

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

CHILDREN AND YOUTH COMMITTEE
PUBLIC HEARING

STATE CAPITOL
HARRISBURG, PA

MAIN CAPITOL BUILDING
ROOM 60, EAST WING

MONDAY, APRIL 4, 2016
11:05 A.M.

PRESENTATION ON
CHILDREN AND YOUTH SERVICES AGENCIES'
CASEWORKER COMPLEMENT AND RETENTION

BEFORE:

HONORABLE KATHARINE WATSON, MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN
HONORABLE KATE ANNE KLUNK
HONORABLE HARRY LEWIS, JR.
HONORABLE DAVID MALONEY
HONORABLE BRETT MILLER
HONORABLE DAN MOUL
HONORABLE TEDD NESBIT
HONORABLE DAVID PARKER
HONORABLE GREG ROTHMAN
HONORABLE RICK SACCONI
HONORABLE TARAH TOOHL
HONORABLE SCOTT CONKLIN, DEMOCRATIC CHAIRMAN
HONORABLE LESLIE ACOSTA
HONORABLE PAMELA DELISSIO
HONORABLE PATTY KIM
HONORABLE STEPHEN MCCARTER
HONORABLE DAN MILLER

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*Pennsylvania House of Representatives
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*

COMMITTEE STAFF PRESENT:

GREGORY GRASA

MAJORITY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

MEREDITH SCHULER

MAJORITY LEGISLATIVE ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

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SUBMITTED WRITTEN TESTIMONY

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(See submitted written testimony and handouts online.)

1 PROCEEDINGS

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3 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN WATSON: Good morning, ladies
4 and gentlemen. Good morning to everyone. Welcome to our
5 public hearing convened by the House Children and Youth
6 Committee.

7 I do want to remind everyone that this meeting is
8 being recorded. Therefore, I would ask that your cell
9 phones, any other electronic devices be set to a silent
10 mode. If you want to check that now, that would be
11 important.

12 We usually start by taking the roll. I'm going
13 to wait a moment to do that and ask you all in a minute to
14 rise for a moment of silence. That is something unusual.
15 But we have had, I'll say, a death in the family in the
16 last few months, and that was one of the advocates for
17 children, one of the tireless advocates for children who
18 goes all the way back to the Task Force on Child Protection
19 who was actively involved.

20 And if you are local, that is in central
21 Pennsylvania, you knew his name from all kinds of other
22 things aside from being an attorney but related to
23 children. And that would be Jason Kutulakis. And I waited
24 and I thought it would be helpful, especially with a number
25 of people who are here, and I recognize many of them knew

1 Jason. He was all over this State and did a lot of work,
2 remember, all as a volunteer, all because, indeed, for him
3 it really was about the children, not about the convenience
4 of adults.

5 So I would ask respectfully if you would rise for
6 a moment of silence for Jason Kutulakis.

7

8 (A moment of silence was taken.)

9

10 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN WATSON: Thank you.

11 And now, Meredith, as secretary, would you please
12 take the roll?

13

14 (Roll was taken.)

15

16 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN WATSON: Thank you.

17

18 Today, ladies and gentlemen, this Committee is
19 beginning an important discussion concerning a critical
20 issue of statewide significance. This is just the first in
21 what will be a series of Committee hearings that will
22 examine the state of Pennsylvania's child welfare system
23 and county CYs agencies.

23

24 What's the objective? The objective is
25 sustaining and improving the system as it continues its
vital mission.

1 This Committee, as you well know, played a very
2 key role in developing and enacting the first comprehensive
3 update and improvement of Pennsylvania's child abuse and
4 child welfare laws actually in nearly two decades.
5 Enacting the landmark legislation to better protect
6 Pennsylvania's children certainly was a major
7 accomplishment. And personally, I'm very proud of the work
8 that this Committee did. They worked long and they worked
9 hard.

10 But the real work or -- that's what I told them
11 because I had to get them to work the first part -- but now
12 I'm telling them, oh, yes, the real work is beginning now
13 after the enactment of the 24 bills, and it really
14 continues to begin today, because here is the challenge of
15 implementing the sweeping changes made to the Child
16 Protective Services law, and that's what we have entrusted
17 to our Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, to the
18 Office of Children, Youth, and Families, and to the 67
19 county Children and Youth Services agencies across the
20 Commonwealth. That's a lot of responsibility.

21 They were with us as we were changing the law,
22 but we heard from them in saying, but, you know, this is
23 going to be really hard to implement, and with what we
24 have, how do we do it? We kept saying we'll help. We will
25 help. We will do this. This is an ongoing issue. It's

1 not a once-and-done. I mentioned that many times in saying
2 it's not as if, if we take these laws and put them stone,
3 we hang them on the building and we're finished and done,
4 no, it is not.

5 The dedicated child welfare professionals who
6 work at the county and State levels, they certainly did
7 applaud the Legislature's actions on behalf of children,
8 and I certainly have to say they've accepted the challenge.
9 But they've also said to us we need more.

10 The children and youth directors, the
11 supervisors, the caseworkers, the private providers, and
12 even the Department of Human Services staff have spent this
13 year or so doing their best to meet those increased demands
14 brought on by all of our legislative mandates, especially
15 with regard to the reporting and the investigating of
16 suspected child abuse.

17 It's imperative then on us that these dedicated
18 professionals have the resources to accomplish the expanded
19 mission that we gave them, and that's the beginning of the
20 hearing here. We recognize there are issues and there are
21 problems. Our goal is to work through all of that. And
22 the overarching goal has remained the same, and that is it
23 is for the betterment of the children of Pennsylvania, not
24 necessarily for the convenience of adults.

