

Confirmation Hearing Testimony

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Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee

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pennsylvania
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

Good morning Chairwomen Vance and Kitchen, members of the Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee and staff. Thank you for the opportunity to come before you today as I seek your approval for my appointment as secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (Department).

I have had the pleasure of meeting with each of you throughout the confirmation process. I have shared with you my experience in human services, my views of how government should function, and my vision for the Department. Today I would like to reiterate my commitment to providing the right services, in the right way, at the right time to the people of Pennsylvania.

As I approach decision making, I always try to ask myself a simple question, “Does this decision treat the families we serve the way that we would like our own family members to be treated if they faced similar circumstances?” By doing that, I hope that I can force myself to understand the complexity of the issue before me and resist the natural temptation to look at the issue as either “black or white”. I often find that, if we instead can see the “grey” that embodies the complexities of all of our lives, we have the best chance to help the families we serve.

Throughout my career I have tried to bring that mindset to the table. As the deputy managing director of the City of Philadelphia, I quickly learned that issues are rarely black or white. To accomplish anything, we had to bring our stakeholders to the table and be willing to listen. I have always said that we will not always agree on everything, but we must come to the table in good faith and with a desire to do the right thing for the people we serve.

In 2005, I became the executive deputy secretary for the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare. I was able to bring my management skills to the Department and be on the front line of many major accomplishments including modernizing and strengthening the licensing of

personal care homes and consolidation and streamlining of program integrity efforts for the Department.

For the past four years, I had the opportunity to serve as the deputy chief of staff and then the secretary of the Department of Human Resources for the state of Maryland. To make a comparison to Pennsylvania, the Department of Human Resources oversaw similar services as the Office of Children, Youth and Families and the Office of Income Maintenance. We successfully transitioned 24,000 people from welfare-to-work, safely reduced the number of children in foster care to the lowest in 25 years, and increased the number of children served in family settings to the highest ever. We also set state records for the most child support collected and decreased Maryland's food stamp error rate by 70 percent.

While there, I also learned that the problems facing Maryland are not much different than the problems we face in Pennsylvania. To be accountable to the people of Pennsylvania, we must ensure that individuals have the skills and job opportunities to transition from welfare to independence. We must focus on the safety of our children and rely on natural supports to reduce the number of children in foster care placements. And we must cut through government red tape to provide benefits in a timely manner to those who are eligible. I am also focused on improving the quality of the services the Department provides across the board – from ensuring we are making people who rely on Medicaid coverage healthier to increasing the number of children in high-quality early care and education settings.

When Governor Wolf asked me to serve as the secretary of the Department, I was excited, humbled, and overwhelmed. As you know, the Department is responsible for the oversight of a breadth of services, many of which are a critical safety net for individuals and families in need. The Department provided services to 2.72 million Pennsylvanians as of

December 2014, or 21.2 percent of the total population, and the Department's budget accounts for 40 percent of the Commonwealth's General Fund. The work we do is important. It matters to the people of Pennsylvania and we must do it right.

Returning to the Department I found that so many things have changed. There's the most obvious change from the Department of Public Welfare to the Department of Human Services. There are also many things that haven't changed. The staff still has a passion for improving the lives of Pennsylvanians. The mission of the Department still has an emphasis on the safety, independence and well-being of the individuals we serve. But there is definitely change that must occur. We can no longer do the status quo. As the Governor said, "We need to think differently and do things differently," and I am bringing a different mindset to the Department.

The Department must focus on initiatives which will improve the quality of services provided, help serve more people in the community and ensure there is accountability for the funds spent. And with that perspective in mind, my goals for the Department include:

- Successfully completing Governor's Wolf Medicaid expansion plan;
- Focusing programs on quality and outcomes and away from simple provision of services;
- Improving the quality and availability of community-based services so that more people living with mental illness, intellectual disabilities and autism can live in the community;
- Rebalancing the long-term living system so that more people can take advantage of home and community-based services;
- Helping more individuals make the transition from welfare to work;
- Serving children in the child welfare system in a family setting wherever possible, and helping them successfully transition to adulthood; and
- Improving the quality and efficiency of early care and education services.

To accomplish these goals, we had to hit the ground running. In the first 100 days of this administration, we have already accomplished so much. When I walked in the door, individuals in behavioral health treatment were stuck in limbo between Medicaid and the Private Coverage Option – at risk of not receiving needed treatment. We reacted quickly, by adding staff to fix the problem and successfully transitioning all identified individuals back to Medicaid, so they were not negatively impacted.

With the passage of 23 new child welfare bills, our ChildLine hotline and clearance unit experienced a significant surge in calls, reports, and requests for clearances. Child Abuse History Clearances were taking as long as 26 days to process. We clearly needed more resources and staff throughout the Department and the Commonwealth stepped up to help. Today, I am proud to announce that we are at a maximum of 10 days for clearances, well under the 14-day statutory mandate.

Thank you for this opportunity to share my previous experience and my vision for the Department. Together, I believe we can accomplish amazing things for the people of Pennsylvania. I look forward to working with you as we fight the status quo together.