



PO Box 396  
Bernville, PA 19506  
610-488-5059  
contact@C4CJ.org  
www.C4CJ.org

---

February 9, 2015

The Honorable Tom Wolf  
Governor, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania  
Harrisburg, PA 17120

The Honorable Joseph Scarnati President Pro  
Tempore, PA Senate  
Senate Box 203025  
Harrisburg, PA 17120-3025

The Honorable Jake Corman  
Majority Leader, PA Senate  
Senate Box 203034  
Harrisburg, PA 17120-3034

The Honorable Jay Costa  
Minority Leader, PA Senate  
Senate Box 203043  
Harrisburg, PA 17120-3043

The Honorable Mike Turzai  
Speaker of the PA House of Representatives  
PO Box 202028  
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2028

The Honorable Dave Reed  
Majority Leader, PA House of Representatives  
PO Box 202062  
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2062

The Honorable Frank Dermody  
Minority Leader, PA House of Representatives  
PO Box 202033  
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2033

Dear Governor Wolf and Leaders of the Pennsylvania General Assembly:

Over the last several years, our Commonwealth, informed and supported by diverse stakeholders, took intentional steps forward to better protect Pennsylvania's infants, children and youth from child abuse and neglect.

The pursuit to restore a distinct focus on child safety and well-being in PA's policies and practices resulted, in part, from our original call to action in April 2011. Interdisciplinary professionals and advocates had grown quite concerned that existing state policies and practices were undercutting a child's safety and pathways to healing and justice. Therefore, we urged creation of a Task Force envisioned to secure objective study and recommendations about how best to define, report, investigate and treat child abuse and neglect in Pennsylvania.

A central underpinning of the General Assembly’s welcome decision to create the Task Force on Child Protection in 2011 was the commitment to restore “public confidence” in how our state fulfills its responsibility to protect our children.

In many ways, the public’s confidence was bolstered by an unprecedented bipartisan commitment and actionable agenda to intentionally rewrite state laws prioritizing child safety; while working to balance the important role parents play as a child’s first protector and teacher.

Today, however, two immediate challenges may well serve to once again erode the public’s confidence:

**1. ChildLine’s ability to retain staff and effectively respond to increased child abuse reports**

The public, particularly those legally mandated to report suspected child abuse, must be assured that ChildLine has the capacity to respond in an informed, timely and consistent way.

Before we issued the call for a Task Force in April 2011, we reviewed mandatory reporting trends in 2010. Our review was triggered by the fact that ChildLine was experiencing an abandoned and deflected call rate of nearly 9 percent in 2010.<sup>1</sup> This focus on mandated reporting policies and practices, which included a survey completed by 1,400 Pennsylvanians, provided sufficient evidence that ChildLine was under pressure.

When the Task Force on Child Protection issued its [report in November 2012](#), it indicated that, “ChildLine staffing levels and retention issues” required further examination and action. The Task Force also signaled support for the ChildLine workforce writing, “The Task Force applauds the level of care and commitment on the part of the employees who staff the ChildLine centralized reporting system.”

As the chart below demonstrates, PA was experiencing an uptick in child abuse reports to the hotline, well before the highly-publicized arrest and later conviction of Gerald Sandusky. In the wake of those events, reports to ChildLine again increased, which then had a ripple effect on county children and youth agencies.

YEAR	Total Calls Received At ChildLine	Total Calls Answered At ChildLine <sup>2</sup>	Child Protective Services Reports (CPS)	General Protective Services Referrals (GPS)	Law Enforcement Only Reports (LEO)
2014	164,911	158,131	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
2013	148,204	142,084	26,944	41,386	5,233
2012	145,794	138,541	26,664	39,328	4,703
2011	140,348	128,111	26,215	38,780	3,885

<sup>1</sup> The Department of Human Services (DHS) defined an “abandoned call” as a call that “is terminated by the caller after the hotline phone rings the caller is provided the complete hotline answering message and is waiting to be answered by a hotline worker. This includes callers waiting in the queue as a result of high call volume.” A “deflected call” is a call where the caller did not get into the queue “instead the caller gets a busy signal so they have to call back.”