25 At the same time, we applaud what has gone on in

1 the past. We applaud many who give hours and hours beyond
2 their job to look after children. And we hear stories all
3 the time of how they've gone that extra mile. But we know
4 that we need to enhance staff recruitment and retention if
5 counties are able to maintain a stable and a well-prepared
6 workforce in the child welfare system. If we don't address
7 that issue alone even, county agencies soon may be unable
8 to provide even the most critical of services. So that's
9 our first step in our goal.

10 But as I said to you, please understand, ladies
11 and gentlemen, this is a problem that won't solve itself or
12 be finished in a month or six months. It is ongoing now.
13 And certainly, the Committee that I have the good fortune
14 to chair is up to the task and they've already proven that.
15 So we will simply move forward.

16 Therefore, examining the state of Pennsylvania's
17 child welfare system is definitely a huge, multifaceted
18 task, and it's a formidable challenge for us. Please
19 consider today's hearing as the starting point, not the
20 end, just the beginning.

21 We begin our fact-finding mission today by
22 focusing on county children and youth agencies caseworker
23 complements, caseloads, caseworker turnover, caseworker
24 retention, and strategies to further professionalize this
25 critically important workforce. As you can imagine, notice

1 the word caseworker kept repeating itself because indeed
2 caseworkers really are the underpinning of the entire
3 system, and the job they do is terribly important.

4 We're fortunate to have with us today a panel of
5 experts in the field who will share their insights into the
6 problems and challenges facing children and youth staff and
7 those who are contracted to provide services to children
8 and youth families. On behalf of Chairman Conklin and
9 myself, I wish to thank each of our testifiers for taking
10 the time to join this discussion today. The Committee
11 certainly will benefit from your wealth of expertise,
12 listening to and learning from a range of perspectives.

13 I would ask one thing, and we had agreed on this,
14 and that would be we recognize and have copies and any
15 Member not here will receive a copy of your testimony. But
16 indeed some of them are 7 to 10 pages. I appreciate the
17 time and effort you've put into it, but would you please
18 excerpt that when you talk to the Committee because I
19 worked it out, you know, the former English teacher, I'm
20 sitting there figuring out how will that be if they read
21 that, they read it about this, and I read some. Ladies and
22 gentlemen, we're going to be here until 2:30, so we can't
23 do that because we have sessions. So we would ask if you
24 would condense some of that knowing that my Members are
25 great. They'll read every single word that you printed and

1 sent to us.

2 I look forward then to us moving in a very
3 positive, constructive dialogue over the next two hours.
4 It's just the first two hours. There will be more dialogue
5 and more things to come. The Committee will be squarely
6 focused on what's best for Pennsylvania's children and
7 their families. I promise you that.

8 This Committee and this House and this
9 Legislature certainly want to partner with you because we
10 are all working for the same goal: to make Pennsylvania's
11 child welfare system the absolute best it can be to serve
12 the children of the Commonwealth and again promote a better
13 life for all children.

14 Chairman Conklin, I have mentioned him as the
15 Democrat Chair, sir, did you wish to comment?

16 DEMOCRATIC CHAIRMAN CONKLIN: In light of time,
17 Madam Chairwoman, I think you've done an elegant job of
18 giving the pre before the meeting starts, so I'm going to
19 leave it to you to begin.

20 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN WATSON: All right. And we
21 are running -- we're five minutes late. I don't want to
22 stress you out, but I will mention that. But now it's time
23 to begin today's testimony.

24 We thought it would be good to first hear from
25 the caseworkers themselves, the people that we certainly

1 praise but then go, oh, we think you're doing a fine job
2 but we're going to give you more to do and no more time and
3 no more money and all those things. So indeed, we're going
4 to start with Shiloh Hagerty if she would come forward,
5 Caseworker II with Cumberland County Children and Youth.
6 And we thank you for joining us today. And please, you may
7 begin your testimony when ready. Members, you have a copy
8 of that. We'll just keep moving along. Thank you.

9 MS. HAGERTY: Good morning. I would first like
10 to thank Chairwoman Watson, Vice Chairman Moul, Executive
11 Director Greg Grasa, as well as the honorable Committee for
12 this opportunity.

13 My name is Shiloh Hagerty. I am currently
14 employed at Cumberland County Children and Youth Services
15 as an intake and investigation caseworker. I have been
16 doing this job for 12 years, 7-1/2 in Cumberland County and
17 4-1/2 in Monroe County.

18 As an intake caseworker, I conduct investigations
19 of serious abuse, including physical, sexual, emotional, as
20 well as serious neglect investigations. Also, I conduct
21 general assessments, including allegations of drug abuse,
22 deplorable housing, ungovernable teenagers, et cetera.

23 Since being in the child welfare field, I have
24 seen numerous deficits to the system which prevent children
25 and youth agencies and their caseworkers to complete their

1 job effectively and to assure the safety of children to the
2 fullest extent possible. One deficit includes an enormous
3 amount of paperwork that has to be completed by a
4 caseworker while conducting an investigation/assessment, as
5 well as caseworkers who provide ongoing services to
6 families. The amount of paperwork over the past 12 years
7 has drastically increased, causing caseworkers to spend
8 numerous hours at the office or on a computer rather than
9 where they need to be, which is in the field with their
10 families.

11 When I first began as a caseworker, I was able to
12 complete paperwork for a family within at minimum 30
13 minutes. The minimum amount of time now would be at least
14 one to two hours per family, which creates a lot of time in
15 the office rather than, again, in the field.

