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TO: All House Members
FROM: Representative Jerry Knowles 
DATE: September 27, 2012
SUBJECT: Expansion of the Human Services Development Block Grant Program

I intend to introduce legislation next week, amending Act 80 of 2012 to expand the Human Services Development Block Grant Program to at least 30 counties, with the amendment to take effective immediately.

Under Act 80, a block grant pilot program which provides needed reforms for the human services funding system was established, but participation has been limited to 20 counties. The original proposal announced by the Governor concurrent to his budget address intended all 67 counties to be provided the option of participating in the block grant. A total of 30 counties filed applications with the Department to become a pilot county, resulting in the limitations in the act preventing the participation by ten ready and willing counties.

Given the level of interest clearly evidenced by the number of applicants, driven in part by the 10% cut in funding for programs within the block grant, an immediate expansion is in order to allow the additional counties to participate now, increasing the potential for beneficial flexibility in utilization of funding through local decision making, which may lessen the impact of cuts.

Under the pilot in current law, the chosen counties will continue to receive their funding for the seven included line items based upon categorical allocations for each area. Those lines include the Mental Health and Intellectual Disabilities base funds, Act 152 Drug and Alcohol funds, Human Services Development Fund, Child Welfare Special Grants and Homeless Assistance. Flexibility is authorized for block grant counties with some limitation, and in year one, pilot counties will be required to utilize 80% of the funds within the categorical area for which those dollars are provided. Having such a standard provides assurance that counties selected for the pilot will have substantial guidance and oversight during the transition. All counties within the block grant are required to submit detailed plans on how funds will be utilized and must conduct two public hearings in order to inform local citizens and clients of the changes that may accompany the new model. The selected counties will be required to fund each of the seven line items, and cannot defund any of the included line items completely.

Under my legislation, the ten counties that were not selected as pilot counties would be permitted to request reconsideration for the expanded slots, up to thirty for 2012-2013 fiscal year. No additional counties may apply unless one of the original thirty declines to request reconsideration.

If you would like to join me in sponsoring this bill, please contact Tracy Baker at 787-9029 or tbaker@pahousegop.com

JK/tb