<sup>2</sup> Each year a percentage of the calls to ChildLine are abandoned or deflected, which is why there is a difference between the number of calls received versus those that are answered. For instance, in December 2014 the A&D rate was approximately 7.5 percent. The annual average in 2014 was just over 4 percent.

YEAR	Total Calls Received At ChildLine	Total Calls Answered At ChildLine <sup>2</sup>	Child Protective Services Reports (CPS)	General Protective Services Referrals (GPS)	Law Enforcement Only Reports (LEO)
2010	133,660	121,868	25,812	36,503	3,288
2009	123,094	117,203	25,792	33,293	2,948
2008	121,369	117,305	24,064	28,063	2,602
2007	121,657	110,766	22,673	22,443	1,708
2006	105,737	98,514	25,088	18,414	909

Today, with more than twenty new state child protection laws in effect, the pressure on ChildLine and county agencies is again mounting.

We welcome the February 3rd decision by DHS to fill 6 outstanding vacancies restoring the existing caseworker complement to 38. Also promising is the related DHS decision to hire 10 additional caseworkers. Still we would offer this caution: ChildLine has routinely struggled to retain caseworkers and then fill vacant positions resulting from staff turnover. Also, we believe the challenges currently impacting ChildLine extend beyond the staffing composition (e.g., newly implemented technology).

Still we are requesting immediate and ongoing evaluation/auditing of workforce issues (e.g., training, staff retention, utilization of overtime) and new technology being utilized to ensure it is enabling, not hindering the reporting process for mandated reporters, and that reports of child abuse or a crime against a child are being shared in real time with entities (e.g., law enforcement and county children and youth agencies).

**2. Comprehensive criminal and child abuse background checks for volunteers may lead to unintended consequences**

We believe that regularly updated and comprehensive background checks are a tool to enhance child protection.

We also have promoted the need to examine whether additional volunteer populations, beyond those currently exempted in the law, should have the fees waived for such checks (e.g., low-income parents and grandparents critical to their child’s education unable to afford the fees now associated with volunteering).

There is some expected, yet growing, anxiety about the criminal and child abuse background checks requirements enacted last October. In Act 153 of 2014, the General Assembly rightly charged DHS, the Department of Education and the PA Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) to determine what should exclude a person from working or volunteering with a child. Still we believe this charge is too limited. Additionally, these agencies should be directed to meaningfully engage diverse stakeholders to identify and address unintended consequences that may be emerging.

Finally, we renew our call that a percentage of background check fees charged to the public to work or volunteer with children be invested in evidence-based primary child abuse prevention strategies advanced by PA’s Children’s Trust Fund.

As we have through the years, we remain willing to be among the partners that further our shared responsibility to protect children and keep them connected to protective and supported families.

