

## Inside This Issue

Children in Foster Care Act Passes the House .....	1
More Approval on Other Foster Care Bills .....	2
House Approves Bill Requiring Dropout Data Collection System .....	3
Zahorchak Leaves for Allentown SD; Rendell Nominates Gluck to Head PDE .....	3
Permanency Improves Lives and Saves Money, Says PA Chief Justice .....	3
Job Readiness Summit Held on April 22 .....	4
CHIP Applicants Must Confirm Citizenship, ID .....	5
State Revenue Update .....	5
CHIP Enrollment .....	5
<b>FEDERAL UPDATE</b>	
Duncan: Emergency Funds Needed to Fill Education Budget Holes .....	6
Congress Extends 2009 Poverty Guidelines to End of May .....	6
Senate Budget Committee Passes 2011 Budget Resolution .....	6
Still Waiting for Extension of Federal Aid to States.....	7
May is National Foster Care Month ....	7

## State Update

### Children in Foster Care Act Passes the House

Children in foster care would be informed of their rights, and the child welfare system would become more transparent, under House Bill 2338, the Children in Foster Care Act. The bill was approved by the House Children and Youth Committee April 21 and then by the full House of Representatives May 4. The bill received overwhelming support in the House by a vote of 192-0 on final passage.

Currently, requirements for children's care – including the basic protections and requirements for children in foster care to have their basic needs met – are scattered among an array of statutes, regulations and policy bulletins. The Children in Foster Care Act, sponsored by Rep. Phyllis Mundy (D-Luzerne), would compile those laws, regulations and policies and mandate that information pertaining to the basic needs and requirements of kids in the system is provided consistently to every foster child and caregiver.

The bill would notify foster children, resource parents, and birth parents that children have the opportunity to contact their attorney or guardian ad litem, notice of their court hearings, education stability, access to necessary health services, consent to medical and mental health treatment consistent with current law, permission to participate in religious observances, permission to visit and have contact with family, and more.

“Ensuring that children, birth and resource families and other providers are informed of these legal requirements for children in foster care will help eliminate confusion and improve the transparency and consistency of care and services across Pennsylvania's 67 counties,” said members of the Porch Light Project Leadership Council in communications to the members of the House. “House Bill 2338 offers Pennsylvania a unique opportunity to improve the services provided to children in foster care, with no new additional state costs, simply by ensuring that they – the consumers of the system – are presented with information related to the requirements of their care.”

Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children commended Rep. Mundy, the bill's cosponsors and all of the members of the House who supported House Bill 2338.

*continued on next page*



“They say that knowledge is power,” said PPC President and CEO Joan L. Benso. “Foster children are just about the most powerless people in our society, constantly buffeted by forces beyond their control. However, the Children in Foster Care Act would improve their lives by giving them the knowledge and information to be their own best advocate while they are in care.”

By collecting the patchwork of statutes into one document, the bill would also diminish confusion among caseworkers and resource families about their responsibilities, Benso said.

### **More Approval on Other Foster Care Bills**

The House Children and Youth Committee approved House Bills 2297 and 2258 in April, which would align state law with the federal Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008.

House Bill 2297, sponsored by Chairwoman Louise Williams Bishop (D-Philadelphia), would inform youth that they can stay in foster care until age 21 and can petition to return to foster care if they’ve left after 18. Additionally, the bill would provide that all youth aging out of foster care would be provided with a transition plan prior to their exit.

Putting the measure in place would allow Pennsylvania to draw down federal funding to finance the extension of youth in the system, Bishop said.

House Bill 2258, sponsored by Rep. Tim Briggs (D-Montgomery), would provide court oversight of sibling placement and visitation to ensure that county agencies make reasonable efforts to place siblings together, or if joint placement is not possible, ensure that the siblings are able to visit with each other at least twice a month.

The committee also approved House Bill 2429, sponsored by Rep. Steve Samuelson (D-Lehigh/Northampton). The measure would require county child welfare departments to notify

**PPC is now on Facebook and  
Twitter and we want YOU!**

**Please follow us on Twitter, become a Fan on Facebook**



**and read our new**

**blogs devoted to critical children’s issues.**

**Blog: [HTTP://BLOG.PAPARTNERSHIPS.ORG/INDEX.CFM/BLOGGING4CHILDREN](http://blog.papartnerships.org/index.cfm/blogging4children)**



**Back to Table of Contents**



grandparents and other adult relatives within 30 days when a child has been removed from a parent's home.

### House Approves Bill Requiring Dropout Data Collection System

The Pennsylvania Department of Education would build a high-quality database to help identify and prevent the causes of dropping out, under a bill passed by the House of Representatives April 19.

Rep. James Roebuck (D-Philadelphia) sponsored the proposed Drop-out Data Collection Act, House Bill 1618. The bill would require the Pennsylvania Department of Education to define "dropout" and develop a uniform system to collect data on graduation and dropout rates.

School districts, charter schools, and cyber charters would be required to submit data to the system.

"Serious questions" surround the uniformity and reliability of Pennsylvania's dropout data, the bill notes.

