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## News for Immediate Release

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### **Auditor General DePasquale Continues Focus on Protecting Children, Will Follow Up on State of the Child Reports**

*Also commends York County child services agency for making dramatic improvements*

**HARRISBURG** – Auditor General Eugene DePasquale today said he will follow up on his “State of the Child” reports to ensure Pennsylvania is doing everything it can to protect at-risk children from neglect and abuse.

“Progress is being made. Many of the recommendations from my reports have resulted in action, such as updating caseworker job requirements, improving the training new caseworkers receive, and having working groups look at reducing redundant paperwork and data collection,” DePasquale said. “But there’s more work to do, and I’m concerned that the efforts of hardworking caseworkers are being stymied by the bureaucracy that exists in Harrisburg.”

DePasquale said his review will focus on the Department of Human Services’ (DHS) Bureau of Hearings and Appeals, how the bureau functions and whether it is effectively helping to protect at-risk children from their abusers. It serves as an administrative court on hundreds of issues that come before DHS.

“When caseworkers allege that a child has been abused, the accused abuser may appeal that decision to the Bureau of Hearings and Appeals,” DePasquale said. “It hears an average of 1,000 child-abuse appeals each year and, on average, it backs up caseworkers only about 4 percent of the time. That strikes me as a very lopsided number and I want to know why that is happening.”

DePasquale said only a small percentage of cases involving allegations of child abuse result in criminal charges.

“Much of the time, this administrative court is as far as a case gets – it’s almost like a ‘shadow’ justice system for accused child abusers and hardly anyone knows it exists,” he said.

DePasquale said his review will explore the following questions:

- Who decides who serves on the bureau?
- Are bureau members adequately trained in how to handle children as witnesses?
- What happens to cases that are appealed to Commonwealth Court after they go through the bureau?
- Is the Department of Human Services doing enough to oversee how this bureau functions? and
- Do the bureau’s actions on appeals influence how often caseworkers are willing to recommend taking action against child abusers?

DePasquale said he expects his review to be completed later this year.

DePasquale today also released his latest audit of York County Children, Youth and Families. The agency had previously struggled with caseload management exacerbated by staffing issues and a surge in the number of abuse allegations it was required to investigate after changes were made to state law.

“In my last audit released in January 2017, I noted that the agency was so overwhelmed that it was struggling to perform its basic function of protecting children and families,” DePasquale said. “However, I’m pleased to say that under the leadership of Terry Clark, the agency has made a host of corrective actions that have led to better protection of the county’s children, youth and families.”

DePasquale noted that the agency filled 25 vacancies within five months, enabling it to return to being fully licensed after operating on provisional licenses from 2014 to 2016.

The full [audit report](#) for York County Children, Youth and Families is available at [www.paauditor.gov](http://www.paauditor.gov).

In September 2017, DePasquale released his 80-page [“State of the Child”](#) special report, which detailed the strengths and challenges of Pennsylvania’s child-welfare system. A follow-up report, the 43-page [“State of the Child Action Plan,”](#) was released in May 2018.

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