

Pennsylvania's Efforts to Better Address Child Abuse Also Must Preserve What Works to Keep Kids from Harm

PA Partnerships for Children Releases 2012 State of Child Welfare Report

(HARRISBURG, PA) Dec. 12, 2012 – As Pennsylvania works to improve its response to child abuse complaints, it also must build on efforts to prevent neglect and abuse and reduce its use of foster care, according to a new statewide report from Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children.

“If done thoughtfully, Pennsylvania can improve its child protection efforts without drawing resources or attention away from efforts that we know are working to keep kids in safe, nurturing homes,” said PPC President and CEO Joan Benso.

PPC's latest annual State of Child Welfare report documents some of the accomplishments of the commonwealth's child welfare system, including a decline in the number of children entering foster care and an ongoing reduction in the overall foster care population. The latest report shows the number of children in foster care statewide fell to 22,443 – down nearly 1,800 from the prior year.

Pennsylvania's approach to foster care emphasizes placing children in family settings – preferably with relatives – rather than relying on group homes or institutions, often termed “congregate care.” Family-focused foster care typically provides a better pathway for foster children to move into permanent families.

Despite the seemingly positive trends in the foster care statistics, there are signs Pennsylvania's efforts to safely reduce foster care may have reached a plateau. Still, Benso noted, Pennsylvania has new tools to continue its progress, most notably permission from the federal government to be more flexible in how the commonwealth spends its child welfare funds – flexibility that will allow for more investments in prevention strategies.

The State of Child Welfare report also stresses the importance of preserving Pennsylvania's “differential response” approach to investigating child abuse – an approach more and more states are implementing because they recognize it is a better method of working with families to ensure children are safe.

The commonwealth's Task Force on Child Protection recently offered numerous recommendations to improve the child welfare system, including some PPC suggested to the panel.

PPC began issuing its annual State of Child Welfare report in 2009 to gauge the performance of Pennsylvania's child welfare system in meeting the needs of the children and families the system serves. The report includes comprehensive data for each of the 67 counties, including information on foster care placements, children leaving or re-entering foster care, and efforts to reunify children with parents or relatives.

The State of Child Welfare statewide report, as well as county reports, can be found online at www.porchlightproject.org.

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