"While Pennsylvania has made improvements to ensure a higher quality education to all students, we must still do a better job of helping every student graduate high school with the necessary skills for success," said Roebuck, chairman of the House Education Committee. "That effort must begin by improving our data-collection system to determine exactly where, why and how many students are dropping out. It is only with those details that we can effectively focus dropout-prevention efforts where they're needed most."

The bill moved to the state Senate Education Committee for consideration.

### Zahorchak Leaves for Allentown SD; Rendell Nominates Gluck to Head PDE

Gerald Zahorchak, Pennsylvania's Education secretary since 2005, is stepping down to become Allentown School District's superintendent.

Gov. Rendell appointed Executive Deputy Secretary Thomas E. Gluck, as acting secretary, effective May 10.

Zahorchak was superintendent of the Greater Johnstown School District when he was appointed deputy secretary for elementary and secondary education in 2003.

Under his watch, the Pennsylvania Department of Education implemented the state's first new school funding formula in 20 years, helped raise grade-level achievement from half of students to 75 percent, implemented funding for quality pre-kindergarten and full-day kindergarten, created

### **Permanency Improves Lives and Saves Money, Says PA Chief Justice**

Court efforts to find permanent homes for foster children improve lives and save money, Pennsylvania Chief Justice Ronald A. Castille said in his annual State of the Commonwealth's Courts report.

Led by Justice Max Baer and his "passionate desire" to secure safe, permanent homes for foster children, the state court system's Office of Children and Families in the Courts has developed the Permanency Practice Initiative. The evidence-based initiative is building collaboration among county courts and child welfare agencies, while improving the identification and engagement of extended family resources.

The effort has helped to reduce the number of Pennsylvania children in foster care by 4,500 – a drop that has saved \$225 million in administration costs, Castille said.



[Back to Table of Contents](#)



Pennsylvania's first high school graduation requirements, and simplified the transfer of academic credits among colleges.

"It was an honor to serve Gov. Rendell and help to implement his extraordinary vision for public education in Pennsylvania," Zahorchak said. "I am proud of our accomplishments."

Zahorchak will succeed Karen Angello as Allentown's superintendent. Allentown is Pennsylvania's fourth-largest school district, with 18,300 students and 2,500 employees.

After his appointment as acting secretary, Gluck pledged that he will continue pursuing policy advancements during the Rendell Administration's remaining eight months. He said he will seek higher education funding, a new school empowerment law, and changes to charter school laws.

"We have work to do until the very last day here," he said. "There are many children we have yet to reach."

Gluck has also served as Democratic executive director for the state Senate Education Committee, assistant to the president of Milton Hershey School, and director of communications for the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education.

Gluck's nomination is subject to Senate confirmation.

### **Job Readiness Summit Held on April 22**

The Pennsylvania Business Council conducted a Job Readiness Summit April 22 in Harrisburg. The Summit brought together policymakers, business leaders, educators and workforce professionals to discuss workforce training, teacher quality, postsecondary education issues and re-engaging high school dropouts.

U. S. Education Deputy Assistant Secretary Glenn A. Cummings was the keynote speaker and spoke about President Obama's commitment to increase the percentage of Americans with industry credentials or 2 — or 4-year college degrees, and the important role the country's community colleges play in the strategy.

PPC's Joan Benso presented an overview of the Operation Restart dropout re-engagement campaign to ensure Pennsylvania's young people who are high school dropouts have access to high-quality education options that lead to a high school and postsecondary or industry credential.

"It's critically important that the Commonwealth provide opportunities for the nearly 120,000 16-to 24-year-olds who left high school before earning a diploma to re-engage and earn high school and postsecondary credentials," Benso said. "Over the course of their lifetimes, high school dropouts earn less than their graduating peers; pay less in taxes; rely more on publicly-funded government programs; are more likely to be unemployed, live in poverty and get in trouble with the law."

[Back to Table of Contents](#)



### CHIP Applicants Must Confirm Citizenship, ID

The Pennsylvania Insurance Department's new Central Eligibility Unit will now call parents and guardians directly to confirm citizenship and identity of children applying for CHIP.

The new unit was created in the Office of CHIP and adultBasic in response to federal requirements.

The CEU will call parents and guardians to ask for Social Security Number, legal name and correct spelling, date of birth, gender, and citizenship. If the information is inconsistent with Social Security Administration records, applicants must provide proof of correct information.

Children otherwise eligible are conditionally enrolled in CHIP while the CEU and CHIP insurance company seek needed information. If the family doesn't respond in time, the child's CHIP coverage ends and the family must re-apply.

### State Revenue Update



The Pennsylvania Department of Revenue reports that Pennsylvania collected \$2.9 billion in General Fund revenue in April, which was \$390 million, or 11.8 percent, less than anticipated. Fiscal year-to-date General Fund collections total \$22.8 billion, which is \$1.1 billion, or 4.6 percent, below estimate.