16 Although the thorough documentation in completing
17 risk and safety assessments is necessary to conduct
18 investigations, the time spent doing so for each family
19 leads into another deficit in the child welfare field,
20 which is high caseloads, which then creates unrealistic
21 demands of a caseworker. Caseworkers are working numerous
22 hours of overtime in the evenings after already working
23 eight-hour days. Very rarely do we get lunch breaks. We
24 are working late into the night just meeting with families
25 and also trying to complete paperwork as we have deadlines

1 set by the State for when our paperwork has to be
2 completed. Those demands on a caseworker also then leads
3 into personal issues and issues in their own families.

4 In addition, we also have been required to attend
5 family engagement meetings, which has been developed so
6 families can succeed. However, those meetings are numerous
7 hours to coordinate, as well as to attend. Although
8 they're very well-needed, when you have a high caseload and
9 have numerous families that you need to do that for, it
10 creates a lot of time.

11 I have seen so many caseworkers leave the child
12 welfare profession because of the stress and the long hours
13 that are being worked. Although they love to work with
14 children, they cannot overcome the stress and the long
15 hours that they need to work.

16 The child welfare system also lacks as a whole
17 the funding needed not only to provide caseworkers with an
18 income that they deserve but also to provide services for
19 the families that we work with. Providing services to a
20 family can be difficult on a low budget for the child
21 welfare system. If we had additional funding, we would be
22 able to provide necessary services to the families that
23 they need, which then can prevent a lot of placement of
24 children, as well as I do believe if caseworkers were
25 supplemented with a salary they deserve, that would help

1 with the high turnover rate as well.

2 I truly do believe that based upon my firsthand
3 experience in working in this field for 12 years, it has
4 been proven that having a manageable caseload of
5 approximately 15 families per caseworker would drastically
6 decrease the stress of the job. Having a manageable
7 caseload would allow caseworkers to spend to spend more
8 time with our clients to assure the safety of children and
9 that caregivers are the most effective they can be for
10 those children. Caseworkers would be able to complete
11 their paperwork and attend all of their necessary family
12 engagement meetings that we need to complete. If having a
13 manageable caseload would reduce stress and overall
14 paperwork, then many caseworkers may choose to remain in
15 the child welfare system, making caseworker retention an
16 attainable outcome.

17 Hiring the best individuals for the caseworker
18 job may also start within the communities. Teaching and
19 preparing students interested in the child welfare field
20 that are attending colleges, the reality of the job, is key
21 to caseworker retention. Many students who intern at
22 children and youth agencies are then hired and then
23 realize, wow, this is a lot of stress, and they then
24 oftentimes leave and go elsewhere for employment that
25 doesn't require long hours and high stress.

1 In conclusion, I did not choose this profession
2 because I thought I would become wealthy. However, I did
3 choose this career for the love in helping of working with
4 children. I continue to work in this career because I do
5 enjoy knowing that I have helped to improve the life of
6 children and/or caregivers. We're oftentimes called
7 numerous names, we're threatened. However, there are some
8 instances when a child or a caregiver says thank you to us,
9 and that means the world to a caseworker. Knowing that
10 you've helped a family and have been recognized for such is
11 worth the work that we do.

12 I do know that if the deficiencies in the child
13 welfare field are not fixed, that this is not a career that
14 I can continue in myself. Addressing the caseworker
15 retention issues and improving caseworkers' job experience
16 is where the start of improving the overall child welfare
17 system begins. If we can start now to move toward more
18 positive changes in the child welfare system and retaining
19 caseworkers, this may one day be an issue of the past.

20 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN WATSON: Thank you very much
21 for your comments. Would you stay there for a moment --

22 MS. HAGERTY: Yes.

23 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN WATSON: -- and Mr. Ranney,
24 Nicholas Ranney, would you join, please, Caseworker II,
25 Cumberland County. I'm sorry, Franklin County. How could

1 I make that mistake? But if you would join us. And then I
2 though, ladies and gentlemen, if you have a quick question
3 for caseworkers, we'll do that. Then, we'll move to the
4 administration at that level with Mrs. Rainey talking to
5 us. But if you would, sir, begin, that would be terrific.

6 MR. RANNEY: Okay. Good morning. I would first
7 like to thank Chairwoman Watson and the honorable Committee
8 for allowing me this opportunity.

9 My name is Nicholas Ranney, and I am an intake
10 caseworker with the Franklin County Children and Youth
11 Service. I was hired in May of 2008 after I graduated from
12 the West Virginia University with my bachelor's degree. I
13 come before you today to offer my experience within the
14 child welfare field and to hopefully share a perspective
15 which may help to better the field and practice as a whole.

16 In my short time within this profession I have
17 seen many changes. Most notably, I have seen many
18 caseworkers come and go in my eight short years. I've had
19 the opportunity to meet many other caseworkers within the
20 State and all share similar stories about staff coming and
21 going. Retention, particularly within the intake unit, has
22 been a struggle even when I was first hired. I believe
23 there are many reasons for this which I will touch upon.

24 Currently, a Franklin County intake worker is
25 averaging two cases being assigned to them per day, or a 40

1 percent increase since the inception of the new Child
2 Protective Services law. Meanwhile, our intake staff has
3 not increased at all. The increased caseload alone is
4 enough to cause our staff to leave.

5 I believe another problem caseworkers face is a
6 lack of training. Since I have begun this career, I have
7 had to develop extensive knowledge within the fields of
8 child development, mental health, human anatomy, biology,
9 pharmaceuticals, narcotics, addiction, interrogations,
10 crime scene investigations, technology, and the list goes
11 on.

