growth isn’t the only thing looking bright in Forest County—there are also the fireflies.

In 2011, some campers saw fireflies flashing in unison in the Allegheny National Forest. A research group—the Firefly International Research & Education team—heard about the sightings and, in a 2012 visit, confirmed the presence of over 15 species, including the synchronous firefly (*Photinus carolinus*). In 2013, a handful of local residents, environmental activists and business people formed the Pennsylvania Firefly Festival to celebrate local fireflies.

The organization isn’t just about pretty lights either. Every year they secure funding to hire interns to do scientific research on the local firefly populations and habitat. The PA Firefly Festival was awarded the 2018 Conservation & Stewardship Award from the Pennsylvania Wilds for their efforts to educate the public about firefly habitats and for the ongoing research they spearhead. “It does seem a little bit quirky that people come to Forest County from all over the world to stand in the dark and look at fireflies,” says Peggy Butler, whose property in Kellettville is the staging area for the annual Pennsylvania Firefly Festival, “but so many people are as enchanted by them as we are, so we welcome them with open arms.” 🐞

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Forest County government: [co.forest.pa.us](http://co.forest.pa.us)

Forest County tourism: [forestcounty.com](http://forestcounty.com)

Forest County Business Alliance: [fcbusinessalliance.com](http://fcbusinessalliance.com)

PA Firefly Festival: [pafireflyfestival.com](http://pafireflyfestival.com)

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All facts and figures are as of December 31, 2017.



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THE VOICE OF PENNSYLVANIA COUNTIES

## 2019 County Government PRIORITIES

Committed to the core responsibilities of county government—and ultimately to the people and communities of Pennsylvania.

### Election Equipment and Voting Systems

**As the level of government responsible for assuring the integrity of every step in the election process, counties must be at the forefront of any effort to replace election equipment so that they can maintain their strict security standards as well as voter confidence.**

Counties have a significant responsibility to maintain a fair and secure elections process, including the sole authority for selection and purchase of voting equipment. While counties are confident that current voting systems are accurate and secure, there is general consensus that election equipment is nearing the end of its useful life. Thus counties had already prioritized the need for state and federal assistance in replacing that equipment over the next few years, on reasonable timelines based on funding and equipment availability.

In settling a federal lawsuit stemming from the 2016 presidential campaign, though, the Pennsylvania Department of State has agreed to require all voting machines have a voter-verifiable paper trail by the April 2020 primary. State, federal and county government will need to work together to assure counties have access to a full marketplace of voting equipment that is compliant with certification requirements and available to meet timing and deployment needs.

At the same time, Gov. Wolf's administration has indicated its intention to seek state funding of at least 50 percent of the cost of new systems, or approximately \$75 million of an estimated \$150 million statewide cost, in addition to \$14 million in available federal money. A chief objective under this priority

is obtaining full funding for voting systems, noting that every dollar that does not come from federal or state funding will be a local property tax dollar.

A strong partnership is needed to allow counties to meet the needs and expectations of Pennsylvania's voters and the requirements of the settlement agreement, and to continue to fulfill their responsibility to maintain a fair and accessible voting system for all.

#### COUNTIES SUPPORT:

- Full state funding for voting systems to reduce the burden on county property taxpayers.
- A state-county partnership in planning to meet the requirements to have voter-verified paper trail systems in place by April 2020.

For more information on **election equipment and voting systems**, contact **Doug Hill** at (717) 736-4715 or [dhill@pacounties.org](mailto:dhill@pacounties.org).

# Forensic Services for Seriously Mentally Ill County Inmates

**Prisons are not the place for many individuals with mental illness or developmental disabilities. Society must provide the treatment, resources and tools to safely transition them back into society.**

Untreated mental health needs are often the catalyst behind entry, and then re-entry, into the criminal justice system. Counties have been leading the call for alternatives to placing offenders with mental illness or developmental disabilities in our prisons, a system that fails to effectively or compassionately address human need.

As a result of these efforts, counties and the state Department of Human Services have formed a strong partnership to address the shortages of psychiatric, or forensic, beds, and to obtain state funding to expand community-based services. Together, this means state hospital admissions can be reduced while county jail inmates get the services they need.

But much remains to be done. Not every county is currently served with expanded community capacity. It will also be critical to work closely with state policy makers to address the need for funding for expanded services, beds and diversion across the mental health system as a whole, whether or not an individual is involved with the criminal justice system.

The state-county partnership is at the core of achieving implementation of effective best practices and joint training for prison administrators, county mental health staff, the judiciary, law enforcement, the medical community and others. Counties

must also be involved in any decision that could impact county services, such as the relocation of non-criminal individuals from forensic beds to community-based services.

By treating the reasons behind criminal behavior in an appropriate setting, Pennsylvania can break the cycle of admissions and readmissions to county jails while improving lives, using resources more effectively and building safer communities.

## COUNTIES SUPPORT:

- Expanding resources to allow more options for care and treatment of individuals with mental illness and developmental disabilities outside of the prison system.
- Addressing the needs of the mental health system from a holistic perspective.
- Working collaboratively with the state to assure counties are involved in decision making around the mental health system.

For more information on **forensic bed access for seriously mentally ill county inmates**, contact **Brinda Penyak** at (717) 736-4737 or [bpenyak@pacounties.org](mailto:bpenyak@pacounties.org).

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# Human Services Funding and System Reform

**The commonwealth and its county partners must work together to fully support the needs of our citizens and our communities who are impacted by drug abuse, mental illness, intellectual disabilities, and child abuse and neglect.**

Pennsylvania counties deliver crucial human services on behalf of the state and federal government—services that protect our most vulnerable citizens, among them children suffering from abuse, those fighting substance abuse addictions, individuals with mental illness and developmental disabilities, and seniors in need of long-term care.

However, even though mandates and caseloads continue to increase, state funding support continues to decline. A ten percent aggregate cut to seven line items that impact core services in FY 2012-2013 only compounded an already dire situation. So while counties continue to deal with the daily challenge of serving the ever-growing needs of their residents, they must also face the reality of ever-stagnant state funds to support those needs.

Each year, counties find themselves advocating to prevent state funding for human services from being cut, much less achieving the increases that are so critically needed just to catch up from years of underfunding. The state-county partnership must again be prioritized—including a commitment to additional and sustainable funding for human services programs and assurances of ongoing funding for essential services in the event of any future state budget delay—before the safety net becomes so frayed it can no longer support those who need it most.

But it is not just funding. The General Assembly and administration must bring counties to the table earlier when making decisions that would alter county service delivery in ways. Failure to do so often has unintended consequences, as recently experienced with changes to the medical assistance transportation program. Counties also seek a partnership with the state on program reform; experience tells us there are many more statutory and regulatory opportunities to improve the efficient delivery of services.

## COUNTIES SUPPORT:

- Commitment of full state and federal funding for human services at a level that responds to societal and economy-driven increases in caseloads.
- Assurances of ongoing funding availability for essential services in the event of any future budget delay.
- Collaborative review of the scope, objectives and administration of human services programs to better reflect the state-county partnership.

For more information on **human services funding and system reform**, contact **Brinda Penyak** at (717) 736-4737 or [bpenyak@pacounties.org](mailto:bpenyak@pacounties.org).

# Rural Broadband Expansion

The collective future of Pennsylvania hinges on addressing the challenges to rural broadband expansion that are preventing access to opportunities and information to many of our residents.

Though the need for internet access continues to increase across the nation—as the backbone of business, and as a tool for education, health care, emergency services and other key parts of our everyday lives—the Federal Communications Commission estimates about 800,000 Pennsylvanians still do not have reliable internet service.

Many of these individuals are in rural parts of the state, where building the essential infrastructure is often cost-prohibitive. But high speed and reliable internet access has become a necessity, and our rural communities cannot continue to wait for infrastructure that is critical to our economic vitality and our personal quality of life.

Even agricultural work has become increasingly dependent on connectivity as technology is added to traditional farm equipment and new tools such as drones help improve productivity. Without broadband, a significant number of Pennsylvanians are missing access to opportunities, while rural areas find it harder and harder to attract and retain residents and encourage business development.

