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## News for Immediate Release

Dec. 4, 2017

### **Auditor General DePasquale Briefs House Children, Youth Committee about Broken Child-Welfare System**

**HARRISBURG** – Auditor General Eugene DePasquale today presented the following testimony on Pennsylvania’s child-welfare system to members of the House Children and Youth Committee:

**Written Statement of  
Auditor General Eugene A. DePasquale  
Monday, Dec. 4, 2017**

**For the House Children & Youth Committee  
The Honorable Kathy Watson, Majority Chair  
The Honorable Scott Conklin, Minority Chair**

#### **Regarding Pennsylvania’s Child-Welfare System**

Chairwoman Watson, Chairman Conklin, and members of the House Children and Youth Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Pennsylvania’s child-welfare system, specifically state oversight of our county-run children and youth agencies.

#### **Background**

In September, my Department released an [80-page special report titled “State of the Child,”](#) which evaluated how the commonwealth’s child-welfare system is functioning. As part of the year-long review, my team interviewed nearly 130 people involved with all levels of the child-welfare system, from state officials to county agency administrators to families who have been involved with the system.

What I found was appalling. Pennsylvania spent nearly \$2 billion in 2016 to protect children – and \$1 billion of that came directly from state funds – yet 46 children died and 79 nearly died from abuse and neglect. What really concerned me was that nearly half of those children’s families were known to county CYS agencies. Pennsylvania’s child-welfare system is broken. This is not an exaggeration.

Since the report’s release in September, I have visited county CYS agencies and talked with caseworkers, administrators, nonprofit leaders, district attorneys, coroners, county-level officials and more.

It is important to emphasize that I have focused on learning how the opioid crisis is putting yet another strain on CYS caseworkers as they strive to keep Pennsylvania's at-risk children safe. Without exception, caseworkers and others told me that the opioid crisis has dramatically increased caseloads and increasingly jeopardized child safety and well-being. We cannot and should not ignore the opioid scourge as we work to improve the child-welfare system in Pennsylvania.

### Observations

During my review, I determined that there is not enough support for those on the front lines working with at-risk children: CYS caseworkers, who assess children's safety within their families. My report highlighted five interlaced challenges that severely affect caseworkers' ability to do their jobs:

- **Difficulty hiring** enough qualified caseworkers and
- **Inadequate training** for new hires leads to
- Caseworkers who are not equipped to deal with **overbearing caseloads** and tremendous paperwork they must handle.
- Add in **remarkably low pay** and the stress of facing dangerous situations, and the result is
- **Breath-taking turnover rates** — which, research has shown, is much less likely to lead to safe, permanent homes for children in the system.

My report also offered two additional observations:

- Other state-level reviews of the system are currently happening, including the work this committee has been doing since 2016, and
- Other states are dealing with similar challenges and some, such as Florida and Arizona, have taken steps to try to improve their situations.

I focused the report on 13 counties, which were chosen for their demographic representation. In total, these 13 counties cover nearly 6 million people:

- Allegheny,
- Bucks,
- Cambria,
- Centre,
- Crawford,
- Dauphin,
- Delaware,
- Erie,
- Fayette,
- Luzerne,
- Monroe,
- Philadelphia, and
- York.

## **Conclusion**

When a child dies from abuse or neglect, often there is a rush to judge the CYS system and find fault with what caseworkers did. But CYS is not the sole party responsible for keeping children safe. We are all ultimately responsible for the health and well-being of our children, and as a society our goal must be clear: No child should ever be mistreated, because one abused child is one too many.

Chairwoman Watson, Chairman Conklin, and members of the committee, this brief statement is simply the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the problems with Pennsylvania's child-welfare system. Thank you for the opportunity to present an overview of my report. I am happy to answer any questions.

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