



**Testimony of County Executive Rich Fitzgerald to the Senate of Pennsylvania
Joint Public Hearing on the Unification of Health and Human Services
Monday, May 1, 2017 – University of Pittsburgh’s William Pitt Union**

Good morning, Senators. My name is Rich Fitzgerald and I am the County Executive here in Allegheny County. On behalf of our nearly 1.3 million residents, I welcome you to Allegheny County and one of our great institutions, the University of Pittsburgh.

Thank you for inviting me to participate in today’s joint public hearing to consider the impact of the proposed consolidation of the Departments of Health, Human Services, Aging and Drug & Alcohol Programs into a unified Department of Health and Human Services. I am grateful that you are doing your due diligence on this issue and talking with stakeholders, such as Allegheny County, about the impact this proposal would have on our residents.

As you’re probably aware, Allegheny County is one of three counties which has already gone through a consolidation of its programs – an effort which was begun in 1995 and took effect in January 1997.

Our current county government - home rule with an elected county executive, an elected county council and an appointed county manager – began in January 2000. Many of us who are in elected office now were not part of that effort, but thanks to the sheer volume of recognition and accolades for the work the Department of Human Services has done, we know much of its history and efforts.

For instance, our Department of Human Services (DHS) has reduced foster placements and created greater permanency for children. DHS continues to seek and establish innovative, effective alternatives and follow-up for incarceration, along with several other departments in county government. DHS has also expanded opportunities for aging in place, and provided community-based services in less restrictive settings for treating behavioral and developmental health issues. There has also been a clear message from those who were involved with each of these accomplishments, that these successes would not have been possible without the reorganization that was done.

Like the Governor’s proposal, Allegheny County combined four separate departments into a new, consolidated department that shared support functions and a common database of client services and community needs. Specifically, child protective services; aging; employment and other safety net services; and mental health, mental retardation, drug & alcohol and homelessness services were combined. The county also tapped the Child Welfare Director, Marc Cherna, to expand his duties to become the first director of the new department.

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There were a number of immediate benefits from that effort:

- Integrated fiscal and budgetary functions allowed the county to maximize and leverage resources in 194 funding streams in order to facilitate the use of unrestricted funds where they are most needed
- Over 350 service providers were connected through automated two-way communication with one another, with DHS and with the central database
- Programs and staff were consolidated in four locations, reducing office space by 17,000 square feet and streamlining administrative procedures and processes to achieve a stronger, more centralized management system; the improved communication and collaboration among the various service areas has made services and programs easier for clients to find and have access to
- Cut transaction time, through automation, for personnel paperwork and payment time for vendors; additionally, the time needed to execute a contract was cut almost in half and related cost reductions were seen with a central process for hiring, payments, contracts, and audits.

We have also increased the number of people we are serving, and we are providing those services in settings that are more accessible and in ways that foster independence and permanency and address the totality of an individual's or a family's needs. Through technology we've established greater fiscal and qualitative accountability. And we've accomplished these efficiencies by consolidating administrative functions and data management, as well as by the physical relocation of staff and services.

Based on our own experiences, and having heard the proposal for the unification of the Commonwealth's Health and Human Services, I wholeheartedly endorse the proposal put forth by Governor Wolf. While there are always concerns and challenges with change, a unified department will be able to change for the better, and organize service delivery for our residents. One point of access is imperative to the service delivery that is integral to the work of the department, particularly when a person may not know which department or agency may provide the assistance that he or she needs. That reorganization will eliminate confusion, streamline the effectiveness and efficiency of services, and improve quality and customer service.

The mission of the county's Department of Human Services is to create an accessible, culturally competent, integrated and comprehensive human services system that insures individually tailored, seamless and holistic services to county residents, particularly those residents who are the most vulnerable. With a coordinated and unified delivery system, we have great success in meeting those goals and ensuring that our residents receive the services that they need.

Each year, we serve over 200,000 residents through our system with a budget of over \$872 million and some 138 funding sources, each with separate laws, regulations and reporting requirements. We could not provide the level of service and meet the needs of this community without the consolidation that was done in the late 90s.

I have no doubt that such action by this Commonwealth could result in similar, life-changing improvements that would benefit all residents of the Commonwealth. I urge each of you to support Governor Wolf's proposal, and to move forward with the unification of the departments of Health and Human Services.