The commonwealth must develop partnerships among federal, state and local government, as well as the private sector, that can help to deploy the resources and data needed to make mean-

ingful progress on rural broadband expansion. Counties can also learn from best practices and innovative ideas, such as regional cooperative models that have been successful in Pennsylvania and throughout the country, to be leaders in this area going forward.

The future viability of our rural communities has an impact on the strength of our entire commonwealth. Broadband expansion will be a critical tool to move all of Pennsylvania forward together.

## COUNTIES SUPPORT:

- Working together with federal, state, local and private stakeholders to develop strategies for successful rural broadband expansion.
- Identifying successful approaches and sharing best practices that can be replicated with other rural communities.
- Partnering with higher education and other research entities to leverage data and other resources.

For more information on **rural broadband expansion**, contact **Melissa Anese** at (717) 736-4718 or [manese@pacounties.org](mailto:manese@pacounties.org).

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# Assessment Reform

Whether or not they are actively considering a reassessment, counties can use the knowledge and resources in newly developed tools to maintain fair and uniform assessment practices on an ongoing basis.

Counties administer the property assessment system that serves as the basis for the property tax, which is the primary source of local revenue for counties, municipalities and school districts. But the reassessment process has its significant challenges and expenses, many born out of a need for changes to the current laws and systems as well as for resources and guidance to help the process go smoothly.

In 2018, the Local Government Commission's Assessment Reform Task Force completed several projects that offer tools and suggestions to improve the assessment process on an ongoing basis and provide education for counties and vendors conducting reassessments. Included is a set of data collection standards, as well as a self-evaluation tool for counties to determine whether they are ready to conduct a countywide reassessment. Model contracting standards and public relations guidelines are also available.

These resources now need to be actively shared and promoted among Pennsylvania's counties to help ensure the system is transparent, accurate and equitable for all property owners. CCAP also will be working with AAP to develop training for appeals boards members, which will be required beginning in 2020 under Act 155 of 2018. Further legislative work remains as well, on Task Force bills regarding sales data verification, building

permit reform, and certification for third party contractors that will need to be reintroduced in the 2019-2020 session.

By looking at the assessment system as a whole and taking advantage of the available tools and best practices, counties can continue to offer confidence that assessments are done correctly, fairly and uniformly across the commonwealth.

To learn more about the Assessment Reform Task Force and the tools referenced here, go to [www.pacounties.org/GR/Pages/Assessment-Reform-Task-Force.aspx](http://www.pacounties.org/GR/Pages/Assessment-Reform-Task-Force.aspx).

## COUNTIES SUPPORT:

- Encouraging all counties to use the Assessment Reform Task Force tools.
- Active consideration of Task Force legislation in the 2019-2020 session.
- Working with county assessors to develop appeals board training and plan for its deployment.

For more information on **assessment reform**, contact **Lisa Schaefer** at (717) 736-4748 or [lschaefer@pacounties.org](mailto:lschaefer@pacounties.org).

# Preventing Substance Abuse

**Substance abuse—no matter its cause—requires strong state, county and local partnerships to provide effective education, prevention and treatment programs in our communities.**

Pennsylvania continues to face high rates of overdose and death due to the opioid epidemic. In fact, the commonwealth was in a declared state of emergency to combat the crisis through all of 2018, highlighting the ongoing seriousness of the issue.

Federal, state and local agencies have made progress in recent years, partnering to improve coordination and developing more integrated approaches. While these efforts must continue, counties also recognize that it is not only opioids that are affecting public health—heroin and cocaine also remain significant concerns, as do the use and misuse of prescription drugs and alcohol.

County drug and alcohol programs, run by Single County Authorities (SCAs), are responsible for implementing prevention, intervention and treatment programs. The SCAs work with community stakeholders to assess local circumstances and develop programs to meet community needs.

SCAs and counties must continue to work with hospitals and other organizations to comprehensively address substance abuse in all of its forms. Best practices and evidence-based programs must be encouraged, with a focus on primary prevention and quality assurance.

Beyond that, Pennsylvania also needs to work toward a broad and inclusive data system that removes the barriers to informa-

tion sharing. In this way, state and local stakeholders will be able to see the impact of investments in education, prevention and treatment measures and assure accountability.

Counties will continue to coordinate local and statewide strategies and comprehensive solutions to this public health crisis. Only through integrated and holistic planning, coupled with additional resources to expand local capacity, can Pennsylvania begin to reverse these alarming trends.

## COUNTIES SUPPORT:

- Collaboration among state and local authorities to develop and implement a comprehensive approach to addressing substance abuse in all its forms.
- Additional state resources for increased local capacity for prevention, intervention and treatment.
- Improved data collection to assure resources are appropriately directed to where they are most needed.

For more information on **preventing substance abuse**, contact **Michele Denk** at (717) 736-4704 or [mdenk@pacounties.org](mailto:mdenk@pacounties.org).



## Touching the Lives of Every Pennsylvanian

County governments are responsible for a wide variety of critical services, including provision of human services (mental health, intellectual disabilities, juvenile justice, children and youth, long-term care, drug and alcohol services, housing) to people in need in our communities. In addition, counties are responsible for emergency management and 911 services, administration of the courts and corrections system, elections, maintenance of county bridges and the county property assessment rolls, and are also involved in environmental and land use planning, protection of open space and community and economic development.

The County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania (CCAP) is the voice of county government; a statewide nonprofit, nonpartisan association representing all 67 counties in Pennsylvania. CCAP members include county commissioners, council members, county executives, administrators, chief clerks and solicitors. CCAP strengthens the counties' abilities to govern their own affairs and improve the well-being and quality of life for every Pennsylvania resident. It advocates for favorable state and federal legislation, programs and policies on behalf of counties. CCAP is committed to service excellence through education, information, insurance, technology and other programs that support effective county government. Founded in 1886, CCAP is an affiliate of the National Association of Counties. For more information about Pennsylvania's counties and CCAP, log on to [www.pacounties.org](http://www.pacounties.org) and follow @PACountiesGR on Twitter.



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# Newsworthy

WINTER 2019

Please join CCAP in welcoming the following new Associate members.

**ChemImage Corporation** is a Pittsburgh-based company committed to making the world healthier and safer through dramatic advancements in chemical imaging technology. The company combines proprietary, state-of-the-art imaging sensors, algorithms and analytical software to solve the world's most challenging health and safety issues. VeroVision products help keep police officers, security personnel, correctional facility mail inspectors, first responders and the general public safer.

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**Questions? Contact Andrew Smith, Risk Control Specialist/PELICAN Marketing Specialist at [asmith@pacounties.org](mailto:asmith@pacounties.org).**

# CCAP Announces Graduates from its Academy for Excellence in County Government

**T**he County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania (CCAP) Academy for Excellence in County Government recently graduated 22 county officials.

The Academy is a certificate training program specifically designed for county commissioners, council members, county executives, administrators and assistant administrators, chief clerks and assistant chief clerks, solicitors and assistant solicitors, and their equivalents in home rule counties.

Participants complete required courses in leadership, management and decision-making; county legal issues; today's trends in county government; county functions and responsibilities; county financial management; risk management; personnel and labor relations; personal development; and, also attain elective credits by attending courses covering a wide range of relevant topics.

CCAP and the Academy are committed to training informed and responsible public officials to give

Pennsylvania's counties the leadership needed to deal with the challenges of today's county government. The Academy is a voluntary program that began in 1996. More than 150 county officials have graduated from the program and received the certificate since its inception.

For more information or to enroll in the next cycle of the program, please contact Mandi Glantz, CCAP director of member and vendor relations, at (717) 736-4739 or [mglantz@pacounties.org](mailto:mglantz@pacounties.org). 📧



*Academy graduates gathered at CCAP's Fall Conference.*



**Top row:** Francis Weiderspahn, Jr., Crawford County commissioner; Ed Heasley, Clarion County commissioner; Alan Hall Susquehanna County commissioner; Matt Quesenberry, Elk County commissioner; Benjamin Kafferlin, Warren County commissioner; Bruce Erb, Blair County commissioner; Todd Graybill, Juniata County commissioner.

**Middle row:** Rick Mirabito, Lycoming County commissioner; Steve Nevada, Franklin County Assistant County administrator; Gary Bender, Schuylkill County administrator; Helen Schmitt, Blair County administrator; Leslie Osche, Butler County commissioner, Molly Mudd, Adams County solicitor; Kim Geyer, Butler County commissioner; Theodore Tharan, Clarion County commissioner.

