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## **Human Service Secretary Highlights Program to Support Access to Post-Secondary Education and Training at PA Community Colleges**

**Harrisburg, PA** – Department of Human Services (DHS) Secretary Teresa Miller today highlighted the department's Keystone Education Yields Success (KEYS) program, a collaboration with community colleges and DHS. KEYS assists students who receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and/or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits pursue certificates, degrees, or credentials at Pennsylvania's community colleges to help them graduate and obtain employment.

"The work being done through KEYS is critical to helping individuals as they pursue careers and work towards self-sufficiency," said Secretary Miller. "Programs like KEYS help break down barriers and promote sustainable independence. At DHS, we are working very closely with our program partners to learn how we can expand and strengthen programming and supports to ensure individuals we serve are able to achieve their goals."

KEYS is a collaboration between DHS and Pennsylvania's 14 community colleges. Potential students are referred to KEYS by a caseworker when they qualify for TANF or SNAP and express interest in pursuing education and training available through community colleges. KEYS programs provide supportive services to students like assistance with school supplies, transportation, and child care. Students are also given mentoring and peer support relationships critical to helping students ease the transition back into schooling and overcome barriers to success in education.

Secretary Miller was joined by a current participant of Reading Area Community College's (RACC) KEYS program and a current student and administrator from Harrisburg Area Community College's (HACC) KEYS program, who shared their experiences with KEYS and perspective on how the program helps students access post-secondary education.

Low-income individuals receiving TANF or SNAP benefits are subject to work requirements in order to maintain eligibility for benefits, with certain exceptions. Participation in certain education or training programs can meet these requirements, and KEYS allows participants to pursue education at a community college and remain in compliance with federal work requirements. In January, the department took steps to expand access to education by including GED and other high school equivalency programming and testing to TANF clients of all ages. This means people receiving TANF benefits are now able to meet their participation requirement while pursuing their high school equivalency. This was previously restricted to TANF clients under age 22.

The Wolf Administration is also seeking to expand access to education, training, and supportive services for single-parent families experiencing economic challenges through the Parent Pathways initiative.

Governor Tom Wolf's proposed 2020 budget includes \$5 million to support up to seven partnerships to develop and implement programs for post-secondary education and training for single parents. The Parent Pathways initiative will focus on post-secondary education and training partnerships, housing supports, and two-generational programming that supports healthy child and family development and is part of Governor Wolf's Statewide Workforce, Education, and Accountability Program (SWEAP) to rebuild Pennsylvania's economy and prioritize skills training from birth to retirement.

Parent Pathways models will have the flexibility to develop a community-specific plan that considers the make-up of the community, needs of potential families to be served, and resources available to meet the needs of the specific community and families served. The goal is to support innovative models that open doors and eliminate barriers for single-parent families, be it through post-secondary education or vocational training.

"Too many single-parent families in Pennsylvania and around the country feel limited by their economic situation. We are committed to giving them the tools and supports necessary to help them change their family's trajectory and, most importantly, to help them realize that they are not alone in this journey," said Secretary Miller. "Each of us can play a role in supporting parents and families seeking better lives, and KEYS and the Parent Pathways initiative will give us a vehicle to make this work possible in more communities."

In September 2018, DHS and Pennsylvania's Department of Education (PDE) announced a Request for Information (RFI) to broaden the departments' perspectives on existing models and explore potential opportunities to implement a program statewide that would help expand higher education opportunities for low-income, single-parent families. A summit was held in April that brought together more than 200 partners in higher, secondary, and early childhood education, health care, workforce development, housing, and other human services fields to discuss the Parent Pathways model and two-generational, whole person and family supports.

To learn more about the department's KEYS program, visit [www.dhs.pa.gov](http://www.dhs.pa.gov).

To learn more about Governor Wolf's 2019-20 budget, visit [www.budget.pa.gov](http://www.budget.pa.gov).

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