12 The training provided to new caseworkers is named
13 Charting the Course and consists of 10 modules. While
14 these modules do well to introduce caseworkers to the forms
15 and general practices used within an agency, they do little
16 by way of preparing a caseworker for the field.

17 I had to seek out and get permission to attend
18 additional trainings that helped shape my abilities as a
19 caseworker. These trainings include Finding Words offered
20 by the National Child Protection Training Center,
21 ChildFirst PA, a PA forensic interview training developed
22 by the National Child Training Center, which offered free
23 tuition to child welfare workers with usage of grant money.

24 In 2011, the Pennsylvania Solicitor's
25 Association, along with the Pennsylvania District

1 Attorney's Association, brought ChildFirst to Pennsylvania
2 and began training multidisciplinary investigative teams
3 consisting of Child Protective Services workers, law
4 enforcement, prosecutors, solicitors, forensic
5 interviewers, and medical providers.

6 In 2012, Pennsylvania became certified as a
7 ChildFirst training State. ChildFirst is the only in-state
8 training of its kind. It trains teams to understand the
9 importance of having a county investigative protocol, how
10 to interview children involved in investigations of
11 allegations of child abuse and neglect. The ChildFirst PA
12 training was cited in the Dauphin County Grand Jury report
13 in June of 2015 as being the only training that effectively
14 prepares caseworkers handling child abuse investigations.

15 I've also attended lectures and trainings done by
16 doctors at the Penn State Milton S. Hershey Children's
17 Hospital, the National Children's Alliance, and the
18 Pennsylvania Chapter of Children's Advocacy Centers and
19 Multi-Disciplinary Teams. Those are just naming a few,
20 none of which were required, and all of which helped to
21 mold me into a competent caseworker.

22 Now, imagine being given limited tools with which
23 to accomplish the task. Overwhelmed, daunted, terrified,
24 pressured, scrutinized, stressed, tired, and drained are
25 only a few of the adjectives used when new workers speak

1 about their current day-to-day.

2 Other issues make it hard to retain staff as
3 well. I won't go into the details, as I believe my
4 colleague Shiloh spoke about paperwork, and I echo her
5 sentiments as well.

6 Also, within the last few years, CWIS was
7 introduced, a statewide database in which we now do all of
8 our work. This was rolled out statewide, and caseworkers
9 were only offered a one-day training on this system. Also,
10 it was only limitedly piloted. The difficulties with this
11 system, as well as the redundancy of paperwork tasked to
12 caseworkers are too much to detail, but I will be happy to
13 answer any specific questions.

14 Now, imagine all the problems that myself and
15 Shiloh have spoken about and increasing one's workload by
16 40 percent. Also, be aware that there is no monetary
17 incentive to this job. The starting pay of a caseworker,
18 one tasked with investigations, is less than a ChildLine
19 worker who takes the reports.

20 Young people who enter this profession quickly
21 learn that their earning potential is far greater elsewhere
22 and more likely less stressful. Those who do stay long
23 enough to maybe have a family run into other problems like
24 providing for their family on a meager income, stress of
25 the job interfering with their family relationships, and

1 long hours detracting from one's own family.

2 It is for this reason that I feel that child
3 welfare has entered a breaking point and will soon be in a
4 crisis. Young, talented, and well-intended people are
5 avoiding or leaving this profession at an exceptionally
6 high rate. And for those who remain, the amount of work
7 and stress is becoming near unbearable.

8 I would like to offer some suggestions as to how
9 we can help caseworkers do their intended job. I believe
10 decreasing a caseworker's caseload would provide the most
11 immediate and impactful solution to issues caseworkers are
12 facing. Fewer cases would allow caseworkers to spend more
13 time with their families in the field, feel less rushed,
14 and ease the stress of the job. The more time one can
15 spend with a family, the better an assessment can be
16 completed. The better assessment one can complete will in
17 turn allow for better services to be provided. With
18 appropriate services in place, agencies could avoid
19 potential out-of-home placements and recidivism. This can
20 only be accomplished by increasing staff sizes. As I
21 previously stated, within my agency staff size has not
22 increased in five years.

23 Caseworkers need to be provided better training
24 in the beginning. The amount of knowledge a caseworker is
25 expected to possess is outrageous and beyond one college

1 degree. While I understand some of what we do is learned
2 while being in the field, most new caseworkers aren't
3 receiving adequate supervision or time with experienced
4 caseworkers because of the increased workloads and demands.
5 We need to look into a more comprehensive training program
6 for new caseworkers that not only provide classroom lecture
7 but can recreate real-world experience.

8 At the National Child Protection Training Center
9 there is a mock house used to set up real-world examples of
10 referrals caseworkers may see. ChildFirst PA uses actual
11 children, as well as trained adult actors, for caseworkers
12 to practice their interview skills. ChildFirst PA also
13 offers courtroom training and how to testify. Doctors,
14 such as ones at the Penn State Children's Hospital, should
15 be consulted or have caseworkers attend their lectures.

16 I, as well as all other caseworkers, did not take
17 this job because I wanted to be rich. I do this job
18 because I believe that children are our most valuable and
19 important resource but also the most fragile. I do this
20 because I hope that I have the ability to impact a child's
21 life for the better.

22 I cannot, in the current climate, continue to do
23 the job I love as effectively as I should be able to. No
24 caseworker can. Because of this, I fear that children will
25 be left behind, hurt, neglected, or forgotten. I don't

1 seek change to better my work life. I seek change to
2 better the life of a child.