**Bottom row:** Jeffrey Snyder, Clinton County commissioner; Michelle Shedden, Bradford County chief clerk; Thomas Chernisky, Cambria County commissioner; Jack McKernan, Lycoming County commissioner; Kevin Boozel, Butler County commissioner; Christine Sadler, Berks County solicitor.

**Not pictured:** Kevin S. Barnhardt, Berks County commissioner.



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# County Code *Rewrite* ENACTED



**S**enate Bill 1005, a multi-year project to update and combine the County Code and Second Class County Code into a single, comprehensive statute, was signed into law as Act 154 of 2018. The legislation, introduced by former CCAP member Sen. John Eichelberger, brings counties' core statutes governing county operations, enacted in the 1950s, up to date with current need and practice. Although most changes are of a technical or conforming nature, it also makes substantive changes to the extent

needed to incorporate case law or to delete obsolete language.

While before the House in late September, an amendment was adopted to clarify provisions in the law relating to placing flags on veterans' graves, to provide the flexibility to assure that cemeteries are able to be properly maintained throughout the year, while assuring our veterans are able to receive the honor and respect they deserve. The amendment was collaboratively developed with the input of county veterans affairs directors.

CCAP extends its appreciation to the Local Government Commission for the effort and expertise its staff dedicated to this extensive project, which included regular meetings with CCAP and the county row office associations, and a detailed review of each section of the statutes. The Commission's website (<http://www.lgc.state.pa.us/countyCode.cfm>) includes a summary, a detailed analysis of the act's provisions, and disposition and derivation tables to enable comparison of the old law to the new. 📌



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# REFORMING

## Pennsylvania's Child Welfare System



**Brian Bornman, Esq.**

Director

Pennsylvania Children and Youth Administrators

**For a long time, the child welfare system in Pennsylvania received little attention.** Media outlets picked up the occasional story, usually one of tragedy, and the public reaction was critical and accusatory. During these incidents, child welfare staff were frequently painted as “uncaring,” “incompetent” or “lazy.” However, almost no one understood the legal limitations imposed upon the system, the financial constraints, or the other challenges facing the system. This was the norm for many years, until the Jerry Sandusky trial occurred.

Facing a flood of public opinion that the child welfare system “dropped the ball” and should have been able to know that a prominent athletic coach was engaged in serial sexual assault of children, there was a fervor of activity to fix the child welfare system. The Governor created a task force to study the issue, including not a single child welfare administrator, and laws were drafted and passed. This system reform focused almost exclusively on the Child Protective Services Law, which impacts who must report child abuse, what constitutes child abuse in Pennsylvania, and who will be listed on the state registry of those who have committed abuse, but changed nothing in terms of a caseworker’s ability to obtain crucial records, such as drug and alcohol or mental health, and changed nothing in the processes to petition the court for protective custody.

## PERCEPTIONS

While these laws prospectively do make kids safer by ensuring that those working with children have clearances, the actual impacts are much less than perceived by the general public. For instance, in 2015, the first full year that these laws were in effect, there were more than 1.5 million clearances sought through ChildLine. Of those, 1,828 actually came up with any record on the system. However, only 10 people were actually prohibited from hire under the new laws.

Additionally, counties saw a dramatic increase in the number of investigations they were conducting following the implementation of the new laws. In 2014, there were 29,273 child abuse reports investigated. In 2015, with the new laws in effect, that number jumped to 40,590. This could lead one to surmise that the laws were effective and children were much safer in 2015 as compared to 2014; however, there were 3,340 substantiated child abuse cases in 2014 as opposed to 4,203 in 2015. That is 11,317 additional investigations for 863 more substantiated cases.

The numbers become starker when you look historically. In 2005, there were 22,854 child abuse investigations, with 4,390 being substantiated for a substantiation rate of 19 percent. In 2015, with more acts meeting the definition of child abuse and more people included as mandated reporters, there were 40,590 child abuse investigations with 4,203 being substantiated for a substantiated rate of 10 percent. In 2015, there were 17,736 more child abuse investigations than in 2005, a full decade prior, but only 187 more were substantiated. This is an incredible amount of additional work completing investigations at the county level for little to show for it in terms of substantiated cases.

## STATE OF THE CHILD REPORT

In 2017, the Pennsylvania Auditor General released his Pennsylvania State of the Child Report. This report was the result of his office interviewing more than 100 stakeholders in the child welfare system from across the state, including youth, parents, caseworkers, trainers, and others.

This report identified several areas of need that are set forth below.

- 1) Finding qualified, dedicated professionals to work in child welfare is a pervasive struggle, particularly for those counties that use the State Civil Service Commission.
- 2) Adequately training caseworkers for the complex, potentially dangerous job they perform requires immediate and ongoing changes.
- 3) Unmanageable caseloads and burdensome, redundant paperwork prevent CYS caseworkers from effectively protecting children from harm.
- 4) Pennsylvania caseworkers, particularly those at the entry level, earn a remarkably low salary given the educational requirements, daily work complexity, and potentially dangerous components of their jobs.
- 5) Because of the reasons highlighted in report observations 1 through 4, high turnover among caseworkers greatly inhibits Pennsylvania’s ability to effectively protect children.
- 6) Other state-level groups and agencies are reviewing the same problems within Pennsylvania’s child-welfare system in an effort to find solutions.
- 7) States such as Florida and Arizona are tackling similar challenges in their child-welfare systems and are applying divergent methods to achieve viable solutions.

There was really little to fault in terms of the Auditor’s State of the Child Report, although these areas were very broad and would be very difficult to resolve. Also, while it was good to have an independent entity evaluate the system and identify these areas as a current struggle, this was certainly not new information for those of us working in the field. These are the same topics that counties have been seeking solutions to for years and most are so inextricably intertwined that it is impossible to try and resolve them independently.

## UNSUSTAINABLE DEMANDS

Ultimately, most of the issues with the child welfare system revolve around staff recruitment and retention. If you are unable to recruit highly qualified caseworkers, they will struggle with the demands of the job and burn out, leaving the field for greener pastures elsewhere, only to start the cycle anew. Even if you recruit exceptional caseworkers, the current demand of the job are unsustainable. With overwhelming paperwork and documentation, caseloads being higher than can be reasonably managed, and other stresses of the job, case workers burn out quickly and leave their positions. These cases must be handled by someone and so their caseloads are distributed to the remaining caseworkers, further adding to their already unrealistic workload. As more experienced workers are successively overwhelmed, burn out, and leave, the field is left with a less experienced and knowledgeable workforce. Ultimately, it is the families and children we serve that bear the brunt of this situation.

In response to the Auditor General's 2017 report, the Pennsylvania Children and Youth Administrators (PCYA) began their own system reform discussions. Numerous counties participated in work days to discuss recommendations that could be widely supported and that would have an immediate and positive impact on the field. Many of these proposed solutions would reduce the caseworker time spent on referrals that lack merit. While these recommendations were intended to improve retention and the ability of counties to do the challenging work of protecting Pennsylvania's children, there are also substantial benefits to the citizens of the commonwealth. These recommendations would result in fewer people being subjected to the intrusiveness of a child abuse investigation that is not warranted. These recommendations could ultimately improve the safety of children by allowing counties to better serve those children that are most at risk, without being forced to spend substantial time "checking off boxes" on a statewide data system.

The recommendations of the county child welfare agencies are briefly set forth below. A copy of the system reform recommendations of PCYA can be obtained by contacting Brian Bornman at [bbornman@pacounties.org](mailto:bbornman@pacounties.org).



# 1 Changes to Differential Response System in Pennsylvania

The decision regarding whether a case is handled as a GPS or a CPS should be made by the counties after some preliminary information is obtained. ChildLine should act as a clearinghouse for reports, but should not assign the CPS/GPS designation as they have insufficient information with which to make those decisions. Prior to the implementation of CWIS, this was the process already when reporters of child abuse called the counties directly. The counties determined whether it should be a GPS or CPS, and assigned the appropriate designation. Additionally, counties should determine the response time to assure safety as they are best trained in investigations and the provision of child welfare services. ChildLine staff have only the barest of information and are not trained or experienced in investigations or providing child welfare services.