A recent decision of the U.S. Department of Transportation rejected Pennsylvania's application to toll Interstate 80 in northern Pennsylvania. This leaves a \$470 million hole in the Motor Vehicle Fund. Additionally, Pennsylvania's revenue woes

were further complicated by a 4-1 decision of the Commonwealth Court that orders the state to transfer about \$800 million from its general fund into an account that helps physicians pay their malpractice premiums. Lawmakers utilized funds from this account last summer to balance the state budget. The Commonwealth Court's decision is expected to be appealed to the Supreme Court.

[Back to Table of Contents](#)



Pennsylvania's Children's Health Insurance Program

### CHIP Enrollment

CHIP enrollment jumped to 197,052 in April, a 3.1 percent increase over April 2009. There were 12,838 children enrolled in CHIP who would not have been eligible before the Cover All Kids expansion.

### Capitol Watch for Children is brought to you with the support of the following:

[Allied Corporate Services](#)

[Buchanan Ingersoll & Rooney PC](#)

[Country Meadows Retirement Communities](#)

[Derry Presbyterian Church](#)

[Feinberg Shopp Associates](#)

[Gladfelter Insurance Group](#)

[Health Partners](#)

[Hershey Foods Corp.](#)

[Keystone Outdoor Advertising Company, Inc.](#)

[Snyder's of Hanover, Inc.](#)



### Federal Update

#### **Duncan: Emergency Funds Needed to Fill Education Budget Holes**

State and local funding squeezes are putting education reforms at risk, U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan told a Senate appropriations subcommittee.

Duncan urged members of the Senate Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education to consider another round of emergency support for education, similar to aid given to states through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

“We are gravely concerned that the kind of state and local budget threats our schools face today will put our hard-earned reforms at risk,” Duncan said. “Every day brings reports of layoffs, program cuts, class time reductions, and class size increases.”

Without quick funding to cover shortfalls, hundreds of thousands of educators and other personnel could be laid off, he said. Mass layoffs “not only create hardships for educators who lose their jobs and the children they teach, but the damage ripples through the economy as a whole.”

For more information, [CLICK HERE](#).

#### **Congress Extends 2009 Poverty Guidelines to End of May**

The U.S. Congress has extended the 2009 poverty guidelines until at least May 31.

The action came in response to a 0.1 percent drop in the Consumer Price Index, which measures the cost of food, transportation, housing, and other areas. Without the congressional extension, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services would have had to lower the 2010 poverty guidelines and tighten eligibility for programs supporting families and children.

#### **Senate Budget Committee Passes 2011 Budget Resolution**

Overall federal spending for domestic discretionary programs that includes housing, education, childcare and more would be frozen for three years, while funding for the military and homeland security could exceed inflation, under a 2011 budget resolution approved by the U.S. Senate Budget Committee.

Unlike the president’s proposed budget, the budget resolution does not provide program-by-program funding levels. Instead, it provides an aggregate funding amount. The Senate resolution would provide \$1.124 trillion for discretionary programs – \$4 billion less than Pres. Obama proposed for 2011. The \$4 billion difference comes from reductions in international and State Department funding.

The president’s plan would make Pell Grant and LIHEAP funding mandatory, but the Senate’s would not, so the money – including a \$5.5 billion Pell Grant increase – would have to come from cuts elsewhere.

[Back to Table of Contents](#)



The Senate resolution would extend the 2001 and 2003 tax cuts for those earning up to \$200,000/ \$250,000 (individual/ married couples filing jointly), while allowing the tax cuts for those at higher levels to expire. The proposal also makes improvements to the Earned Income Tax Credit and the Child Tax Credit in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act permanent. If the improvements to the Child Tax Credit are not made permanent, the credit for an estimated 500,000 Pennsylvania children could be eliminated or reduced. The measure also reinstates the estate tax, which was allowed to expire at the end of 2009.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nevada) predicted a Senate vote before Memorial Day. As of our publication deadline, the House has yet to produce a budget resolution.

### **Still Waiting for Extension of Federal Aid to States**

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act provides states with enhanced Medicaid funding retroactively from October 2008 until December 2010. The aid is extremely helpful to states, including Pennsylvania, that are experiencing significant revenue gaps. The December expiration is in the middle of most states' fiscal years. Congress has been working on extending the enhanced Medicaid funding by six months, but it has been complicated by other provisions in the measure that extend certain tax provisions and the need to fund them under the Pay As You Go law. Unfortunately, action has yet to occur, while states are looking for some assurance. For Pennsylvania, the governor has incorporated \$850 million in anticipated extended enhanced Medicaid funding into his proposed budget for FY10-11. Congressional leaders hope to adopt the extension by Memorial Day.

### **May is National Foster Care Month**

In a recent proclamation, President Obama declared May as National Foster Care Month “to recognize the promise of children and youth in foster care, as well as former foster youth. We also celebrate the professionals and foster parents who demonstrate the depth and kindness of the human heart.”

The proclamation cited the half a million children in foster care in America who “deserve the happiness and joy every child should experience through family life and a safe, loving home.”

More information is available [HERE](#).