3 Thank you for your time, and again, thank you for
4 this opportunity.

5 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN WATSON: Thank you very much.
6 And certainly that last statement, "I seek change to better
7 the life of a child," really sums up why this Committee is
8 here and Members ask to be on this Committee, to do that.
9 So I would hope that we will work on that over time
10 together.

11 Members, were there any questions for the
12 caseworker?

13 Representative, go right ahead. And then
14 Representative Saccone will be next.

15 REPRESENTATIVE DELISSIO: Thank you, Chairwoman.

16 To be clear -- and I'm a relatively new Member of
17 this Committee -- are you county employees or State
18 employees?

19 MS. HAGERTY: County employees.

20 MR. RANNEY: We're county employees.

21 REPRESENTATIVE DELISSIO: You're county
22 employees. So are the changes that need to happen at the
23 county level of government or the State level of
24 government?

25 MR. RANNEY: I believe it starts with statewide,

1 as the State level guides our practices and what we do.

2 REPRESENTATIVE DELISSIO: And that comes out of
3 the State Department of Human Services?

4 MR. RANNEY: Yes.

5 REPRESENTATIVE DELISSIO: You've mentioned
6 caseload several times and that the ideal caseload might be
7 15. What is an approximate current caseload?

8 MS. HAGERTY: Currently, caseworkers can have
9 anywhere from 20 to approximately 40 cases.

10 REPRESENTATIVE DELISSIO: Twenty to forty?

11 MS. HAGERTY: Yes.

12 MR. RANNEY: I would agree. I think I'm
13 averaging somewhere between 25, upwards of 40 cases at any
14 given time.

15 REPRESENTATIVE DELISSIO: That's the questions I
16 have at the moment, Madam Chairwoman.

17 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN WATSON: Good. Thank you.

18 Representative Saccone, go right ahead.

19 REPRESENTATIVE SACCONI: Thank you, Madam Chair,
20 and thank you for your testimony. Thank you for all the
21 work you do in our communities. I really do appreciate
22 that.

23 I'm interested in the reduction of paperwork
24 because in every part of the bureaucracy I view, I see that
25 we're capturing many times needless data that we never

1 actually use or never try to re-access or rarely try to re-
2 access but we're still filling out papers and collecting
3 data that, you know, it's taking up your time and it's
4 really not necessary anymore. It may have been necessary
5 years ago or whatever. There's lot of reasons why we do
6 it.

7 Can you identify some of those things for us as a
8 Committee that could help in reducing the paperwork, things
9 that might no longer be needed or things that you think
10 could be combined or streamlined? And if you would just
11 add what is the starting salary for a caseworker?

12 MS. HAGERTY: Well, Cumberland County is in a
13 middle ground kind of right now, so the starting salary for
14 a caseworker I believe in Cumberland, which is the highest
15 in the State, is 47 to 48,000. That is not a clear picture
16 of what the starting salary is of a caseworker across the
17 State.

18 MR. RANNEY: In Franklin County, a starting
19 caseworker begins at, I believe, \$15 or \$16 an hour.

20 In terms of the paperwork, unless you see it, you
21 may not understand, but there's a lot of forms, there's
22 things called safety assessments and risk assessments that
23 we do quite frequently. Part of my belief is is that if we
24 feel that there is no safety or risk, do we really need to
25 do a form that says that or can our contacts, just our

1 simple notes, could we just express it in there, that we
2 felt that the situation was safe, that there was no danger
3 present rather than saying that in our contact notes and
4 then going through another form saying that there are no
5 safety threats, followed by a risk assessment again saying
6 that there is no risk. I feel that there is some
7 redundancy there.

8 I do believe that if there are safety threats, if
9 there is clear abuse or neglect, then, yes, I do believe
10 that there needs to be proper documentation, especially if
11 there's court involvement. But I think for some of our
12 other cases where there is no threat, you know, maybe we
13 just refer them to a few services. I think just
14 documenting that effort should be sufficient. That's just
15 my belief.

16 MS. HAGERTY: I was going to say the same thing.
17 There are two forms we have to fill out. Although I
18 believe thorough documentation of meeting with a family and
19 what you spoke to that family about and how you identify
20 that a child is safe or unsafe is extremely important in
21 your dictation, which can take time when you're meeting
22 with families for long periods of time. However, when you
23 have to complete what's called a risk assessment and safety
24 assessment, they are redundant of each other. You are
25 putting in the safety assessment exactly what you just put

1 in your dictation, and the risk assessment is very similar
2 to what you just wrote in your safety assessment of how and
3 why you determined a child was safe or unsafe in their
4 home.

5 REPRESENTATIVE SACCONI: Is that? That was the
6 only one?

7 MR. RANNEY: I think we could go on for a very
8 long time --

9 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN WATSON: Right.

10 MR. RANNEY: -- but those are just specific
11 examples.

12 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN WATSON: Okay. Thank you
13 very much.

14 Vice Chairman Moul.

15 REPRESENTATIVE MOUL: Hi. I'm just going to
16 speak loudly [inaudible].

17 First of all, thank you for your commitment to
18 this very noble profession. It's a job that not many can
19 do. And we understand on this Committee that it takes a
20 special person to stick with this, so I applaud both of you
21 for doing so. I know that you're getting fabulously
22 wealthy doing this job.

23 But in any event, a couple of my questions were
24 already answered, but are you required to get continuing ed
25 as part of your job?