## Benefits

Changing to this process would result in numerous immediate benefits set forth below.

a) The image of child welfare would improve with the general public. With child abuse referrals being processed through ChildLine, there is a protocol to label anything a CPS investigation where any injury, regardless of how minor, is alleged. For instance, if a young child starts to dart out onto a busy street and the parent grabs their arm, but leave a small fingerprint bruise in doing so (a not uncommon incident), ChildLine labels this as a CPS investigation. This carries with it all the detriment that a child abuse investigation carries with it. A letter is sent to the parent that they are being investigated for child abuse, employers may be notified, clearance requests will show that they are being investigated for child abuse, the parent will be interviewed, the children photographed, their house examined, and all household members will be scrutinized.

All this could have been avoided if the county received a referral that a child had a bruise and then met with the parent and child. They could readily ascertain the situation and not subject the parent to the intrusion of a CPS investigation, but rather offer voluntary

services that the parent could decide if they wanted, such as parent support groups or education, or accept no services and simply be left alone to parent their child. With the increased penalties for not reporting abuse as a mandated reporter, there is tremendous pressure to report everything; however, this does not mean that everything is abuse. The vast majority of reports will be unfounded and families should not be subject to unnecessary CPS investigations because of how a data system is being managed at the state level. When families subjected to these types of Draconian investigations, it leads to distrust of the system and creates hostility between county caseworkers and the community, even though these are not decisions being made by the counties.

- b) Caseworker time to complete better assessments and perform more complete casework on other cases will increase. Without caseworkers spending vast amounts of time investigating cases that they know will be unfounded from the very first contact, they can have that time available to perform more comprehensive assessments on the more critical and serious cases and spend more time with the families they are serving, providing support.
- c) There will be a decrease in liability to the counties. Under section 1983 of the Civil Rights Act, people may bring a suit against a government actor for actions it takes against them that violate their constitutional rights. The constitutional protections set forth in both the United States and Pennsylvania constitutions make it clear that child welfare may not intrude upon someone's right to raise their child as they see fit unless there is a compelling state interest in doing so, specifically that there is need to protect a child. When counties are forced to investigate cases as a CPS that they clearly establish are not abuse, they are put into liability for constitutional violations. This puts counties into the predicament of either violating the rights of those they are investigating or not complying with regulations set by DHS that require such constitutional violations to take place resulting in licensing citations and a potential loss of their license to operate a child welfare agency.

d) Most critically, this change would result in better services being provided to families being served by the child welfare system. When you look at what makes a functioning child protection system, there is traditionally a tremendous focus on assuring that children who are suspected of being abused are being referred for investigation. To be certain, without a child somehow coming to the attention of the system that can intervene to protect them, those protections will be ineffective. However, it is also critically important that a child welfare system only intervene when it

is necessary to do so. People are free to raise their children however they see fit, up to the point in which that child's safety is threatened. This freedom to raise one's child should not be underestimated and is the cornerstone of our democracy. The interventions provided by the child welfare system should be commensurate with the need. This does not happen when the entity assigning the response does not conduct the investigation, is not trained or experienced in conducting investigations, and is assigning the response based on very limited information.

## 2 Improvement to How GPS Reports Are Sent

GPS reports should be sent the counties as a single number with no separate allegations. All concerns noted in the referral to ChildLine should be listed in the narrative of the referral. In order to capture the important outcome data, the system should be reconfigured to allow the counties to enter the overall disposition of the GPS referral as valid or invalid, and then note the specific subcategories that were determined to be valid. Unlike a CPS referral, there is no benefit to treating GPS outcomes as separate, distinct allegations. The very purpose of differential response is to treat GPS referrals as an assessment, with services being offered to families to benefit and strengthen

them. The current process treats families as subjects of an investigation, with each allegation essentially being treated as its own "Mini-CPS" number. This creates a huge burden on caseworkers to spend large amounts of time entering data, rather than working with families, without generating any real value with the data created. It must be noted that CCAP made this very request of DHS in early 2016 on behalf of the counties, yet this process remains virtually unchanged. The extent of the improvement in this area has been to reduce the number of categories to which GPS reports can be assigned from 44 to 33.



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## 3 100 Percent Staff Reimbursement

PCYA is requesting that the state reimbursement share for child welfare staff change from 80 to 100 percent. This would require a statutory change to permit this level of reimbursement. While there may be concerns regarding an increase in staff salaries or an over-inflation of staff compliments, these would be readily controlled. OCYF still would have a level of control by certifying the number of staff required which would limit the number of staff for which state reimbursement applies. Additionally, salaries could not expand beyond the salary range set forth by the limits on state participation that are currently in effect. This has been part of the CCAP platform for some time, as well.

### Benefits to Be Gained From Implementing

Clients and families would benefit from better staff to client ratios, which leads to better outcomes and less involvement with the child welfare system due to the provision of more individualized services that can only be accomplished with adequate staffing. Additionally, greater staff retention has been affirmatively tied to more rapid permanency achievement and greater stability in placements.

Counties would benefit from this proposal by being able to more fully staff their child welfare agencies, which would lead to less caseworker burnout and better retention. Retaining qualified employees is the most challenging aspect of the field currently, as traditionally low wages and high stress are causing many caseworkers to leave the field. The additional demands by the state have only exacerbated an already challenging situation. The ultimate benefit to the counties is better services for their populations, which result in higher standards of living and lower child abuse, crime, and substance abuse issues.

The state would benefit from this proposal by seeing its mandates successfully implemented. Too many times laws and mandates are passed on to the counties without the resources to effectuate them. While the intent for the CPSL amendments is noble, to help protect the children of the commonwealth, the mere passing of laws is meaningless if the counties are not provided adequate resources to actually put them into effect. Increasing the state share would demonstrate that the state is not simply about the "photo op" of protecting children, but that there is the desire and commitment to see it through. Improved staffing at the county level would lead to better outcomes for families and children, less involvement in the system, and a healthier population.

**Clients and families would benefit from better staff to client ratios, which leads to better outcomes and less involvement with the child welfare system due to the provision of more individualized services that can only be accomplished with adequate staffing. Additionally, greater staff retention has been affirmatively tied to more rapid permanency achievement and greater stability in placements.**

## 4 Interim Due Process and Procedure for Licensing

PCYA recommends the following changes for licensing improvements.

- 1) DHS will establish written timelines for OCYF to complete a licensing inspection, issue a license, and respond to corrective action plans.
- 2) DHS will establish an interim appeal process for individual citations. If a county does not agree with a specific citation, there will be a process to have that citation reviewed for compliance to regulation and consistency throughout the state. The proposed appeal processes are set forth below.
  - a. Citations that counties believe to be beyond the scope of law or regulation may be appealed by writing a letter of appeal to the deputy secretary of OCYF. This letter shall note the citation being questioned, why the county believes that this goes beyond the requirements of the regulation or law, and the relief requested. The deputy secretary shall convene a committee to review these citations consisting of two for the Office of Children, Youth, and Families and at least two county administrators. This committee shall review the questioned citations and make recommendations to the deputy secretary of OCYF, who shall respond to the county regarding the citation within ten days. This response shall specifically note whether the citation shall remain on the licensing report and the reasoning why.
  - b. Individual citations may be appealed the same as a denial of license, non-renewal of license, reduction to a provisional license or the revocation of a license with all due process currently set forth under statute.
- 3) DHS will put processes in place to establish greater consistency within regions and between regions to provide a more fair licensing process. There will be a process to request higher review of actions which the county find questionable, such as reductions in the needs based budget submissions or licensing citations to someone within DHS, but outside of OCYF. There will be greater transparency in the licensing process, with changes to process being made in writing and made available to the counties as well as regional offices.
- 4) Licensing citations will be broken into two categories of citation. Licensing violations will be identified as safety citations or technical violations. The designation of a citation as a safety or technical violation shall be set forth by regulation.
- 5) Safety citations or systemic technical violations shall require corrective action plans. Technical violations shall not require a corrective action plan.
- 6) Citations shall not be issued outside of the licensing cycle. Additionally, counties shall be provided the letters sent to complainants so that internal processes can be put into place to improve practice within the agency and prevent future similar complaints. Before letters are sent to complainants by the regional staff, counties shall have the opportunity to respond and clarify their actions regarding complainant.

