FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Wolf Administration Partners with The Arc to Discuss Prevention of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

September is Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Awareness Month

Harrisburg, PA – Department of Human Services Acting Secretary Teresa Miller and Drug and Alcohol Programs Acting Secretary Jennifer Smith were joined by The Arc’s Executive Director Maureen Cronin, individuals impacted by Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), and advocates to raise awareness and discuss prevention of the disorder.

FASD is an umbrella term describing the range of effects that can occur in an individual whose mother drank alcohol during pregnancy. Children with FASD can have serious lifelong disabilities other than intellectual disability, such as learning disabilities and serious behavioral problems.

“The leading known cause of developmental disability and birth defects is FASD, a group of conditions in babies that is caused by pregnant mothers drinking too much alcohol,” said Smith. “Our message today is: prevent harm to babies. Don’t drink while you are pregnant.”

The Wolf Administration takes all substance use while pregnant seriously, and Governor Wolf declared September as Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Awareness Month in the commonwealth.

Since 1981, the U.S. Surgeon General as advised that there is no known safe amount of alcohol use during pregnancy and, that due to the risk of birth defects, women who are pregnant or are considering pregnancy should abstain from alcohol.

“The Arc has a long history of promoting awareness regarding the impacts of alcohol use during pregnancy. FASD Awareness Month is an opportunity to broadcast the message that there really is no known safe amount of alcohol during pregnancy,” said Cronin. “Let’s give our babies their best chance at life.”

Alcohol disrupts proper development of fetal organs, even at very early stages of pregnancy - before a woman may know she is pregnant. Alcohol passes from the mother’s bloodstream into the developing baby’s blood stream.

Damage to a baby’s brain caused by the mother’s alcohol use can result in problems throughout a person’s lifetime: impaired memory, learning disabilities, inability to think and reason properly, deficits in sensory processing, impaired ability to interact or socialize with others, and disruptive or otherwise inappropriate behaviors.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that between 2.4 to 4.8 per 100 children have FASD. The damage of FASD caused by a mother’s drinking during pregnancy is permanent and 100 percent preventable. The impact on children born with FASD is staggering:

• About 80% enter the foster care system or adoptive care system.
• Over 60% will have a disrupted school experience of suspension, expulsion, or drop out.
• 95% will develop depression and often other mental health issues.
• 70-80% will not be able to maintain employment and will not be able to live independently as adults.
• More than 50% of males and 70% of females will have substance use disorders.
• 60% will encounter problems with law enforcement, with most of them spending time in a juvenile and/or adult correctional facility.

“The lifelong impact of this from a physical and mental health perspective is overwhelming, but the financial impacts are just as severe,” said Miller. “The lifetime cost of care for one individual with FASD can reach $2 million.”

“It’s not all doom and gloom,” said Miller. “People with FASD are people with special needs, but first and foremost, they are people. And like most people, they have positive attributes, talents and abilities, and some become very skilled in a profession.”

In spite of all of the adversities that they face, people with FASD can graduate from college, own a business, become employed skilled craftsmen and craftswomen, and live independently.

While there is no cure for this condition, early intervention can improve a child’s development and enable them to live an everyday life.

“With early identification and diagnosis, children can receive services that can help maximize their potential. The commonwealth provides early intervention services to infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with a diagnosis of FASD and ongoing support and treatment throughout the life span,” said Miller. “Local early intervention programs work closely with pediatricians, hospitals, and children and youth agencies so that children at risk for FASD are referred to early intervention for a developmental evaluation.”

Many people with FASD benefit from the support of one-on-one counseling. In addition, they often require intensive service coordination if they do not have someone who can coordinate the many services they need (such as ongoing individual therapy, job coaching, housing, and transportation).

“The Wolf Administration wants to spread the word to all Pennsylvanians – if you are pregnant or trying to get pregnant, don’t drink alcohol,” Smith said.

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PROCLAMATION

FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDER AWARENESS MONTH
September 2017

WHEREAS, children are among the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania’s most important resources, improving children’s health is a priority, and prenatal alcohol exposure is the leading preventable cause of intellectual and developmental disabilities; and
WHEREAS, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is an umbrella term describing the range of effects that can occur in an individual who was exposed to alcohol before birth; with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) being the most recognizable condition along the spectrum; and

WHEREAS, the lifetime cost for one individual with FAS is estimated to be $2 million, with a combined cost to the U.S. health care system for FAS alone over $4 billion annually; and

WHEREAS, more than 50 percent of women of childbearing age drink alcohol and 10 percent of pregnant women drink alcohol; and

WHEREAS, it is the goal of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to raise awareness among its residents, especially women of childbearing age, regarding FASD education, prevention, and intervention, and to improve awareness; and

WHEREAS, the Commonwealth has established an FASD Task Force to prevent new occurrences of FASD through a comprehensive approach to educating citizens and systems within the Commonwealth, and enhancing a system of care for individuals and their families who are affected by FASD; and

WHEREAS, International FASD Day was first observed on September 9, 1999, so that the ninth day of the ninth month would always be a reminder that during the nine months of pregnancy a woman should abstain from alcohol.

THEREFORE, I, Tom Wolf, Governor of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, do hereby proclaim the month of September, as FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDER AWARENESS MONTH in Pennsylvania. I encourage all Pennsylvanians, both adults and children, to support those individuals and families affected by Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.

GIVEN under my hand and the Seal of the Governor, in the City of Harrisburg, this first day of September in the year of Our Lord two thousand and seventeen.

TOM WOLF
Governor

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