1 MS. HAGERTY: Yes, we are required to have 20
2 hours of training per year. However, a lot of those
3 trainings include how to complete certain types of
4 paperwork or not specific trainings -- there's a lot of
5 trainings in-house on how to complete a new safety
6 assessment, those kinds of things, which are important.
7 However, we do need more training which are more beneficial
8 when you're training about when you see various types of
9 injuries on a child what that looks like, what that could
10 be from, or just identifying developmental delays in
11 children and drug and alcohol concerns and mental health.
12 Being aware of what those risk factors look like is what is
13 more beneficial for a caseworker.

14 REPRESENTATIVE MOUL: So what I'm hearing is that
15 there is a lot of redundancy with paperwork/computer work
16 that you have to do when that time could be better spent
17 learning about injuries and things of such. Is that
18 mandated by DHS or is that through your county, the
19 different various paperwork?

20 MS. HAGERTY: DHS.

21 REPRESENTATIVE MOUL: DHS, okay. Okay. I'll
22 hold it there. I know we're running short on time, but
23 I'll come back to you guys later. Thank you.

24 MR. RANNEY: Thank you.

25 REPRESENTATIVE MOUL: Thank you, Madam Chair.

1 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN WATSON: All right. And
2 next, Representative Maloney has a question, followed by --
3 we'll organize this -- Representative Acosta, followed by
4 Representative Klunk. Folks, you're on. Go right ahead.

5 REPRESENTATIVE MALONEY: Thank you, Chairwoman.
6 Thank you for your testimony. There are a few
7 questions that were asked that I thought were rather
8 interesting, but in terms of the 40 percent increase in
9 casework that I think was said a couple times, could you
10 explain why you think that has taken place and has it been
11 more recently?

12 MR. RANNEY: I referenced the 40 percent
13 increase. That's just in Franklin County. I can't speak
14 for other counties, but I have heard upwards of 100 percent
15 increase to 30 to 40, 50 percent.

16 I think when the Child Protective Services law
17 changed, which was a good thing -- I think every caseworker
18 would agree that it was much-needed -- it broadened
19 mandated reporter requirements so there are far more
20 mandated reporters. There was mandatory training for all
21 mandated reporters, which was great, but when you push that
22 to the forefront, it does in turn increase more mandated
23 reporters calling in, which is excellent, that's what we
24 want, but we didn't increase staff on a county level behind
25 that.

1 REPRESENTATIVE MALONEY: So I guess it would be
2 fair to say, and I think everybody would agree, that there
3 was a serious neglect in what was being identified or what
4 we would call a report?

5 MR. RANNEY: I think what it did was it made
6 child abuse -- it brought it more into the face of the
7 public, especially our mandated reporters. I think that it
8 became a very hot topic that a lot more people became aware
9 of it, that they were cognizant, and they started to get
10 better at recognizing it, which is, again, very good, but I
11 just think that there needs to be staff support behind it.

12 REPRESENTATIVE MALONEY: Okay. And because of
13 the time, I think just one last quick question with respect
14 to that paperwork, the reports that you have now that are
15 increased, what would you say or how would you terminate a
16 case as being satisfied?

17 MS. HAGERTY: When you have a completed case,
18 when you go to a home and meet with the entire family and
19 interview all of the children and the family members and
20 you determine that the child is not a safety risk, a lot of
21 times we receive reports of all of these allegations and
22 you actually meet with the child and they say none of that
23 is true or that's not really what happened. So if you can
24 identify the home is safe, the parents are appropriate, the
25 child's needs are being met, et cetera, and that the child

1 is safe, you can then close the case, which as an intake
2 caseworker, we have 60 days to close a case or to transfer
3 a case into a different unit.

4 REPRESENTATIVE MALONEY: But this isn't just
5 homes. You're referring to homes as being the biggest
6 reason for the cases, or would you be referring to
7 organizations, places they could be, somewhere else outside
8 of the home that needs to be investigated?

9 MS. HAGERTY: Depending, that's a case-by-case
10 scenario, I would say. If you receive an alleged daycare
11 abuse, then you have to do an investigation at that
12 daycare, as well as follow up with those children in their
13 own private homes. You meet with children at school and
14 you assess that situation. You also have to follow it at
15 home. So there are many times when you are meeting with
16 them in various locations.

17 REPRESENTATIVE MALONEY: Okay. Thank you.

18 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN WATSON: Representative?

19 REPRESENTATIVE ACOSTA: Yes, thank you. Good
20 morning.

21 I just wanted to say I was a previous social
22 worker myself. I worked for the Public Defender's Office
23 as a child advocate social worker. And going back to
24 Representative DeLissio's question in regards to the
25 caseload, I handle 300 back then. I started as a social

1 worker in 1996. You mentioned about 20 to 40 cases, but
2 that translates into how many cases? So you're saying 20,
3 40, but in essence, in terms of how many cases a person
4 actually has, how much would that be?

5 MR. RANNEY: That's how many cases at one time.

6 REPRESENTATIVE ACOSTA: Is that including
7 families, though, the entire family?

8 MR. RANNEY: That's the entire family. So there
9 could be one child, there could be eight children.

10 REPRESENTATIVE ACOSTA: So in essence, you're
11 saying 20 to 40, but it could be actually more because
12 you're servicing the entire family, is that correct?

13 MR. RANNEY: Correct.

14 REPRESENTATIVE ACOSTA: Okay. The question that
15 I have in terms of visitations with the family, how often
16 are you visiting that child in that home?

