

April 13, 2017

Good Afternoon!

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George J. Vogel, Jr.
Executive Director

Thank you for allowing me to present testimony with regard to the consolidation of the Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs into the Department of Health and Human Services. My name is George Vogel and I present my remarks based on over 4 decades of experience as Executive Director of the Council on Chemical Abuse, the Single County Authority for Berks County, responsible for the planning, development and implementation of county-wide services, intended to both prevent and treat addiction. In my position, I have witnessed our Single State Agency mature and evolve, starting out as the Governor's Council on Drug and Alcohol Abuse, to the Office of Drug and Alcohol Programs (under the Department of Health), to the Bureau of Drug and Alcohol Programs in the Department of Health, to a stand-alone Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs, created by Act 50 of 2010. With a Department, for the first time the scope of prevention, treatment and recovery services had a Secretary, a public face, and a single voice that spoke clearly and decisively on statewide issues and initiatives related to substance use. A voice that was no longer muted and/or filtered by being buried in the bureaucracy of another department. Placing it under the Department of Health and Human Services is being justified by an insignificant cost savings to the overall state budget. "Deprioritizing" substance use issues at a time when opioid deaths are at an all-time high, just doesn't make sense.

In a "super Department" which covers a multitude of various areas, where will the leadership for substance use issues come from? Where will the leadership come from when parents ask how can we keep our children safe? Where will the leadership come from when communities – your constituents – demand that remedies be found for not just heroin and opiates, but an array of problems related to substance use such as DUI, crime, homelessness, the list goes on and on. WILL this leadership come from a lower level bureaucrat fighting to get the attention of a Secretary who is balancing the priorities of welfare, health and aging?

Whether it is on the front page of the newspaper or not, substance use issues are always affecting our society. We know the "popular" substances being used can be cyclical and change over time. Today it is opiates; next year's crisis may be methamphetamines, synthetic drugs or Cocaine. Who

knows? What we do know is that we will need strong and focused leadership to address these issues.

So how do we know that a Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs is needed to effectively address substance abuse problems? In its short existence DDAP, being led by a Secretary, has already made a profound impact. Allow me to cite some examples where immediate and decisive actions were taken by the Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs:

- MA/Jail Project: Initiative expedited the processing of Medicaid benefits for inmates being released from county jails allowing them to be immediately transferred to an addiction residential treatment facility. Previous "wait time" to process such inmates into treatment facilities averaged 6 weeks. There was a local financial benefit of approximately \$2 million/year. But more importantly, the benefit of this program is that over the past three fiscal years, 560 individuals in our County prison were able to secure appropriate levels of treatment. While the project involves multi-agency cooperation, this program came about primarily through the strong leadership and the high profile visibility of the Secretary of Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs. If I am not mistaken, the Secretary attended our first meeting.
- Warm Hand Off: From overdose to treatment and a near death experience to an opportunity to restore one's life, this program is a coordinated effort between the Emergency Department at Reading Hospital, the 9th busiest emergency room in the United States, and the Treatment Access and Services Center, the licensed central intake for drug and alcohol services for Berks County. This program offers intervention at a most opportune time by reaching overdose survivors and immediately engaging them into appropriate addiction treatment. Our Warm Hand Off program has been operational for approximately 16 months with 75% of survivors accepting treatment. The value of this service is measured in lives as well as reducing repeated Emergency Room admissions.
- The past Secretary worked hard at the rapid expansion in communities of take back boxes to dispose of unused medication. Berks, currently has 25 drop boxes and we are not done.
- Working collaboratively with Dr. Rachel Levine, Pennsylvania's Physician General, DDAP's Secretary was instrumental in the needed revision of prescription guidelines.

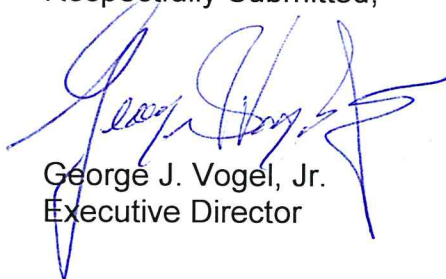
These initiatives are only a few examples of how with laser accuracy, life-saving services can be provided to ailing people and/or communities

of Pennsylvania. When you combine entities with various mandates and missions within one Department, you lose singularity of purpose. Further, in the case of drug and alcohol, you lose an impactful voice that sends a powerful message for and to the thousands of Pennsylvanians affected directly or indirectly by addiction. Is a bigger department better? No, a bigger department is simply bigger. A more complicated, multi-layered organizational chart does not guarantee quality.

In 2010, through overwhelmingly bi-partisan support, the Pennsylvania Legislature was right in establishing the Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs. There was then, and there is now a need for a strong voice at the highest level of state government to focus on substance use issues. This leadership is needed to coordinate with other Departments such as Human Services, Education, Health, Aging, Corrections to assure that there is a consistent and effective approach to addressing substance use issues. This leadership also sends a message to the citizens of Pennsylvania that their state government recognizes the importance of addressing addiction. The cost savings in tax payer money is evident; the savings in human suffering is immeasurable. The citizens of Berks County, and all of Pennsylvania, need and deserve a Department of Drug and Alcohol Program.

Thank you.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "George J. Vogel, Jr.", is written over the typed name and title.

George J. Vogel, Jr.
Executive Director