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Governor Wolf Meets with Grandparents Raising Grandchildren, Urges Legislature to Remove Barriers to Services

Wilkes-Barre, PA – Governor Tom Wolf sat down today with grandparents raising grandchildren as a result of the opioid epidemic, listening to their concerns and renewing his call for passage of legislation aimed at removing barriers to obtaining state services and supports.

“Grandparents are stepping up to take care of their grandchildren as a result of the devastating opioid crisis,” Gov. Wolf said. “And we need to make sure they have our full support as caregivers and legal guardians of children, the most innocent bystanders to this awful epidemic.

“The grandparents I sat down with today are making sacrifices to help their families and communities and they should be accessing all the resources available to help them. One way to do that is for the legislature to pass bi-partisan bills that can make a difference in the lives of Pennsylvania families.”

One piece of legislation, sponsored by Rep. Eddie Day Pashinski, is House bill 1539, which provides a way for grandparents to obtain temporary guardianship while protecting both the parental rights of parents, including those suffering from opioid addiction, and the needs of the child to be with loving family members, rather than be placed in foster care or other arrangements.

According to General Assembly research, Pennsylvania grandparents are saving the state an estimated \$1 billion a year by keeping their grandchildren out of the foster care system, but that figure may be even higher because many of these grandfamilies are not on the state’s radar.

The governor was joined by Rep. Pashinski, Department of Aging Secretary Teresa Osborne, Wilkes-Barre Mayor Tony George and other elected officials on a tour and grandfamilies’ discussion at the Jewish Community Alliance of Northeastern Pennsylvania in Wilkes-Barre.

“Throughout Pennsylvania, senior community centers serve as safe harbors for older Pennsylvanians who need to access supports and services in order to age in place,” said Secretary Osborne. “Today’s gathering at the Jewish Community Center with grandparents who are raising their grandchildren provided us with the opportunity to listen to their concerns and

learn from their experiences, which will enable the Wolf Administration to better assist them in meeting the health, educational, nutritional, and other needs of the children in their care, while ensuring that our grandparents have the supports necessary to meet their own physical and mental health, and emotional well-being.”

An estimated 82,000 grandparents are the sole caregivers for nearly 89,000 grandchildren in Pennsylvania. That number is increasing due to the opioid crisis across the commonwealth. The House Children and Youth Committee held a hearing on the issue last summer, with estimates showing that Pennsylvania grandparents are saving the state at least an estimated \$1 billion a year by keeping their grandchildren out of the foster care system.

“I have called on our legislature to [pass bi-partisan bills](#) in the past and am doing so again today because it’s vitally important that we give our grandfamilies not only support, but access to the information and resources they need to thrive and raise strong, healthy families in Pennsylvania,” Gov. Wolf said.

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