## 5 Reduction of Data Elements Mandated by State

The current trend to collect data has had some very substantial benefits in recent years. A greater ability to track referrals and their demographics has allowed counties to make more informed choices in how programs are developed and how services are delivered. The ability to measure the efficacy of services can dramatically improve outcomes and demonstrate clearly what services are working and what are not. The development of data analytics to assign risk tags in Allegheny has been extremely innovative and is showing great promise in improving assessments for children. However, data for the sake of data can be a tremendous drain on the workforce and impact the ability of county agencies to protect

children. No additional collection of data can take place without some cost, either in human capital or financial expenditures.

Data elements that are dictated to be collected by DHS should be specifically tied to some statutory requirement. Data fields should not be thrown in just because they can be. The inclusion of data elements should be based upon proven factors that directly impact the service delivery, safety/risk assessment, or other factors that will clearly improve the child welfare system. There should not be a process where data is gathered without being able to specifically identify why it is important.

## 6 Increase State Participation in Data Systems

The reimbursement rate for changes to the county case management system in order to comply with CWIS should be reimbursed at a greater rate than is currently applied.

As these requirements are being dictated to the counties by the state, they should bear the cost of these upgrades.

## 7 Define Screenouts

Presently, there is no specific guidance on how to define a screenout of a referral and how they should be handled; however, there are substantial questions and justification requested by DHS regarding how individual counties handle screenouts. As a result, the variance between counties regarding screenouts varies wildly, yet there is no consistency regarding what is considered a screenout. What one county labels a screenout, may be identified as

an assessment in another county. This inconsistency leads to misleading data at the state level and to confusion at the county level regarding nomenclature.

DHS and counties should work collaboratively to arrive at a standardized definition of what constitutes a screenout so as to provide consistency across the commonwealth.

**The inclusion of data elements should be based upon proven factors that directly impact the service delivery, safety/risk assessment, or other factors that will clearly improve the child welfare system. There should not be a process where data is gathered without being able to specifically identify why it is important.**



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## 8 Rate Methodology/IV-E Deferral

PCYA supports the passage of legislation to enact the recommendations of the Rate Methodology Task Force to bring Pennsylvania into compliance with Federal IV-E requirements. The failure to adequately address this issue

is preventing Pennsylvania from fully claiming IV-E funds to which it may be entitled, reducing much needed funding for the system.

## 9 Greater Flexibility for Counties

Counties should be given great flexibility in how funds can be utilized to provide services to include the following:

- a) Counties should be able to program fund for services that are needed if they can demonstrate that they would be unable to acquire the services otherwise.
- b) Funding should be made available, along with technical assistance, for counties who want to utilize a Family Drug Court model.
- c) Counties should be able to combine CYS funding easily with other human service areas, such as drug and alcohol and mental health, in order to more easily fund housing and transportation programs.

## 10 Caseload Sizes

It has been clear for many years that the current regulatory requirement of maintaining caseload sizes at 30 cases per caseworker is unrealistic. It is simply impossible for a caseworker to be able to effectively meet the requirements of providing services to families with these ratios. Similarly, the current ratio of a supervisor being able to effectively supervise five caseworkers is also unrealistic. There is a distinct need to revisit the

regulations to better reflect the realities of work being performed by caseworkers today.

Caseload sizes should not be continued at 30:1, as presently set forth by regulation. There should be additional discussion to determine what the proper ratio should be and a more universal definition of "Case" may well be needed.

These positions voted on and finalized on February 2, 2018 by a majority of the counties. The position paper that was drafted to convey these recommendations was shared with the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, the Pennsylvania Auditor General, and other groups with an interest in the child welfare system. They were presented to the Pennsylvania Child Welfare Council, a group convened by DHS to help provide input for the child welfare system in Pennsylvania.

Following the issuance of the Auditor General's State of the Child Report in September 2017, that office engaged in substantial work to try and develop an action plan of how

the problem areas identified in their initial report could be improved. In May 2018, the Auditor General State of the Child Action Plan was released. This action plan contained a number of recommendations. These recommendations were specific to various groups, including the following: Governor and General Assembly, Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, County leaders and CYS agencies, University of Pittsburgh: School of Social Work's Child Welfare Resource Center, Pennsylvania State Police, Private service providers, and State Civil Service Commission.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNOR AND GENERAL ASSEMBLY

**Recommendation 1:** The General Assembly should immediately pass legislation and the governor should sign such legislation—that would bring Pennsylvania into compliance with federal regulations so that the commonwealth can receive all Title IV-E funds to which it is entitled.

**Recommendation 2:** Pennsylvania should pay for 100 percent of CYS caseworkers' salaries up front instead of requiring counties to do so.

**Recommendation 3:** The General Assembly should increase funding to provide adequate resources for proven preventive and diversionary programs that help strengthen families and prevent children from formally entering the CYS and juvenile justice systems.

**Recommendation 4:** The General Assembly should allow county CYS agencies more flexibility in how state funding streams can be spent.

**Recommendation 5:** The governor must ensure that the Department of Human Services and the State Civil Service Commission complete their work to revise CYS caseworker job descriptions and requirements and create a CYS-specific Civil Service test.

**Recommendation 6:** The governor and the General Assembly must ensure Medicaid expansion continues so that caregivers struggling with addiction can continue to receive low- or no-cost treatment that can lead to lifelong recovery and safe, permanent living situations for children.

**Recommendation 7:** The General Assembly should give CYS caseworkers the authority to receive necessary medical, drug-and-alcohol treatment and school records without requiring releases, using language similar to Section 6342(d)(1) of the Juvenile Act, which provides Court Appointed Special Advocates with such powers.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DHS

**Recommendation 8:** DHS should complete its work with the State Civil Service Commission to revise caseworker job descriptions and requirements and to create a CYS specific test.

**Recommendation 9:** The Office of Children, Youth and Families should allow county CYS caseworkers to determine the severity and designation of incoming cases instead of having lesser-trained ChildLine staff do so.

**Recommendation 10:** OCYF should define the term "screen-out" to ensure consistent workflows across the state regarding referrals.

**Recommendation 11:** Where possible, DHS' OCYF should reduce unnecessary mandated data that must be entered for each case into counties' case-management systems and should allow for an elongated timeline before all mandated data must be entered.

**Recommendation 12:** DHS' OCYF should revise its outdated regulation on caseload sizes from 30:1 to a range of 12:1 to 15:1.

**Recommendation 13:** OCYF should continue CWIS changes which prevent incomplete forms from being submitted to ChildLine, then sent back to the CYS agency for correction.

**Recommendation 14:** DHS should continue prioritizing and implementing changes in CWIS that will lead to better, more-efficient user experiences for caseworkers.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COUNTIES

**Recommendation 15:** County CYS agencies should proactively work to improve partnerships with local law-enforcement agencies and the Pennsylvania State Police.

**Recommendation 16:** County CYS agencies should proactively work to improve partnerships with other county-level entities, including social-services agencies.

**Recommendation 17:** County leadership and county CYS agencies should create strong Head Start/Early Safe Start programs to best protect substance-exposed newborns.

**Recommendation 18:** County CYS agencies should work with community partners who want to provide preventive or diversionary programs.

**Recommendation 19:** County CYS agencies should improve partnerships with children's advocacy centers and child-abuse medical experts.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CWRC

**Recommendation 23:** The Child Welfare Resource Center should provide access to training for all CYS staff on resources available through child-abuse medical experts and children’s advocacy centers.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PSP

**Recommendation 24:** PSP should explore, with its union, creating a specialty related to domestic abuse and child-welfare issues.

**Recommendation 25:** PSP should ask the General Assembly and the governor for additional resources as needed to ensure maximum ability to handle workloads so they are available to assist when needed with child-welfare-related visits in areas where they have primary jurisdiction.

**Recommendation 26:** PSP and local law-enforcement agencies should proactively work with county CYS agencies to ensure caseworker safety during particularly dangerous visits.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRIVATE PROVIDERS

**Recommendation 27:** Private service providers should adapt programs as necessary to face the rising complexity of cases and should continue to advocate for the necessary resources to provide those programs.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STATE CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION

**Recommendation 28:** The State Civil Service Commission should complete its work with DHS to revise caseworker job descriptions and requirements and to create a CYS-specific test.

