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STATE UPDATE



New State Budget Has Wins for PA Kids

On June 30, less than two hours before the new fiscal year began, Gov. Tom Corbett signed into law a \$28.4 billion spending plan for fiscal 2013-14 that begins moving the commonwealth in the right direction when it comes to investments in children.

Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children President and CEO Joan Benso called the new budget “a hopeful sign that state policymakers are beginning to prioritize common-sense investments in our kids.”

“This budget invests more in high-quality early learning programs and child care for working families, increases funding for basic education and makes a stronger commitment to enroll more children in health insurance,” Benso said. “Now that we’ve begun boosting our investments in the commonwealth’s nearly 2.8 million children, the challenge will be to continue that momentum in future years and not backslide on our commitment to kids.”

Under the newly enacted budget:

- Basic education funding increases to \$5.526 billion – \$122.5 million more than last year and about \$32.5 million more than the governor sought in his initial budget proposal. A significant portion of the increase, \$22.5 million, is allocated for financially distressed school districts.

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Joan L. Benso, President & CEO.



- *The Accountability Block Grant (ABG) program will remain funded at \$100 million. Since 2004-05, the ABG program has been used by many school districts to finance full-day kindergarten programs.*
- *Special education funding will remain level-funded for the fifth year in a row at \$1.027 billion, although a commission to review the special education formula has begun its deliberation process and will issue a report by Nov. 30 with recommendations on how the distribution of special education funding could be improved.*
- *Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts is funded at \$87.28 million – \$4.5 million more than the 2012-13 budget.*
- *Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program is funded at \$39.18 million, an additional \$1.9 million over the 2012-13 budget.*
- *Child care services is funded at \$155.67 million, about \$14.3 million more than last year and more than double the \$7.1 million increase the governor initially sought.*
- *Child care assistance is funded at nearly \$152.61 million.*
- *Nurse-Family Partnerships is level-funded at \$11.978 million for the fifth year in a row.*
- *Funding for the state’s Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) increases by about \$9.5 million, including funding that will be used for outreach and enrollment of uninsured kids.*
- *Funding for county child welfare services is \$1.055 billion, an increase of \$15 million over last year.*

Within days after the budget bill was signed, lawmakers approved several budget-related measures, including omnibus bills related to the Tax Code, School Code and Welfare Code. The Welfare Code bill, in particular, contained an important provision that PPC championed to help foster children. That provision is detailed below.

‘Family Finding’ Measure Adopted

Among the legal changes approved by the General Assembly in the Welfare Code ([House Bill 1075](#)) is an effort to promote “family finding” in the state’s foster care system.

Family finding involves a process of searching for, identifying and engaging the relatives – or even close family friends – of children who have been removed from their homes and placed into foster care or whose immediate families are receiving services from the county’s children and youth agency. Involving extended family as part of a child’s support system is better for the child, in part because we know children are best cared for within their families and communities.

“The General Assembly is to be congratulated for advancing this important piece of legislation during a busy budget season, and Rep. Dan Moul in particular should be commended for his hard work in pursuing enactment of family finding,” said PPC President and CEO Joan Benso. Rep. Moul (R-Adams) has spent nearly three years working to advance the measure.

Unfortunately, a companion effort ([House Bill 1076](#)) called “family conferencing” did not make it to the governor’s desk before the summer legislative recess, but PPC is hopeful the measure could receive consideration this fall.



Family conferencing builds off of family finding in that once a child's extended support system is identified, child welfare officials can invite family members to a conference or meeting where everyone works together to develop a plan to support the children and family. The conferencing process emphasizes the natural supports and resources that families have, prompting those families to take the lead on developing a plan to promote the safety and well-being of the children involved. This is a more lasting, sustainable approach than expecting a child welfare agency to push short-term interventions on a family and expect long-term benefits.

You can learn more by reading PPC's fact sheets on [family finding](#) and [family conferencing](#).

A Look Ahead To Fall Session

Several important issues that impact children will be awaiting action by the General Assembly when lawmakers return in September. They include:

Medicaid Expansion – Despite a strong bi-partisan effort in the Senate, legislation that would make more low-income adults eligible for Medicaid fell short of reaching the governor's desk, after House Republicans stripped expansion language from a Senate-approved version of the Welfare Code.

Rep. Gene DiGirolamo (R-Bucks) made a last-ditch effort to save the Medicaid expansion language through a procedural maneuver during House debate, but his effort failed. DiGirolamo made an impassioned plea to his fellow House Republicans to enact expansion, saying, "I believe from the bottom of my heart this is absolutely the right thing to do."

PPC supports expanding Medicaid coverage to more low-income adults as a way to reach the commonwealth's 148,000 uninsured children. The Georgetown Center for Children and Families estimates there are about 274,000 uninsured Pennsylvania parents – and about 131,000 of those uninsured parents would qualify for Medicaid if Pennsylvania were to expand coverage. This could help cover more kids because research shows insured parents are more likely to obtain health insurance coverage for their children.

CHIP Reauthorization – A bill that would extend the life of Pennsylvania's Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) awaits action. [House Bill 108](#), which extends CHIP through 2015, was approved unanimously in the House and awaits a Senate vote. More than 187,000 Pennsylvania children now benefit from CHIP, which provides health insurance to all uninsured children and teens who are not eligible for or enrolled in Medical Assistance. Without renewal, Pennsylvania's CHIP program, created in 1992, would expire at the end of this year.

PPC strongly supports reauthorizing CHIP.

