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PROBLEM STATEMENT: *Too often Pennsylvania’s child protection policies, practices, and funding have been sequestered to a single state agency undercutting intentional, inter-disciplinary and routinely measured prevention and intervention strategies. A further complication is that the majority of funding for and oversight of Pennsylvania’s child protection policies and practices are housed within the Department of Public Welfare. Even when DPW is renamed the Department of Human Services (DHS), it is likely to remain an agency that is targeted for budget cuts, including those that will impact the workforce responsible to implement and to continuously monitor and measure the quality of PA’s child protection strategies.*

QUESTION #1
In light of the number and diversity of programs, services and funding streams within the jurisdiction and oversight of the current Department of Public Welfare; how will you meaningfully use the Office of Governor to prioritize the safety, well-being and permanency of Pennsylvania’s infants, children and youth?

PROBLEM STATEMENT: *Recent studies have demonstrated that Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), such as child abuse and neglect and exposure to other forms of violence, can be toxic stressors that lead to lifelong consequences (e.g., chronic and costly physical and mental health problems). It remains extremely difficult to identify or analyze Pennsylvania’s investment in prevention and specific positive outcomes for infants, children and youth. Service categories are not clearly identified, budgeted funds are not designated, and service planning and delivery for prevention services are rarely documented on either case-specific or agency-budget levels. As a result, meaningful oversight, consolidation, and efforts to improve prevention-focused services are frustrated.*

QUESTION #2
How will you meaningfully use the Office of Governor to promote inter-disciplinary, public/private, and evidence-based strategies to reduce a child’s exposure to Adverse Childhood Experiences, including child abuse and neglect?

QUESTION #3
Within your early childhood care and education plan, do you have specific strategies and outcome measures to improve the safety, health (including mental health), and permanency for children from birth to age three? Please highlight how these strategies are intended to strengthen the confidence and competence of parents, who are a child’s first protector and teacher.

QUESTION #4

Will you support designating a portion of the fee charged by the PA State Police for a criminal background check (\$10) and by the Department of Public Welfare for its child abuse history check (\$10) toward evidence-based child abuse and neglect prevention services/programs? _____ Yes _____ No

PROBLEM STATEMENT: *Between 2008 and 2012, Pennsylvania recorded at least 175 child abuse fatalities with nearly 80 percent involving a child who was three years of age or younger. An additional 225 Pennsylvania children experienced a child abuse near-fatality and 84 percent of these sentinel events involved a child three years of age or younger. The challenges faced by children and their families do not exist in isolation even as they can be isolating. The complex needs and realities of infants and families with young children can lead to involvement with a number of publicly funded systems, well beyond the traditional child welfare system. Coexistent risk factors make multi-system interventions challenging and too rarely is the response holistic, preventative, or strength-based. There are powerful human and economic incentives to work with intention – across disciplines and all child-serving systems – toward improved safety, well-being and permanence for every Pennsylvania infant and child. There is also incentive to determine whether Act 33 of 2008, which requires local and state-level timely reviews and publicly released reports when a child dies from suspected or substantiated child abuse, has proven itself an effective prevention tool.*

QUESTION #5

What is your actionable plan to reduce child abuse fatalities and near fatalities?
Please provide some brief outline of the components of this plan. If you do not have a plan, please explain why not.

QUESTION #6

What would you identify as the strengths of Act 33 of 2008 and what, if any, weaknesses would you identify within Act 33 of 2008?