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The recommendations of PCYA and the Auditor General have met with limited support from the Department of Human Services, although there has been some support for reducing the number of categories that are sent to the counties by ChildLine with GPS reports and support for improving the hiring process for caseworkers. The recommendations regarding allowing counties to determine the tract a case should take have not been supported by the department, nor has there been any support for greater reimbursements for child welfare staff from the state. There has been ongoing discussions between county administrators and DHS to try and resolve some licensing issues, but this remains a point of contention for many.

The series of recommendations from the Auditor General regarding the counties are certainly well-taken. Counties must always strive to create and improve on their relationships with their partners. While a county agency having custody of a child may be held responsible by the court for that child's mental health and drug and alcohol treatment, the reality is that those services are actually provided by entities outside the control of child welfare. That being the case, it is incumbent on each county to build strong, functioning relationships with their schools, mental health providers, drug and alcohol providers, Children's Advocacy Centers, law enforcement, courts, and local medical professionals to ensure that the children in their care received the services they and their families need to succeed.

Presently, Pennsylvania is at a crossroads. Whenever system reform has been considered in the past, it is frequently the result of a rushed response to some perceived failing within the system, often based on a singular incident. The deluge of new legislation and implementation of the statewide data system has pushed the system to the brink of collapse. Caseworker turnover

has decimated the institutional knowledge base that is so critical to effectively providing services for the families we serve. With the current level of attention on this system, we now have an opportunity to make some meaningful changes that will benefit the families we serve. Pennsylvania must stop holding counties responsible for providing all the services needed to maintain a functioning child welfare system, while simultaneously clinging to the paternalistic desire to control every aspect of that work.

Our legislature, and indeed all the citizens of Pennsylvania, need to understand that the system is reactionary in nature. Much like firefighters do not simply know which house will burn down, enabling them to prevent the fire before it starts, so too is child welfare incapable of knowing who will mistreat a child and cause them harm. By the time the system is made aware of a situation, it is frequently too late to prevent the initial harm. While the serious injuries, fatalities, and severe neglect cases are abhorrent, the focus must be on learning how we can improve practice, rather than legislating a fix that will further drown the system in paperwork while providing no legitimate improvement in child safety.

Most critically, caseload sizes must be reduced. Work loads of caseworkers must be reduced to a manageable size and child welfare workers must be treated like the professionals that they are. There is much expected from the caseworkers, supervisors, administrators, and service providers in the system. While many are quick to point out their faults, there is little recognition of their successes. To be certain, a news story about how a mother overcame her addiction and was reunited safely with her child may not be the headline of the week, but it is the highest measure of success for this field. 🍷

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To discuss recommendations or other child welfare issues, contact Brian Bornman, at [bbornman@pacounties.org](mailto:bbornman@pacounties.org).



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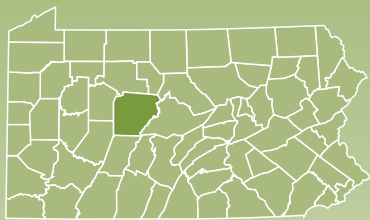
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NRM-12873MT (12/17)



COUNTY HIGHLIGHT:  
CLEARFIELD

Kathleen Gillespie, ACBSW, NHA  
Chief Executive Officer  
Clearfield County Area  
Agency on Aging, Inc.

**Based on the results, it was determined that our elders were interested in downsizing, wanted to remain in their home communities and preferred single family dwellings over high rise apartment living.**

# Creating "Community" with Affordable Senior Housing

In the spring of 2014, the Clearfield County Area Agency on Aging, Inc. conducted a needs assessment via survey completed by the consumers served at the time in order to identify gaps in service needs and to assist in the further development of the agency's service plan. One of the top three opportunities was affordable senior housing. Based on the results, it was determined that our elders were interested in downsizing, wanted to remain in their home communities and preferred single family dwellings over high rise apartment living. In addition, seniors were very much interested in living in neighborhoods consisting of younger adults and families as well as seniors.

## SHARED HOUSING

In 2016, our agency was made aware that a local church with a very small congregation had available the parish house that had been unoccupied for a couple of years. As we considered the increasing needs for affordable housing, discussion about the possibility of utilizing the manse as a shared house came up as a potential mutually beneficial arrangement for the agency and the church as well. In addition, the number of individuals seeking transition from institutional living back into the community continued to increase.

Fiscal year 2015-2016 had an increase in nursing home transitions from 32 people the previous year to 110. The need for affordable senior living continued to increase and at the time, there was a three year waiting list for subsidized housing. A long term lease agreement was reached with the local church to rent the manse and establish it as a shared home for seniors. As news spread about this evolving option for seniors, we were approached by the families of two 89 year old ladies who were roommates in a local nursing home for the past two years, about potentially transitioning them to the available house. Both of these individuals were cognitively impaired with Alzheimer's disease, and there had been an increase in falls for one of the individuals, while the other had numerous transports to the emergency room for various issues.

## ENVIRONMENT AND BEHAVIOR

In meeting with the families, options for services were discussed along with the list of available providers. As both of the individuals had significant issues with short term and recent memory, it became apparent that a large part of the problem had to do with the physical environment and what that environment communicated to the individuals. In our service area, the long term care facilities for the most part are based on the medical model of care. Understanding the impact that the physical environment has on behavior in cognitively impaired individuals, there was a conflict in the cues that the environment sent about expectations and behavior. In essence, the environment cued the individuals to act as patients



which was a direct conflict for the individuals because they do not believe they are sick. Over the course of two years, the ladies started to behave as one would if they were ill.

The most common issue from the perspective of the adult children was the barriers they found in their efforts to be true partners in the coordination of care for their loved ones, as well as the perceived obstacles that were cited as regulation to the families. In June of 2017 the elders and their respective families made the decision to transition the individuals to the manse and have home and community based service providers provide the care under the Aging Waiver Program. In addition, a third elder also transitioned from a long term care facility. All three individuals are now 90 years old; two of the three are ambulatory now versus wheel chair bound.

There has been a decrease in the number of medications and other activities of daily living have either been maintained or improved. The physical environment cues the individuals in ways that are familiar. The smell of food cooking services

to increase appetite, and there has been no weight loss. The biggest challenge in this arrangement has been the availability of direct care workers. Families have become a support system for each other and are also primarily responsible to direct the care and services authorized. Shared housing is also a viable option for those seniors who experience financial barriers as an option to pool resources and continue to experience the social connectedness which is so very important for people of all ages. The rents for the shared house are currently 30 percent of income.

## ECHO (ELDER COTTAGE HOUSING OPPORTUNITY) AKA GRANNY PODS

Understanding that 75 percent of supportive services for elders is provided by their adult children, this option provides opportunity for the family to continue to oversee and provide supportive services while eliminating the travel time, while also maintaining independence, privacy and dignity of the elder in need of support. Elder cottages are small,

separate, manufactured residences that are temporarily placed in the side or rear yard of a host family (relatives or close friends) for an elder to live in. The cottage provides autonomy for its resident along with easy access to family members who can provide assistance when needed.

The cottage is 572 square feet, 16X36; with a wheelchair accessible bathroom, bedroom and an open living/dining area; roll in shower and kitchenette with roll under sink. The utilities tie into the main house. When the cottage is no longer needed by the individual, it is relocated to the property of another family. In addition to postponing institutionalization for the elder, this option also reduces the stress on family caregivers and preserves family cohesiveness while maintain the level of function and health of the elder in the community.

With grants from PHARE and the Clearfield County Affordable Housing Trust; the first ECHO was placed in Sandy Township, Clearfield County in July of 2018. The need for affordable senior housing will continue to increase as the population of individuals over 65 years continues to increase across the country; and the baby boomers demand options to remain in their communities versus institutional living arrangements. This is also a viable option for elders who may be providing supportive care/services for adult children with disabilities.

The cottage is owned by a subsidiary of the Clearfield County Area Agency on Aging, Incorporated, a private, non-profit 501c3, Mature Resources Foundation. Services for the resident are coordinated by the provider of choice of the consumer or by the family. The rent for use of the ECHO

is 30 percent of income. The targeted individuals are those with income below 50 percent of AMI, and those who can reside independently with or without support services. This is an opportunity to facilitate families taking care of one another in light of the crisis currently experienced in the lack of direct care staff.

