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Lt. Governor Stack Co-Chairs Hearing to Examine Existing Laws Governing Access to Addiction Treatment

Harrisburg, PA – Lt. Governor Mike Stack and Secretary Gary Tennis of the Pennsylvania Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs (DDAP) held the fourth of six public hearings today to examine existing laws governing access to drug and alcohol treatment and identify ways to help consumers access treatment.

The hearings around the state are held in accordance with House Resolution 590, adopted in May of 2016. Pennsylvania and the nation are in the midst of the worst drug overdose epidemic in all recorded history. Ten Pennsylvanians die every day from a drug overdose – nearly 3,500 died in 2015.

HR 590 charges DDAP with establishing and administering a task force to review compliance with all current relevant laws, regulations and agreements, and to file a report with the General Assembly within one year of passage of the resolution.

“The worst ever overdose death and opioid addiction epidemic, increasing complexity of the disease of addiction along with co-occurring mental health issues, a more enlightened approach to treating criminal justice offenders rather than simply incarcerating, and an expansion of Medicaid have all put great stress on our treatment system,” said Stack, who along with Tennis, is co-chairing the hearings. “However, we know that treatment works and recovery is possible. We need to do everything we can to ensure barriers do not block the path to recovery. These hearings are helping us do just that.”

The task force has heard testimony relating to the application of mental health laws, length of care, insurance coverage and practices, and other barriers to treatment including lack of funding across the treatment continuum and inadequate reimbursement rates, which have strained the treatment system.

The multi-agency initiative includes representation on the task force from the Pennsylvania Departments of Health (DOH) and Human Services (DHS), the Pennsylvania Insurance Department (PID), addiction treatment programs, patient advocates and parents and loved ones of those with addiction.

A report detailing the task force’s findings as well as recommendations to address identified barriers to treatment is due to the General Assembly in May 2017.

MEDIA CONTACT: Gary Tuma – 717-787-3300, gtuma@pa.gov

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