Child Protection Measures – A six-bill package to improve Pennsylvania's child abuse laws began moving in the House in June and will be on the agenda for further action this fall. The bills, based on recommendations from the state's Task Force on Child Protection, include:

- [House Bill 430 \(P.N. 2007\)](#) – *Authorizes the reporting of child abuse through an advanced technology system. This legislation eliminates chain of command reporting and establishes a direct child abuse reporting structure. (sponsored by Rep. Kathy Watson – Bucks)*
- [House Bill 433 \(P.N. 2008\)](#) – *Establishes a higher evidentiary threshold (clear and convincing*

evidence) for appeals of indicated determinations of child abuse. The bill also requires supervisor/solicitor sign-off on indicated reports of child abuse. (sponsored by Rep. Ryan Aument – Lancaster)

- [House Bill 434 \(P.N. 2009\)](#) – Repeals Pennsylvania’s separate standard of “student abuse” and establishes clearance requirements for school employees. (sponsored by Rep. David Maloney – Berks)
- [House Bill 435 \(P.N. 2010\)](#) – Improves employment ban requirements, self-reporting, and additional clearance requirement beyond current law for employees of other child-serving institutions and volunteers (non-school employees). (sponsored by Rep. Dan Moul – Adams)
- [House Bill 436 \(P.N. 2011\)](#) – Expands list of those designated as mandated reporters. (sponsored by Rep. Todd Stephens – Montgomery)
- [House Bill 726 \(P.N. 2012\)](#) – Includes a new, more expansive definition of child abuse that improves the functional clarity and application of the law by eliminating the “severe pain” threshold, incorporating the standards of culpability and certain “per se” acts that constitute child abuse. In addition, the bill would expand the list of individuals defined as perpetrators of child abuse. (sponsored by Rep. Scott Petri – Bucks)

Additionally, the Senate has its own package of child protection bills which are likely to receive consideration in the fall. Several of the education-related bills their package received consideration by the full Senate or initial committee consideration prior to the summer recess. One of the bills was [Senate Bill 31](#), sponsored by Sen. Wayne Fontana (D-Allegheny), which would also eliminated the separate standard of “student abuse” for Pennsylvania educators.

U.N. Honors Philly DHS for Public Service

The Philadelphia Department of Human Services (DHS) was recently honored by the United Nations for its work to improve the oversight of families and children in its care.

On June 12, DHS was awarded second place honors in the [2013 United Nations Public Service Award](#), in the category of improving the delivery of public services. More than 600 organizations from 82 countries applied for the U.N. Public Service Award, and DHS was among just 47 winners worldwide and the only North American entity to receive an award this year.

“Over the last six years, DHS has made critical, systemic changes to improve the way it provides services and strengthen its accountability,” [Mayor Michael A. Nutter said](#). “DHS is truly deserving of this prestigious award.”

DHS was nominated for the award by Casey Family Programs with recommendations submitted by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and Supreme Court of Pennsylvania Justice Max Baer.

William Bell, president and CEO of Casey Family Programs, said of the award: “Casey Family Programs is honored to congratulate Mayor Nutter and the City of Philadelphia on this prestigious award. This is one more affirmation that children in Philadelphia are in good hands.”



CHIP/MA Update

CHIP enrollment increased from 187,034 in May to 187,434 in June. There were 1,076,055 children enrolled in Medicaid in May. June Medicaid enrollment figures were not yet available when this edition of Capitol Watch was published.

Revenue Update

Pennsylvania collected \$2.7 billion in General Fund revenue in June, which was \$45.4 million — or 1.7 percent — less than anticipated. Fiscal year 2012-13 General Fund collections totaled \$28.6 billion, which was \$56.9 million — or 0.2 percent — above estimate. The fiscal year ended June 30.

Mackereth Confirmed As DPW Secretary

Beverly D. Mackereth's nomination to head the Department of Public Welfare was unanimously approved by the state Senate on June 25.

Gov. Tom Corbett nominated Mackereth to head the state's largest agency on April 30, following the resignation of former Secretary Gary Alexander. Mackereth had previously served as DPW's deputy secretary for the Office of Children, Youth and Families since November 2011. She also served eight years as a Republican in the state House of Representatives representing a district in York County and as executive director of York County Human Services.



Beverly Mackereth

FEDERAL UPDATE

Join the July 8 Virtual Rally4Babies

Birth to age 3 is the peak age for brain development and learning. Consider this: About 700 new neural connections form every second during the first three years of a child's life, making it the most crucial time for developing critical functions such as hearing, language and cognition.

While it's an optimal time for learning, not every child reaps the full benefits of this landmark phase of development. Without the chance to participate in high-quality early childhood development and learning programs, gaps can appear early — sometimes even before a child's first birthday. That means by the time some children reach preschool, they already are playing catch-up with their peers.



The good news is there are a number of high-quality programs and services in place to provide positive early opportunities for children birth to age 5, including child care, pre-kindergarten, early intervention and home visiting. We need our elected leaders to take the lead and adequately fund them by expanding investments in early learning that starts at birth.

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Parents and experts in the early childhood field across the country are urging President Obama and Congress to expand early learning opportunities for infants and toddlers, as well as young children in preschool. You can lend your voice to this important effort.

Join the [Rally4Babies](#) on **Monday, July 8 at 2:00 EST** to show your support for our youngest children. The event will be hosted online at [Google Hangout on Air](#), and details and updates are being posted on [rally4babies.org](#).

Connect live with keynote speakers, including U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, actor and Save the Children artist ambassador Jennifer Garner, children's musician Laurie Berkner, and Alma Powell, chair of the Board of America's Promise Alliance. The rally will be hosted by journalist Soledad O'Brien. It is going to be a fantastic event that you can join from the comfort of your office or home.

When infants and toddlers get a strong start, our nation prospers. Learning happens from the start – and so should our investments in children.

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