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Senate of Pennsylvania

December 12, 2011

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TO: All Senators

FROM: Senator Kim Ward 

SUBJECT: Co-Sponsorship of SR 250 – **Task Force on Child Protection - Memo #35**

As a result of recent events relating to child abuse, I plan to introduce a resolution establishing the Task Force on Child Protection.

The Senate Aging and Youth Committee held public hearings on August 26, 2011, receiving testimony on necessary changes to Pennsylvania's definition of child abuse and on October 4, 2011, receiving testimony related to difficulties in determining child abuse. In addition, the committee held a public hearing and the Senate passed Senate Bill 449, which requires additional child abuse training for mandatory child abuse reporters.

I believe that there must an immediate examination and comprehensive action taken. The Task Force on Child Protection will conduct a comprehensive review to:

- (i) ascertain any inadequacies relating to the mandatory reporting of child abuse;
- (ii) restore public confidence in the ability of the Commonwealth to protect the victims of child abuse.

The Task Force shall consist of the following members appointed within twenty-five days after the adoption of this resolution by both chambers:

6 members knowledgeable and experienced in issues relating to child abuse or providing services to victims of child abuse as follows:

- (i) Three members appointed by the President Pro Tempore of the Senate, in consultation with the Majority Leader and the Minority Leader of the Senate. A member under this subparagraph may be a member of Senate.
- (ii) Three members appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, in consultation with the Majority Leader and the Minority Leader of the House of Representatives. A member under this subparagraph may be a member of the House of Representatives.

4 members appointed by the Governor as follows:

- (i) One member shall be a member of the general public.
- (ii) One member shall be a member of a crime victim organization or a children and youth services organization who is directly involved in providing services to victims of child abuse.
- (iii) One member experienced in the operation and interaction between a county children and youth agency and the Commonwealth.
- (iv) One district attorney.

The Secretary of Public Welfare of a designee who is an employee.

The task force has the following powers:

- (1) To examine and analyze the practices, processes and procedures relating to the response of child abuse.
- (2) To review and analyze law, procedures, practices and rules relating to the reporting of child abuse.
- (3) To hold public hearings for the taking of testimony and requesting documents
- (4) The chairperson shall have the power to administer oaths and affirmations to witnesses appearing before the task force.

The task force has the following duties:

- (1) To accept and review written comments from individuals and organizations.
- (2) To make, by November 30, 2012, a final report to the Governor, Senate and House of Representatives.
- (3) Based on its review, the report shall include recommendations:
 - (i) To improve the reporting of child abuse.
 - (ii) To implement and necessary changes in state statutes and practices, policies and procedures relating to child abuse.
 - (iii) To train appropriate individuals in the reporting of child abuse.
- (4) To make reports as follows:
 - (i) Status reports and updates with the Governor, Senate and House of Representatives.
 - (ii) Reports shall be adopted at public meetings.
 - (iv) Report shall be a public record.

Task Force will expire on December 31, 2012.

If you would like to co-sponsor this resolution, please contact Judy Merrill in my office at 717-787-6063 or by email at jmerrill@pasen.gov **BY NOON TODAY.**