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Wolf Administration Announces Grandfamilies Workgroup for STOP OVERDOSES IN PA: GET HELP NOW WEEK

Harrisburg, PA – Today, Department of Aging Secretary Teresa Osborne, Department of Human Services Secretary Teresa Miller, and Department of Health Secretary Dr. Rachel Levine announced the formation of a Grandfamilies Workgroup as part of **Stop Overdoses in PA: Get Help Now Week**, a statewide initiative to get the overdose reversal medication naloxone to Pennsylvanians and get help for residents suffering from the disease of opioid-use disorder. Grandfamilies are defined as kinship families in which children reside with or are being raised by grandparents, other extended family members, or adults with whom they have a close family-like relationship, such as godparents or close family friends.

“The trend of grandparents raising their grandchildren is being fueled by the opioid crisis,” said Secretary Osborne. “These grandfamilies can provide the safest environments and they can be the most appropriate caregivers, but in order to provide the stability that the children need and deserve, we need to better support them as they try to identify and access much-needed public and private resources for themselves and the children entrusted to their care.”

Building upon the Wolf Administration’s efforts to combat the opioid crisis, specifically the needs of grandparents who have taken on the role of caring for their grandchildren, the Department of Aging selected a group of grandparents as members of the Grandfamilies Workgroup. The workgroup will meet regularly over a six-month period with members of the administration to build on the progress Pennsylvania has made thus far in providing resources and support for grandfamilies. This includes identifying barriers in the health, human services, education and legal systems, providing insight on the day-to-day experiences of grandfamilies, and identifying additional support needed. Following the six-month period of meetings, the department will coordinate the implementation of actionable items developed by the workgroup.

The Grandfamilies Workgroup will be comprised of grandparents who participated in the Wolf Administration and Pennsylvania Family Support Alliance’s (PFSA) three-stop [Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Listening Tour](#) earlier this year and stakeholders, including PFSA, Highmark Caring Place, the NEPA Intergenerational Coalition, AARP Pennsylvania, and the PA Association of Area Agencies on Aging.



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“As we know, the prescription opioid and heroin epidemic does not discriminate. Its effects are not limited to the person with a substance use disorder – it affects their entire family, especially when children are involved,” said Secretary Miller. “Because of this, many grandparents are stepping in to help their grandchildren live, grow, and cope with their parent’s illness in a safe, loving home. As we focus on getting those who are suffering from a substance use disorder the treatment they need, we must be sure that we’re helping all touched by this epidemic.”

An estimated 89,000 grandparents are the sole caregivers for nearly 100,000 grandchildren in Pennsylvania. That number is increasing due to the devastating opioid crisis. Pennsylvania’s 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 per year by keeping their grandchildren out of the foster care system.

Recently, Governor Wolf signed three laws designed to better serve and support grandfamilies as they fulfill their responsibilities as caregivers and guardians, including Act 88 of 2018, which will establish a Kinship Caregiver Navigator Program; Act 89 of 2018, that will grant temporary guardianship to grandparents when the parents of the grandchildren are unable to care for them primarily due to substance abuse issues; and House Resolution 390, which directs the Joint State Government Commission to study the trend of grandparents raising grandchildren in Pennsylvania and report its’ findings and recommendations to the General Assembly.

Since Governor Wolf first signed a heroin and opioid disaster declaration in January, 16 state agencies have continuously worked to fight the opioid epidemic and have made significant progress to help individuals and families dealing with this crisis. Some accomplishments include waiving birth certificate fees for individuals seeking treatment, using federal Medicaid funding in treatment facilities to provide more than 12,000 individuals access to medically necessary treatment, and providing career services to people who have been impacted by the opioid epidemic and plan to return to work.

“Every Pennsylvanian can save a life by having naloxone on hand and using it if they come across someone who has overdosed,” Dr. Levine said. “The opioid epidemic does not discriminate in who it effects. We will continue to work to help all of those affected by this public health crisis.”

For more information on Pennsylvania’s response to the opioid crisis visit www.pa.gov/opioids.

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