17 MR. RANNEY: I think it's a case-by-case basis.
18 You need to assess -- a lot of different things go into it
19 like the child's age, what the concerns are reported. If
20 it's something like incorrigibility or truancy of a
21 teenager, you might be in that home less but actually
22 following up with the child at school more. If it's a very
23 young child, very vulnerable child with serious concerns,
24 there's cases where I'm in that home every other day if not
25 every day. So it's a case-by-case determination.

1 REPRESENTATIVE ACOSTA: So when the case is
2 adjudicated through court, you're mandated to go visit that
3 child based on that court order how often? It all depends?

4 MR. RANNEY: So if a case is adjudicated in which
5 the agency takes custody of that child, places that child
6 in out-of-home placement, that case then leaves our desk
7 and goes to a placement unit. Those placement workers, I
8 believe, are mandated to see the child at least once every
9 30 days.

10 REPRESENTATIVE ACOSTA: Okay. And then that
11 report comes back to you in terms of the status of that
12 home, is that correct? How is the information correlated
13 between your agency and the private agency that you
14 contract to go see that child?

15 MS. HAGERTY: We see the children ourselves. If
16 children are placed outside of their home through a
17 provider, their visitations with that child in the home,
18 they do not count towards our visitations with the child in
19 the home.

20 REPRESENTATIVE ACOSTA: It does not. So your
21 visitation is separate from the other individual --

22 MS. HAGERTY: Correct.

23 REPRESENTATIVE ACOSTA: -- visiting that family?

24 MS. HAGERTY: Correct.

25 MR. RANNEY: Yes.

1 REPRESENTATIVE ACOSTA: How many services could
2 be provided for that one family outside of your agency? So
3 how many people can actually be coming in and out of that
4 home?

5 MR. RANNEY: Numerous. We could have the agency
6 involved doing home visits. We could also have the foster
7 agency involved doing home visits. We could have mobile
8 therapy in the home. We could have early intervention in
9 the home, physical therapy, occupational therapy. So there
10 could be a lot of services provided in that home.

11 REPRESENTATIVE ACOSTA: So what I'm trying to get
12 at that there is someone constantly visiting that home and
13 updating information and communicating with your office the
14 safety of that child, is that correct?

15 MR. RANNEY: Yes.

16 REPRESENTATIVE ACOSTA: Okay. I have one more
17 question and I'm done. In terms of the statewide database
18 that was just implemented, and it was rolled out, I
19 believe, this year, is that correct?

20 MR. RANNEY: No, it was rolled out April 2014.

21 REPRESENTATIVE ACOSTA: Okay, '14. Can you talk
22 a little bit about what that database does for the agency?
23 That database has to capture what in essence?

24 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN WATSON: Representative,
25 could we hold that question because we're going to hear

1 from DHS --

2 REPRESENTATIVE ACOSTA: Okay. So that's a DHS --

3 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN WATSON: Yes. And I think --

4 REPRESENTATIVE ACOSTA: Okay.

5 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN WATSON: -- that you -- and
6 that's no offense. You have some experience, but I think
7 we'll just go right to the big --

8 REPRESENTATIVE ACOSTA: That's fine.

9 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN WATSON: -- honcho and find
10 out --

11 REPRESENTATIVE ACOSTA: Okay.

12 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN WATSON: -- about it.

13 REPRESENTATIVE ACOSTA: All right. Well, that's
14 all my questions. And I just, once again, commend you for
15 the work that you do.

16 MR. RANNEY: Thank you.

17 REPRESENTATIVE ACOSTA: I have a lot of respect
18 for social workers, so thank you.

19 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN WATSON: All right.

20 Representative Klunk with the last question and then we
21 really need to move on. Thank you.

22 REPRESENTATIVE KLUNK: Thank you, Chairwoman.

23 And thank you for joining us today. Thank you
24 for everything that you do for our children across
25 Pennsylvania.

1 My question goes to, I believe, Nicholas, you
2 mentioned the ChildFirst training program. Can you speak a
3 little bit more about what that training program involved?
4 And you've gone through it in Franklin County. What are
5 your friends throughout the community saying are the
6 benefits of it. And especially those counties that have
7 gone through the program, is that making them more
8 efficient and effective at servicing these children and
9 families? And is that allowing them to better leverage
10 those multidisciplinary individuals in different
11 departments in really making sure we're using all of the
12 resources available to help children?

13 MR. RANNEY: Yes, I have attended ChildFirst
14 training here in Pennsylvania as well at the National Child
15 Protection Training Center. It's a weeklong course, very
16 intense. I think the positive of it is it's not only
17 classroom lecture but you get to use what you've learned.
18 There's actually real children brought in that are used for
19 you to speak with to learn some, you know, and to practice
20 the tools that you've learned. There's also adult actors
21 who play children that you get to speak with. That's when
22 you start speaking about more serious things. Obviously,
23 we don't want to use real children for that.

24 But I think the other benefit is is it also
25 brings in several different fields into one room. So each

1 county, jurisdiction is encouraged to bring not only a
2 caseworker but also law enforcement, District Attorney's
3 Office, all sorts of fields so that they're all in the same
4 room all learning together.

5 So I think that's one of the many trainings I've
6 attended that have truly had an impact on my day-to-day
7 job.

8 REPRESENTATIVE KLUNK: Shiloh, do you have any
9 comments?

10 MS. HAGERTY: I have attended the training as
11 well. I agree with everything that he's said. It's a very
12 hands-on training and real-life situations and how to speak
13 with children, which I think is absolutely important that
14 we do our job. How you speak to a child is how you're
15 going to get the best interview and make them feel
16 comfortable if something is going on in their home that
17 they need to tell you about in order for us to make them
18 safe. So ChildFirst is one of the best trainings that I
19 have personally been to.