## WORLD'S FIRST ARTS-BASED INTERGENERATIONAL DEMENTIA FRIENDLY COMMUNITY

A vacant elementary school and 23 acres of woodland will be transformed into dementia-friendly pocket neighborhoods for people of all ages and abilities featuring Dr. Bill Thomas' robot-built Minka homes and a schoolhouse repurposed into mixed-use commercial and arts engagement center. The Clearfield County Area Agency on Aging, Inc. partnered with Dr. Thomas' New York-based advanced home-manufacturing company Minka and its Denmark-based architects AJGA, to develop the 60-home Village of Hope project based on Dr. Thomas' intergenerational MAGIC model—Multi-Ability, multi-Generational, Inclusive Community—co-created with the University of Southern Indiana. Minka and MAGIC build off Dr. Thomas near 30 years of innovation as founder of The Eden Alternative global non-profit, The Green House Project, the Senior Emergency Room and the ChangingAging movement.

Our families are devastated by skyrocketing rates of individuals diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease and related disorders. We need to create communities to support these

families and provide environments for those who journey through this disease to thrive. We're partnering with Dr. Thomas to build the Village of Hope to give families hope that people living with dementia can participate and enjoy life when they live in a community that welcomes and includes them. The Village of Hope will include a mix of single family and multi-family homes featuring smart home technology, universal design accessibility and Minka's rapid robotic manufacturing process. 58 single and multifamily units are planned.

The project also includes repurposing the Girard Goshen Elementary School, closed since 2010, into a community center featuring a mix of retail, health services and local creative arts engagement programs designed with community participation for both young and old.

The emphasis on arts engagement was determined in August 2018 in the first of a series of participatory design workshops led by Dr. Thomas' team to invite the community, including people living with dementia, to lead design of the dementia-friendly community elements that would help them thrive.

Alzheimer's disease has directly affected 400,000 Pennsylvanians and dementia has impacted all of us, directly or indirectly. Human beings are built for human connections. What the Village of Hope represents is not something new, it's the oldest invention humans have created—community. 🍷



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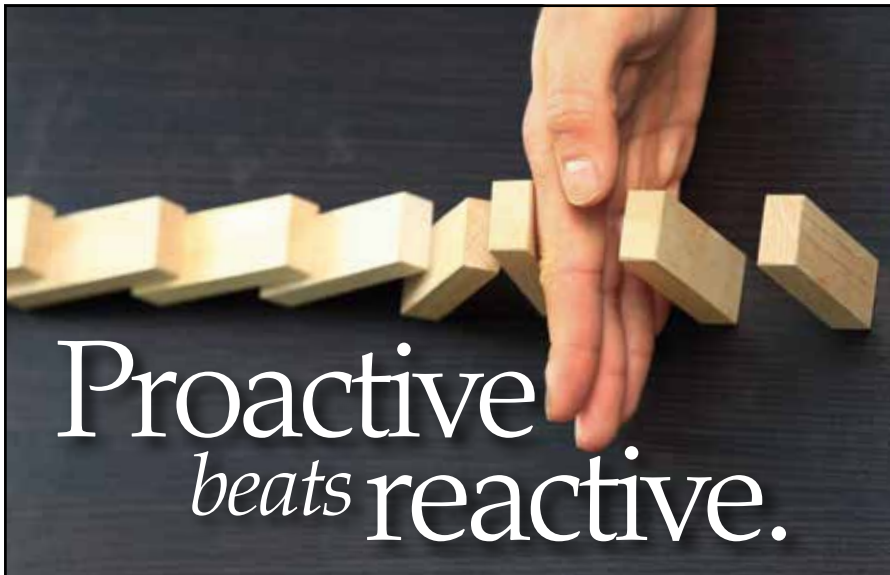
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# PHFA 101



A quick review of PHFA's programs can help counties better assist local residents in need of housing.

**Brian Hudson**  
Executive Director and CEO  
Pennsylvania Housing  
Finance Agencies

**Housing is important to people's personal growth, and it's a key element for the growth of towns and cities, as well.**

**H**ousing is so critical to people's well-being and success in life, because a stable and affordable place to live allows them to pursue other life goals. Years of research show, too, that housing available to people at different income levels is vital for the growth of vibrant communities. So housing is important to people's personal growth, and it's a key element for the growth of towns and cities, as well.

Fortunately, the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agencies (PHFA) has long had a cooperative relationship with counties and local governments across the commonwealth. As a result, many

county leaders and staff are familiar with PHFA housing programs. But the agency's programs evolve from year to year. A good example of that is PHFA's homeownership programs which are continually adapted and improved to meet changing market conditions and a variety of homebuyer' needs.

This article provides a refresher on PHFA's main housing programs. Employees new to county government should find it to be a useful reference in their jobs. But even experienced county employees and government leaders will learn about programs that perhaps they've overlooked or which have evolved over time.

A portion of renters in the state dream about owning their own home but are unaware of PHFA programs that could help them move from renting to owning.

## CALL OR CLICK TO REACH US

Before we jump into our housing programs, we want to share that PHFA now has a Customer Solutions Center with 11 representatives on the telephone, including bilingual staff. This call center was established to help Pennsylvania citizens with their housing questions, but we're happy to field inquiries from county staff, too. When answers about our programs aren't readily available on our website at [www.PHFA.org](http://www.PHFA.org), call our Customer Solutions Center toll-free at 1 (855) U-Are-Home (827-3466) weekdays from 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. Messages are recorded after hours and will be returned the next business day. Now that you know how to easily reach us, let's discuss how we can help with your most common housing challenges.

## HOMEOWNERSHIP

The percentage of people who own homes in Pennsylvania stands at 68.5 percent. A portion of renters in the state dream about owning their own home but are unaware of PHFA programs that could help them move from renting to owning. This is one area where county leaders and staff can help those residents by making them aware that PHFA offers affordable home loan products, plus free homeownership counseling.

### Home loans that produce successful homeowners

Over the years, PHFA has expanded its home loan offerings so that it can help more homebuyers in a variety of situations. Buyers wanting to learn more about the agency's loan program can, of course, read more on our website. But for those wanting one-on-one assistance, they can contact a lender approved by the agency to provide PHFA loans (conveniently listed on our website). These lenders work with homebuyers to get them approved and prepare them for closing. Once the home loan closes, PHFA buys the loan back from the lender and services it from our Harrisburg office for the life of the loan.

We won't go over all the different home loan products offered by PHFA. But what's important to know is that PHFA home loans exist to meet many common buyer situations. For instance, one of the agency's home loans eliminates the need for Private Mortgage Insurance for buyers making a down payment of less than 20 percent. Other home loans exist with different features of benefit to buyers. Our approved lenders, and our Customer Solutions Center representatives, can give more details or provide helpful brochures.



Often the biggest barrier to homeownership is the challenge of saving for down payment and closing costs. Recognizing this, the agency offers a no-interest loan to help people with those costs.

Another popular homebuyer program is called the Mortgage Credit Certificate (MCC). The MCC lets homebuyers deduct a portion of their home loan interest from their income taxes every year and can be used as a dollar-for-dollar match toward their tax liability. So on a 30-year loan the savings can be significant. Homebuyers interested in the MCC must ask about this program early in the buying process, because it cannot be offered once the home loan has closed.

### **Help with septic systems and sewer connections**

With an aging infrastructure, many communities across Pennsylvania are in the process of updating their sewer lines, and some are building municipal sewer systems for the first time. Connections to these sewer systems can be expensive for homeowners. So, too, can be fixes to a home's septic system. Most people don't have money set aside for when this unexpected need arises. That's why PHFA has partnered with another state agency, PENNVEST, to provide affordable loans to help with sewer and septic problems when they occur.

## **CONSUMER COUNSELING AND EDUCATION**

PHFA prides itself on not only providing affordable home loan products but in also creating successful homeowners.

### **No-fee housing counseling**

The most powerful tool for anyone wanting to become a homeowner is an understanding of the homebuying process. Buyers who are knowledgeable are more likely to make sound financial decisions and less likely to get in over their heads with a home loan that upends their family budget. PHFA works with a network of 72 private sector housing counseling agencies that help both renters and buyers make smarter housing decisions. The counseling agencies are located across the state to be conveniently accessible. A search tool on the PHFA website displays counseling agencies available in each county.