PROBLEM STATEMENT: *Pennsylvania receives reports of suspected child abuse via a 24-hour reporting hotline known as ChildLine. The state hotline is staffed by specially trained workers. In 2013, ChildLine answered 142,084 calls – an increase of more than 20,000 calls when compared with 2010. The Task Force on Child Protection’s November 2012 report addressed the importance of “ChildLine staffing levels and retention issues.” In 2012, Pennsylvania investigated reports at a rate of 8.6 per 1,000 children; nationally it was 42 per 1,000 children. One out of every thousand children in our Commonwealth was determined to be a victim of child abuse, while nationally it exceeded 9 per 1,000 children. Responding to this outlier status, the General Assembly legislatively created the Task Force on Child Protection. Beginning in 2013, more than twenty pieces of legislation were enacted largely following this Task Force’s recommendations related to defining, reporting and investigating child abuse. Included in these changes was dedicated funding for state-of-the-art children’s advocacy centers. Still, there is unfinished business, including decisions about a child’s access to high quality medical exams and on-going counseling and victim services. Also, undecided is which individuals should submit to background checks and how regularly these checks should occur.*

QUESTION #7

How do you intend to monitor and measure the implementation of these 2013/2014 comprehensive policy and practice changes, especially around key provisions (e.g., consistency in reporting suspected child abuse and ensuring multidisciplinary investigation teams operate with the protocol required by state law)?

QUESTION #8

Will you initiate an independent audit of ChildLine in order to analyze the hotline's staffing trends (e.g., number of staff, turnover rates, use of overtime) and the recent implementation of modern technology? _____ Yes _____ NO

QUESTION #9

How will your administration build upon Pennsylvania's recent statutory decision to dedicate state funding for children's advocacy centers?

QUESTION #10a

Do you support regularly updated (e.g., every 2 years) criminal and child abuse background checks conducted by the Pennsylvania State Police and the Department of Public Welfare (DPW) for volunteers and paid employees having regular contact with a child? _____ Yes _____ No

QUESTION #10b

Do you support a federal criminal background check conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) for individuals who want to work or volunteer with Pennsylvania children but the person has not lived in PA continuously for the last ten years? _____ Yes _____ No

PROBLEM STATEMENT: *Pennsylvania children, youth and families benefit from child-welfare services delivered by public and private providers as part of a state-supervised and county-administered system that has many strengths. Unfortunately, too often the child welfare system does not function as needed to effectively assess and assure the safety of a child as well as guard the rights of parents, children and alleged perpetrators. Decisions made and public resources spent have a profound impact on the safety, liberty and custody of children and families. Mechanisms to respond to child-welfare complaints or to report concerns about specific decisions for an individual child or a class of children exist within the Department of Public Welfare, the county child welfare agencies and their contractors. This presents an obvious lack of objectivity and independence as well as impacts public confidence in this system.*

QUESTION #11

Do you support a state-level independent Child Protection Ombudsman or what some refer to as the Child Protection Advocate? _____ Yes _____ No

If yes, please explain how you see this office developing during your administration (e.g., by executive order or legislation, as an office of state government or through a contract with an independent entity).

If you do not support the Ombudsman/Advocate, please explain how your administration will assure meaningful independent complaint resolution within Pennsylvania's child welfare system.

PROBLEM STATEMENT: *Recently the New York Times Editorial Board acknowledged a central lesson of the Gerald Sandusky serial child sexual abuse scandal - "It can take years before victims are emotionally and psychologically ready to come forward." Pennsylvania's criminal statute of limitation*

(SOL) in child sexual abuse cases is generally until the child victim reaches the age of 50, while the civil SOL is to the victim's 30th birthday. A state's approach to SOLs can create uneven access to justice and may contribute to some perpetrators escaping accountability permitting them opportunities to continue to sexually abuse children. PA's criminal and civil SOLs in child sexual abuse cases were not addressed by the Task Force on Child Protection in 2012.

QUESTION #12

Do you support changes to Pennsylvania's criminal and civil statute of limitations in child sexual abuse cases, specifically would you sign the following legislation as Governor of the Commonwealth:

To eliminate the criminal statute of limitation? Yes No

To eliminate the civil statute of limitation? Yes No

To extend the civil statute of limitations in child sexual abuse cases until the child victim reaches the age of 50? Yes No

To permit a time-limited (e.g., 2 year) retroactive window for filing a civil claim with this option available to child sexual abuse survivors previously barred by existing SOLs? Yes No