

State Rep. Pam DeLissio

Minority Chair / Children and Youth Committee



Dear Colleagues,

As minority chair of the House Children and Youth Committee, I want to reach out and express how thrilled I am to be working with you to put our children first.

Since the start of the 2021/22 legislative session, we have hit the ground running. In an effort to keep everyone updated about what's going on in the committee, I will be sending out a monthly email to Democratic members and stakeholders that includes the latest happenings in Harrisburg along with other relevant information related to the committee.

COMMITTEE MEETING RECAP



State of the Child Welfare System – February 25, 2021

With so many new members to the committee, our first hearing provided everyone an overview of Pennsylvania's child welfare system.

We heard testimony from the:

- Office of Children, Youth and Families.
- Pennsylvania Children and Youth Administrators Association.
- Bureau of Family and Child Services.
- Cumberland County Court of Common Pleas.

Each presenter offered significant insight into the commonwealth's state supervised and county administered system, (all 67 counties have their own Children and Youth Agency) the critical role the courts play, the importance of ChildLine and the need to connect child caseworkers with additional support.

COVID-19's Impact on Child Care – March 8, 2021

We brought experts together to help us better understand what the legislature can do to help keep quality childcare services available during the COVID-19 pandemic. We heard from the:

- **Office of Child Development:** discussed the financial relief available and how federal dollars are awarded to childcare facilities.
- **Pennsylvania Child Care Association:** stressed staff turnover has been exacerbated during COVID-19 and the inability to attract new hires continues impacting providers' ability to operate efficiently.

We also heard testimony from the directors of Kinder Academy in Philadelphia and Little Learners Child Development Center in Harrisburg who gave us differing opinions of the [Keystone STARS Program](#).

Family First Preventative Services Act – March 17, 2021

We educated members on Pennsylvania's transition to the federal historic, landmark Family First Preventative Services act of 2018 and heard from:

- **Casey Family Programs:** testified Family First shifts federal funding from congregate care, like group homes, and reimburses states for certain evidence-based, preventative services to help keep children at risk of entering the child welfare system with their families
- **The Office of Children and Youth:** explained Pennsylvania has seen a 20% reduction in congregate settings in the past two years. However, while Family First gives the commonwealth the opportunity to draw down on federal prevention dollars, it comes at a loss for youth in congregate care facilities. The commonwealth will be sending its prevention plan for approval in October of this year.

We also heard perspectives from the Allegheny County Children, Families and Youth and the Luzerne County Children and Youth Services.

Voting Meeting – March 24, 2021

During the first voting meeting of 2021, the committee considered two bills:

- **H.B. 954**: would allow law enforcement agencies to share investigative information related to child abuse cases with children and youth agencies for investigation purposes, child advocacy centers to support the investigation, and other authorized entities who can use the material to collectively help in investigations
- Passed the House unanimously (201-0)
- **H.B. 200**: would qualify children for screening and if needed for early intervention services who are born to mothers considered to be high risk of postpartum depression.
- Passed the committee (24 – 1)

You can find committee updates and resources, including hearing testimony, [online here](#).

CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION MONTH



April is child abuse prevention month – a reminder that everyone should know the signs of child abuse, how to prevent it and stop it. If you suspect child abuse, contact ChildLine immediately at 1-800-932-0313.

Here are resources that are available to help protect our kids:

- <https://www.preventchildabusepa.org/>
 - <https://www.childhelp.org/states/pennsylvania/>
 - <https://www.dhs.pa.gov/KeepKidsSafe/Resources/Pages/default.aspx>
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UNDERSTANDING POVERTY VS. ABUSE



While it's important to know the signs of child abuse, it's also crucial to recognize the difference between child neglect because of abuse and neglect because of poverty.

According to the Center for American Progress, [nearly 11 million children – or 1 in 7 kids – are living in poverty across the country](#). The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the issue, leaving parents and caregivers unemployed and struggling to support their families.

A child who appears unhealthy and mistreated may not always be a victim of physical or mental harm but the result of financial hardships at home. When we're working to create solutions, factoring in the social detriments of health is a critical part in keeping our young people safe.

Policies that include efforts to provide good paying jobs, quality housing and educational opportunities, and ample access to food ultimately helps improve the well-being of our most vulnerable children.

I look to expand upon these social determinants of health in future committee hearings and welcome your feedback on this topic.

RESTORING DIGNITY TO INCARCERATED PARENTS



The House Democratic Policy Committee hosted a virtual roundtable discussion in March, focusing on incarcerated parents and the impact incarceration has on their families – especially children.

The conversation brought together advocates and formerly incarcerated individuals who shared their personal stories along with the trauma family separation has on young people.

[You can watch a video of the discussion here](#) and [read testimony from participants here](#).

OTHER BILLS REFERRED TO THE CHILDREN AND YOUTH COMMITTEE

[H.B. 764: Provisional Hiring Parity Legislation](#)

[H.B. 631: Keys to Independence for Foster Youth Age 16-21](#)

[H.B. 369: COVID-19: Support for Frontline Workers](#)

[H.B. 628: Student Loan Forgiveness for Child Welfare Workers](#)

[H.B. 253: Establishing a Task Force on Opioid Abuse Epidemic's Impact on Infants and Children](#)

[H.B. 159: Child Abuse Reporting and Military Personnel](#)

[H.B. 1155: Exempts public preschool recreation programs from the requirement to be certified by the Department of Human Services as child care facilities by specifically excluding such programs from the definition of child day care center.](#)

GETTING TO KNOW YOU



Each month, I will spotlight members of the Children and Youth Committee so you can get to know them better. First up is state Rep. Bridget Kosierowski, D- Lackawanna.

A loving mother of four, Rep. Kosierowski helped her son Jake through his brave battle with Leukemia who has been in remission since he was ten.

She spent her professional life as a registered nurse and is currently playing a critical role in ensuring Pennsylvanians receive the COVID-19 vaccine as a member of Gov. Tom Wolf's COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force.

Her background in health care along with her passion for the well-being of children makes her a great addition to this committee.

You can [read more about Rep. Kosierowski's story here.](#)

HAVE A QUESTION?

If you have any questions or would like to share ideas for the Children and Youth Committee, feel free to email our executive director Camila Horst at chorst@pahouse.net.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cam". The letter "C" is large and loops around the "a", and "m" follows in a cursive style.