## **FORECLOSURE PREVENTION**

Sometimes, for reasons beyond their control—like a medical emergency, or loss of a job—people fall behind on their mortgage. In the early 1980's, it was recognized that short-term help for people who had fallen on hard times could often keep them in their home, benefiting the homeowner and preventing blight from stifling communities. The result was a

foreclosure prevention program still administered today by PHFA.

### **Saving homes, preventing community stagnation**

Many families have limited savings. So when a bad situation happens, their home mortgage can quickly spiral toward foreclosure. The Homeowners' Emergency Mortgage Assistance Program, or HEMAP, was started to address that situation, and it's become a national model for foreclosure prevention. A HEMAP loan can cover past-due mortgage payments and real estate taxes. It's important to note that HEMAP is not a grant; it's a loan that homeowners pay back once they recover from their bad situation. Their repayments help the program to assist even more homeowners by supplementing the funding provided by the state legislature.



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## AFFORDABLE RENTAL HOUSING

A common misperception is that PHFA offers rental subsidies to help low-income families with affordable rental housing. In fact, rental assistance is provided by the federal government through the Department of Housing and Urban Development. But PHFA does have several helpful programs that directly and indirectly help low- and moderate-income renters.

### Stimulating the construction and rehabilitation of affordable apartments

PHFA is involved in affordable rental housing because the marketplace alone is not sufficient to address all the public demand for apartments at different rent levels. Tax credits awarded by PHFA help developers raise the capital needed to finance the construction of apartment buildings with affordable rents. In exchange for tax credits, developers agree to keep rents at lower levels for a set period, usually 30 years.

### Helping renters find affordable apartments

Sometimes affordable rental units are available, but they simply aren't easy to find. A group of state agencies, led by PHFA, oversee an online rental search tool that simplifies the

apartment hunting process. Available at *PAHousingSearch.com*, this web resource includes photos for many of the listings, saving a trip across town to see if an apartment truly is a good match. *PAHousingSearch.com* was relaunched with major updates in October. So if you haven't visited the site recently, do check it out. A separate PAHousingSearch call center for handling specialized rental housing questions is available Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. until 8 p.m. Call 1 (877) 428-8844; English and Spanish-speaking operators can answer renters' questions. Brochures promoting this service are available.

### Supportive housing services

As Pennsylvania's population ages, supportive housing services are becoming more important. These services include things like transportation to a doctor or supermarket, health screenings, income tax preparation, and computer education classes. They help seniors and people with disabilities so they can continue to live independently, which typically promotes better health outcomes and happier lives. That helps taxpayers, too, since it reduces demand for institutional housing. To learn more about available housing services, call PHFA's Customer Solutions Center.

## Housing for people with disabilities

Many people with disabilities want to live on their own. They appreciate the freedom to control their own lives, and with a little assistance many are able to do just fine. PHFA is working with the state Department of Human Services to coordinate rental assistance for Pennsylvanians with disabilities, with funding provided by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. This program is a win-win, since it helps both taxpayers and people who otherwise could not live on their own.

## LET'S CONTINUE OUR HOUSING PARTNERSHIP

For more than 45 years, PHFA has been working with county leaders to improve access to housing that people can afford. You help us promote our services to people who might otherwise never know about the state assistance available to them when they face housing issues. Working together, we can build on our past success of providing county residents with affordable housing solutions. ▾



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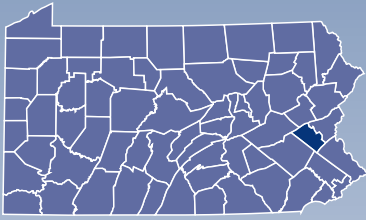
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COUNTY HIGHLIGHT:  
**LEHIGH**

**Joshua Siegel**  
Public Information Officer  
County of Lehigh

Initiatives such as the Whitehall Shadowing program are critical in the age of voter apathy and low-participation in local government, especially among young people.

# Lehigh County Cultivates the Next Generation of **LEADERS**

**W**hen County Executive Phillips Armstrong assumed office, he knew that he wanted to leverage his previous experiences in politics and education to add a different dynamic to his administration. Armstrong, who spent more than 40 years as an educator teaching social studies, had a unique understanding of the importance of connecting local government with the education system. That effort first came to fruition during his tenure as the president of the Whitehall Board of Commissioners.

Under his leadership, Armstrong brought in Whitehall students to shadow and ultimately learn from key elected and appointed officials about the nature of local government. This included seminars with the local police chief and Public Works Department, in addition to a variety of other critical positions. The day concluded with a mock township meeting, with students serving as stand-ins for the positions which they had previously shadowed. This opportunity gave students to apply their recently learned knowledge to contend with a series of simulated real-world issues, from garbage removal to concerns over the expense of a public park.

## **APPRECIATION AND UNDERSTANDING**

The annual event always left students with a deep sense of gratitude and appreciation for local public servants, as well as a deeper understanding of the complexity within their own community. Afterwards, students regularly expressed interest in pursuing careers in local fields such as law enforcement and planning. Initiatives such as the Whitehall Shadowing program are critical in the age of voter apathy and low-participation in local government, especially among young people. In 2016, the average age of a mayoral voter was 57, and the Pew Research Center found that the United States ranks 31st out of 35 countries in voter turnout.



The value of inspiring and educating young men and women about the importance of their government and the impact of local leaders cannot be emphasized enough. Armstrong has carried this passion for education and youth involvement into his time as county executive. One of his first major initiatives was to develop a Youth Government Day. The first one drew nearly thirty-five students, each with an array of different experiences and backgrounds. The day began with the students reviewing a cabinet meeting, with each member explaining the importance of their respective offices. The students heard from the chief fiscal officer, county solicitor, and public defender, as well as the directors from various county departments.

Students then took a tour of the public courthouse to learn about the

local justice system and the courts. The students had the opportunity to meet with a local judge, understand the process of paying court fees, and were exposed to various offices from the District Attorney's Office to the Public Defender's Office. This behind-the-scenes glimpse into vital aspects of county government provided the students with a unique educational opportunity.

### **PERSONALIZING THE EXPERIENCE**

In addition to seeing county government in action, Armstrong also wanted students to have a personalized learning experience with valuable mentoring opportunities. Following the courthouse tour, students shadowed members of the cabinet to learn more about their respective offices. The students

shadowed the county executive, director of administration, chief fiscal officer, and the public defender, finishing with a question and answer period; this gave students the chance to dig deeper into the complexities of governing.

Finally, this learning experience wouldn't have been complete without a practical application phase. As a former teacher, Armstrong wanted the students to apply what they had learned to real world scenarios. The Youth Government Day ended with the students assuming the role of the county commissioners, and holding a simulated meeting where they would pass two resolutions. The first dealt with debtors' prisons and whether there should be fines for those who couldn't afford to pay. The second revolved around firearms on county-owned parks and recreational

## The simulated commissioners meeting gave students an opportunity to deal with critical issues, such as communicating with residents and maintaining professionalism and decorum when faced with strong opposition.

places. The remaining students acted as constituents, fielding a variety of complaints and supporting comments about the resolution.

The simulated commissioners meeting gave students an opportunity to deal with critical issues, such as communicating with residents and maintaining professionalism and decorum when faced with strong opposition. The students found the experience rewarding and fun. They voted on both resolutions and proceeded to discuss the impact and importance of both. Afterwards,

students expressed a great deal of support for the program, especially the commissioner meeting portion. They believed they walked away with a stronger understanding of government and an appreciation for its importance in others' lives.

Given the day's success, Armstrong hopes to make this a yearly event with new students being given the opportunity to participate. Furthermore, Armstrong is looking to expand the program to include a more permanent youth development program. Lehigh County will soon

start the Youth Advisory Council, which will give students opportunity to advise commissioners on youth policy and issues which are important to them. It will also feature a community service aspect which will ask students to come up with idea to positively impact their neighborhoods. Armstrong hopes that programs like these can build the leaders of tomorrow and encourage young people to participate in local government. The results thus far have been extremely positive. ▀



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