Sincerely

**Adams County Children's Advocacy Center**

Tammy Barbour, Executive Director

**Alice Paul House (Indiana County)**

Audia J Boyles, Executive Director

**American Academy of Pediatrics – PA Chapter**

Susan Kressly, MD, FAAP, President

Suzanne Yunghans, Executive Director

**CASA Youth Advocates, Inc.**

Anne Shenberger, Executive Director

**Centre Co. Women's Resource Center**

Anne K. Ard, Executive Director

**Children's Alliance Center of Berks County**

Melissa B. Haydt, Executive Director

**Clinton County Women's Center**

Debra Zinck, Executive Director

**Columbia County Family Center**

Allison Williams, Executive Director

**Columbia County Victim Services**

Frances Fraley, Victim Witness Coordinator

**Community Prevention Partnership of Berks County**

Cheryl Guthier, Executive Director

**Court Appointed Special Advocates of Philadelphia**

Wendy Graham, Executive Director

**Crawford County CASA, Inc.**

Cindy Knight, Executive Director

**Crime Victims Alliance of Pennsylvania**

Carol Lavery, Chair

**Crime Victim Center of Erie**

Paul Lukach, Executive Director

**Disability Rights Network of Pennsylvania**

Sallie Lynagh, Children's Team Leader

**Jefferson County Victim Services**

Michelle Fusco, Victim Services Coordinator

**Lackawanna County CASA**

Joan W. Peterson, Executive Director

**Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in PA**

The Rev. Amy Reumann, Executive Director

**Maternity Care Coalition**

JoAnne Fischer, Executive Director

**Mercer County Juvenile Advisory Council, Inc. CASA Program**

Marsha Cummings, Executive Director

**National Association of Social Workers, PA Chapter**

Tara Breitsprecher, Policy & Communication Director

**Network of Victim Assistance (Bucks County)**

Barbara Clark, Executive Director

**Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence**

Peg Dierkers, Executive Director

**Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape**

Delilah Rumburg, CEO

**Pennsylvania Council of Churches**

Rev. Sandra L. Strauss, Director of Policy

**Pennsylvania Court Appointed Special Advocates**

Dennis Hockensmith, Executive Director

**Pennsylvania EMS for Children Program**

Thomas Winkler, Director

**Pennsylvania Head Start Association**

Blair Hyatt, Executive Director

**Pennsylvania Psychological Association**

Bruce E. Mapes, Ph.D., President of the Board

Krista Paternostro Bower, Executive Director

**Pennsylvania Social Services Union, Local 668, SEIU**

Tom Herman, President

**Philadelphia Children's Alliance**

Chris Kirchner, Executive Director

**Pittsburgh Action Against Rape**

Alison Hall, Executive Director

**Prevent Child Abuse Pennsylvania**

Teresa Olsen, Director

**Protect PA Kids PAC**

Susan Matthews Dachowski, Founder

**Samaritan Counseling Center**

Linda Crockett,

**Sexual Assault Resource and Counseling Center of Lebanon and Schuylkill Counties**

Jenny Murphy-Shifflet, Executive Director

**Sullivan County Victim Services**

Marty Gates, Executive Director

**Support Center for Child Advocates**

Frank Cervone, Executive Director

**Survivors, Inc.**

Terri L. Hamrick, Executive Director

**The Center for Children's Justice**

Cathleen Palm, Founder

**The Crime Victims Center of Chester County, Inc.**

Peggy Gusz, Executive Director

**Turning Point Women's Counseling & Advocacy Center**

Kristen Pfautz Woolley, Founder and Clinical Director

**Victims Resource Center**

Janet MacKay, Executive Director

**Women Organized Against Rape**

Carole Johnson, Executive Director

**Women's Services**

Victoria Wood

**York County Cribs for Kids**

Michael Goodstein, MD, Director

**YWCA Carlisle**

Caroline Bajus

Valentina Cucuzza

Shelly Farmery

Laura Masgalas

Sierra McCulloch

Jennifer Metz

Robin Scaer

**INDIVIDUALS**

Mary Achilles (Cumberland County)

Hollie Ayers (Mifflin County)

Larry Breitenstein (Allegheny County)

Lynn Carson (York County)

Shari Copenhaver (Perry County)

Nicole Cronin (Allegheny County)

Joe DeVizia (Luzerne County)

Beth Docherty (Allegheny County)

Wanda D Filer MD MBA FAAFP (York County)

Danielle Gorman (Bradford County)

Edward Gunn (Northumberland County)

Matthew Gunn (Northumberland County)

Donna R. Hull (Chester County)

The Rev. Karl Jones (Schuylkill County)

Kathy Kane (Chester County)

Douglas Kifolo (Centre County)

Ruth F. Kolb (Allegheny County)

Benjamin H. Levi, MD PhD (Dauphin County)

Cynthia Lupold (Cumberland County)

Rev. Paul L. Lubold (Allegheny County)

Ann Martin (Lancaster County)

Hallie Martyniuk

Hayley McLeish

Dolores Miller (Philadelphia)

Joan Mills (Allegheny County)

Shannon Pavlovcic (Cumberland County)

Eugene Quaglia (Berks County)

Elizabeth Schmoyer (Berks County)

JoAnne Sessa

Melissa Sweitzer

Gary I. Shuey (Cumberland County)

Amanda Smith (Franklin County)

Angela Thomas (Cumberland County)

Tracy Wertz (Cumberland County)

Jeff Winslow (Lebanon County)