

Testimony of

The Departments of Aging, and Labor and Industry, and Public Welfare

Before the

Aging and Older Adult Services Committee

Of the

Pennsylvania House of Representatives

Presented by

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Thank you Chairman Mundy, Chairman Hennessey, and members of the House Aging and Older Adult Services Committee for the opportunity to testify on this important issue. We applaud Representative Bear for bringing HB 1743 forward and engaging us in a dialogue to meet the Department of Aging's civic engagement goals, the Department of Public Welfare's goals of self-sufficiency for their clients, and the Department of Labor and Industry's efforts to strengthen our workforce.

I am Ray Prushnok, Director of Policy and Legislative Affairs at the Department of Aging. I am joined today by Linda Blanchette, Deputy Secretary of Income Maintenance of the Department of Public Welfare and Neil Cashman, Special Assistant for External Affairs of the Department of Labor and Industry.

Our departments support the concept of using retirees as a resource for providing support to recipients of welfare payments and low-wage individuals as they seek employment. A retiree welfare-to-work mentorship program would contribute to the commonwealth's continued workforce development and job placement efforts. Additionally, this bill would continue the successful efforts of the Department of Public Welfare in serving clients and assisting them in their efforts to achieve self-sufficiency. It will also broaden the scope of services that are provided to welfare-to-work clients by strengthening the relationships of our departments.

The bill, by providing for the establishment of a comprehensive Pennsylvania retiree welfare-to-work mentoring program, provides an avenue for job advancement for DPW clients so that they can continue to be productive and to enjoy the increased income offered by staying on the job. The bill provides tremendous opportunities for individuals with significant work and life experiences to share those experiences and to impact positively families who are striving to obtain independence and self-sufficiency.

The Department of Public Welfare has made significant progress reducing the number of families relying upon TANF cash assistance and helping to get adults into the workforce. Today, there are approximately 207,000 adults and children receiving TANF Cash Assistance. Of the total, 72 percent are children and 28 percent are adults. This means that fewer Pennsylvanians are receiving cash assistance than anytime since 1961.

The decline has been especially significant in the last two years. The number of persons receiving cash assistance has declined by 24% percent since October 2005.

The good news for TANF families is that more low income parents are able to get the training and support they need to get jobs and to stay employed. The number of job placements has been up every year since 2003-04. Job placement by employment and training vendors nearly doubled from 8,700 in FY2005-06 to 16,300 in FY2006-07. This program would be a strong complement to these efforts.

Through the Industry Partnership program, the Department of Labor and Industry has vastly improved and expanded opportunities for individuals to receive training in what has been identified as High Priority Occupations. There are currently 90 Partnerships,

6100 companies involved and 53,000 people have been trained since its inception in 2005. If implemented, this program could coordinate with that larger strategy.

The Department of Aging would be charged with recruiting individuals ages 60 and older to be mentors for DPW clients and low-wage individuals. We would also be responsible for providing necessary training for the mentors, reimbursing them for expenses, and purchasing the needed technology to make the program operational. The Department of Aging is uniquely equipped to administer such a program with our experience and the local expertise of the area agencies on aging in administering volunteer programs such as the APPRISE, PEER, and ombudsman programs.

Learning from the Kansas experience, much of the training of mentors was an evolutionary process. Training included required reading, hands-on experience, group training sessions on what problems clients may have, and how to understand the services clients regularly relied upon. While not licensed or certified as counselors, the Kansas mentors used their training to identify community resources for their clients' needs and developed a referral system to immediately respond to crises experienced by their clients.

HB 1743 provides little guidance regarding development of training programs for mentors. The bill says these mentors are to serve as "advisors, counselors and teachers" to aid clients in developing "job-seeking and job-keeping skills, work ethic and responsibility."

Additionally, an evaluation of the benefits of coaching versus mentoring would be of value. Coaching is a *learning technique* that involves observing an individual at work and providing feedback to enhance performance or correct deficiencies. This method focuses the client specifically on career and skills development to maximize opportunities and eliminate barriers to employment. While mentoring, however, is a relationship that gives people the opportunity to share professional and personal skills and experiences, all of which may not necessarily relate to career development.

HB 1743 is focused on providing clients with the tools necessary to successfully gain and retain employment. The Department of Labor & Industry believes the more efficient use of resources in activities designed to provide job training skills is through coaching as opposed to mentoring.

While our departments are strongly supportive of the concept, the availability of adequate financial support will be critical in implementing a successful pilot. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss this important legislation. We would be glad to answer any questions you may have for our departments at this time.

