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News for Immediate Release

Sept. 15, 2016

Auditor General DePasquale Encouraged by DHS Efforts to Improve State's Child Abuse Hotline

HARRISBURG – Auditor General Eugene DePasquale today commended the Department of Human Services (DHS) for announcing changes to its operation of ChildLine, the state's hotline for reporting suspected child abuse and neglect.

In May, DePasquale issued an interim audit report after finding more than 42,000 calls to ChildLine went unanswered in 2015.

"I sounded the alarm in May because even one unanswered phone call means there could be a child in a life-threatening situation who needs help," DePasquale said. "I am pleased to hear that DHS took our interim report recommendations seriously and implemented changes that could help save children's lives."

The interim report ([available online here](#)) highlighted four significant matters and made eight recommendations for improvement. The full audit report on ChildLine will be finalized next month and will include additional recommendations for improvement.

The significant matters in the interim report were:

- 22 percent of all calls in 2015 went unanswered,
- ChildLine was constantly understaffed in 2015,
- Nearly one-third of all calls received in 2014 and 2015 were not tracked or documented, and
- Supervisors monitored an extremely small number of calls — only 7, or 0.005 percent — in 2015.

In the interim report, the Department of the Auditor General recommended that DHS:

1. Immediately evaluate and determine the minimum number of staff needed based on call volume and self-service online reporting to ensure all calls received on the hotline are answered by caseworkers and callers are not placed on hold for an unreasonable amount of time, such as no longer than 3.5 minutes.
2. Immediately hire and train additional staff necessary based on the results of the evaluation in Recommendation No. 1, including consideration of turnover.
3. Ensure the hotline is always staffed at or above the minimum staffing levels needed as determined in Recommendation No. 1.
4. Track and document the purpose of all calls received on the hotline, including those not generating referral reports.
5. Consider ways to divert calls not involving allegations of child abuse or neglect from the hotline caseworkers to provide more time to answer calls that do involve allegation of child abuse or neglect, such as:

- Conduct outreach to mandated reporters and the general public to inform that the hotline should be utilized to report suspected child abuse and neglect and provide information as to where calls for other purposes should be made. This outreach can be through DHS' website, developing a resource guide to circulate, media outlets, etc. More specific examples include email blasts with helpful tips and guidelines for child abuse reporting, additional information about training opportunities, and quarterly newsletters posted on DHS' website.
 - Add additional prompts when a call is made to the hotline for purposes other than allegations of child abuse or neglect. Based on the prompts selected, calls other than child abuse or neglect allegations may be diverted to other caseworkers or DHS office separate from the hotline or, perhaps, to a voicemail in which a call may be returned at a later time by the appropriate DHS office separate from the hotline.
6. Develop procedures for supervisory monitoring of calls answered by caseworkers to include number of phone calls to be monitored for each caseworker, how often monitoring will be conducted, and follow-up on corrective actions for caseworkers whose performance is unsatisfactory.
 7. Implement call monitoring procedures developed in Recommendation No. 6 to ensure calls are processed accurately, efficiently, and effectively.
 8. Consider recording hotline calls for training and monitoring purposes to ensure calls are processed properly.

The ChildLine Interim Report of Significant Matters is available online at: www.PaAuditor.gov.

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