



Children's Justice & Advocacy Report

To promote community responsibility so every Pennsylvania child is protected from child abuse, including sexual abuse.

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House Children and Youth Chairwomen make the case to let child protection changes "work"

Today's Pittsburgh Post-Gazette editorial ([Trouble spotters: Pa.'s new child-abuse reporters need training](#)) has further contributed to angst some policy makers and the public are feeling over the impact of the comprehensive child protection changes. More than 20 new pieces of legislation were enacted during the 2013-2014 legislative session.

The editorial, similar to some other presentations in the media and communities, have struggled to fully, accurately and consistently inform on the content of the laws and the implications of those policy changes on mandated reporters and systems responding to reports of child abuse.

In other words sometimes the public education is becoming a double edged sword in that even as awareness is raised it is then diminished by messaging that further confuses and creates angst.

Of increasing concern is the focus on the changes on adults versus intentionally reinforcing that at-risk and abused children waited nearly two decades for a child-centered approach to how child abuse was defined, reported and investigated.

Enter the PA [House Children and Youth Committee](#), which today convened an informational hearing to generally outline the significant child protection changes enacted in recent years with a particular focus on Act 153. This law created a requirement for

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"Astounding" number of mandated reporters being trained, clearances being completed

DHS' Office of Children, Youth and Families (OCYF) Acting Deputy Secretary Cathy Utz reminded committee members that DHS

enhanced an existing contract with the University of Pittsburgh, School of Social Work to develop an online training resource on [recognizing and reporting child abuse](#). Federal Children's Justice Act (CJA) funds were used to help develop the training resource.

The 3-hour free online course includes "information on the recognition of child maltreatment, the obligation or opportunity to report child maltreatment, and the procedures for making a report of child maltreatment."

This training, which was launched on November 14, 2014, has had over 135,000 individuals registered for the training and nearly 113,000 have completed the training.

Utz noted those are "astounding" numbers reflecting the commitment of the state to train mandated reporters, who are the "first line of defense" to protect children.

She also noted that the state has continued to contract with the [PA Family Support Alliance \(PA-FSA\)](#) and the [PA Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics](#) to provide in-person

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ChildLine staff increases as technology hurdles cited as decreasing

Utz acknowledged that there have been challenges that have resulted from the growing demand on ChildLine and the implementation of new technology. She said DHS has handled some challenges "better than others."

Last week the Wolf Administration announced that it would hire additional staff at ChildLine and already this week 10 more staff members are working to process clearances. DHS is on target to bring another

25 employees to aid ChildLine in receiving reports of suspected child abuse and processing background checks.

As for the much awaited technology known as the Child Welfare Information Solution (CWIS) well it has been a bumpy ride so far.

CWIS went live on December 31st. DHS has planned CWIS to include 4 phases with the 1st phase launched this month. It took 6 years (and various even earlier IT disasters that cost significant public resources) to develop a statewide automated child welfare system. Among the CWIS goals:

- Improve the efficiency and effectiveness of PA's child welfare programs through systematic automation and process modernization;

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Representative Moul opens the door to waived fees for all volunteers

[Representative Dan Moul \(R-Adams\)](#) was the prime sponsor of the legislation that has become the biggest hot button issue - requiring comprehensive and regularly updated criminal and child abuse background checks for those paid to work or volunteer with children.

Moul emphasized that many volunteer-driven organizations, including churches, have outreached to his office to raise some concerns about the cost implications of the background check requirements.

A volunteer, who does not have background checks for employment purposes, must obtain at least a PA State Police Criminal History Check (\$10) and a PA Child Abuse History Clearance (\$10). Volunteers that have not been a resident of Pennsylvania consistently for 10 years would also have to

complete an FBI check with fingerprinting at a cost of about \$28.

State law requires that the \$10 DHS Child Abuse History Clearance fee and the \$10 PA State Police Criminal History Check fee be waived for prospective volunteers with a Big Brother/Big Sister program, domestic violence or sexual violence

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CPSL FAQ: Are volunteers required to be trained now that they are mandated reporters?

No, there is no legal requirement that volunteers be trained in recognizing and reporting suspected child abuse and neglect.

Of course given the important responsibility involved in reporting suspected child abuse and the potential legal ramifications for willfully not making a report (e.g., being sentenced to prison or facing a fine), training makes sense.

Training is also reasonable in that a number of online resources – approved by the Department of Human Services – exist and provide no-cost training. Other approved training providers may charge a fee, but they

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