



# Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children

Joan L. Benso  
President & CEO

116 Pine Street, Suite 430  
Harrisburg, PA 17101  
[www.papartnerships.org](http://www.papartnerships.org)

David W. Sweet, Esq.  
Board Chairman

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Kathy Geller Myers  
717-236-5680; 717-903-3716 (mobile)  
[kgmyers@papartnerships.org](mailto:kgmyers@papartnerships.org)

### **Report Shows How Counties Fare in Serving Kids in Child Welfare System** *PPC Releases "State of Child Welfare" to Track Progress & Highlight Needs*

(HARRISBURG) Dec. 8, 2009 – Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children (PPC) today released a new report on the performance of Pennsylvania's child welfare system designed to provide data highlighting how counties are doing in meeting the needs of children and families in the child welfare system. The inaugural report establishes baselines this year of various indicators that will measure progress over time as well as shine a light on areas that need improvement.

For the first time, comprehensive data for all 67 counties will help policymakers, children and youth administrators and others invested in the welfare of vulnerable children assess how state and county governments are doing providing safe, stable and permanent families for all children in Pennsylvania. PPC's new report, to be released annually, will take a critical look at measures for every county including number of first-time entries and re-entries into foster care; types of placement including congregate care settings; and length of stay in foster care.

"These indicators were selected as measures for our report because they are the key decision and transition points in the life of a child experiencing the child welfare system," said Joan L. Benso, president and CEO, PA Partnerships for Children (PPC). "The choices we make for children in foster care - such as placing them with a relative, a foster family home or in a congregate setting - affect permanency outcomes. This report sets measures today that will enable us to look back every year and see how we are doing in achieving our goal of a forever family for every child."

"The State of Child Welfare" reveals children are more likely to re-enter foster care after being reunified with their families when they are from urban communities. However, urban communities do a better job than rural counties of placing children who are in foster care with their relatives. Rural communities tend to move their children out of foster care more quickly, with the exception of taking longer than other communities to move children to adoption.

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“Our primary goal as stewards of our most vulnerable population is to ensure every child can live safely with his or her family, but if that isn’t possible, then we must do what we can to find another safe, stable and permanent family for the child as quickly as possible,” Benso said.

The report also examines, by county, repeated child abuse; in-home services for families in crisis; age and race of children in foster care; type of placement setting; reasons children leave foster care, such as adoption or guardianship; and foster care placement stability. The report shows that every county type – rural, rural-mix, urban and urban-mix – has the need and opportunity to improve its planning, service delivery and outcomes for children in foster care.

“Are counties keeping children safe in their homes so fewer children ever have to enter foster care? Are they taking the steps to ensure these children will be reunified safely with their families?”, Benso asked. “These are the types of questions we must ask ourselves and the types of questions we cannot be afraid to answer. Our children are counting on us.”

In addition to the county indicators and data, the report provides public policy recommendations to safely reduce the number of children in foster care and assure a legal and permanent family for every child. The recommendations include, but are not limited to: enacting child welfare financing reform that increases funding for in-home and community-based services that improve child outcomes and family safety; creating a legal means to establish formal and enforceable post-adoption contact agreements between birth and adoptive families in cases deemed appropriate by the courts; and requiring a minimum of three-month permanency review hearings by the courts for all children in foster care.

More information is available online at [http://www.porchlightproject.org/reports\\_and\\_media\\_socw09.shtml](http://www.porchlightproject.org/reports_and_media_socw09.shtml) or by contacting Kathy Geller Myers, PPC Communications Director, at 717-236-5680; 717-903-3716 (cell).

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