20 REPRESENTATIVE KLUNK: So you would recommend,
21 you know, all counties across the State and all caseworkers
22 to go through at least that program or something similar to
23 make sure that they are providing the best care possible
24 and coordinating all of those services?

25 MS. HAGERTY: Absolutely.

1 REPRESENTATIVE KLUNK: Thank you.

2 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN WATSON: All right. Thank
3 you. We're going to pick up the pace a little bit. And I
4 would ask that testifiers, you really do have to speak into
5 the microphone because there's a lot of ambient noise
6 that's here, and we have trouble sitting up here -- not
7 just because I'm old but they're having trouble, too --
8 hearing you sometimes. So we would ask that you would each
9 do that.

10 I want to thank you both for the job that you do
11 day in and day out and for taking the time to come to give
12 testimony and have some specific examples for us to think
13 about. Thank you so much.

14 MR. RANNEY: Thank you, Chairwoman.

15 MS. HAGERTY: Thank you.

16 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN WATSON: All right. Next,
17 we're going to -- and I have to be honest and fair about
18 this. We're moving along to talking to children and youth
19 administrators and indeed what's their perspective and what
20 do they see is going on at the local county level. I went
21 and got a very good friend of mine so I admit, because we
22 have to have transparency here -- but indeed, Lynne Kallus-
23 Rainey, please come up. She's the Executive Director of
24 Bucks County's Children and Youth, and has done that job
25 for a number of years. And I am one of the regulars who

1 bothers her and her assistant and calls up Marge McKeone
2 and says, look, I have this problem with a constituent and
3 I don't know; what's the best advice you can give me? What
4 do I do and how do I help?

5 So I then called this time and said, look, I have
6 a Committee hearing and we need to get some people up here,
7 and Lynne is very active with the administrators, and I
8 thought what better way to give us kind of a collective
9 wisdom on what they think.

10 So please begin your testimony.

11 MS. KALLUS-RAINEY: Thank you, Chairwoman Watson,
12 and good morning, Chairman Conklin, Vice Chairman Moul,
13 Mr. Grasa, honorable Committee. Thank you for the honor of
14 inviting me here today.

15 I am the Executive Director at Bucks County
16 Children and Youth, as Kathy just stated. I've been the
17 appointed Director for 8-1/2 years. I've been with the
18 agency since 1979, and I've been, I think, in every
19 capacity just about within the agency.

20 There are five main points -- and I want to also
21 commend Shiloh and Nicholas. I think that they nailed it.
22 I can't imagine anybody else describing any better what
23 life is like on a daily basis at the county agency in
24 Pennsylvania. We are struggling.

25 I want to take it to another level, however, from

1 the Director's perspective, and there are five main points
2 that I want to leave you with today: number one, a basic
3 understanding of how the county child welfare agency
4 operates. I think that that kind of understanding is
5 helpful for you perhaps when considering legislation for
6 new mandates, as well as how to improve the system.

7 Number two, that the elements that are essential
8 to making public child welfare work intersect with other
9 major systems, which all operate independently and apart
10 from the child welfare system. Shiloh and Nicholas
11 mentioned a few of those. For example, the courts, the
12 Department of Education, the Department of Health, early
13 childhood and education, mental health, drug and alcohol to
14 name just a few.

15 Number three, that the core of what makes child
16 protection services work is in-person, in-home visitation.
17 Consistent engagement of individuals and families by
18 qualified, well-trained professionals, two of whom you just
19 had the honor of meeting with, are necessary to make this
20 work. What we need to do is learn how to attract and
21 retain career-minded, educated professionals to make change
22 in the ongoing system for Pennsylvania.

23 Number four, that public child welfare agencies
24 are vulnerable to changes in the political, social, and
25 economic policies of elected officials at any given time.

1 And while we are all subject to that, it may be helpful
2 that when legislating new mandates, it is necessary to keep
3 in mind that to address the needs of the workforce to
4 enhance the professionalism and retention are always
5 forefront.

6 Number five, it is helpful to consider new
7 structural approaches of service delivery systems when
8 developing new mandates. Thinking through an integrated
9 interdisciplinary approach to mandates so that dramatic
10 impact on any one system is lessened and the means to the
11 desired outcomes is shared. An integrated approach can
12 develop service systems using the same amount or fewer
13 resources and achieve more targeted results.

14 The nature of the job: The job has never been
15 easy or simple. Caseloads have always exceeded the ideal.
16 Salaries are not on parity with similar type public sector
17 work such as teachers and/or criminal court employees. The
18 child welfare caseworker requires extensively more
19 training, skill development, responsibility, and personal
20 risk than a caseworker in aging or mental health, yet those
21 jobs usually pay the same and/or in some cases more.

22 While salary ranges within the court and human
23 service departments are unique among the counties. What is
24 fairly universal is that the child welfare caseworker and
25 their role is often overlooked and the vital role they play

1 in public safety, public health, and our communities.

2 So why do people stay? What is it about child
3 welfare that makes it one of the most rewarding yet
4 disagreeable jobs on the planet? How many times does a
5 caseworker hear I wouldn't want your job, I couldn't do
6 your job, or why do you stay? We know that caseworkers,
7 supervisors, managers, and executive directors stay when
8 their clients, their work, and their agency are valued and
9 appreciated. Effective workload distribution through
10 responsive management and staff complement is seen as a
11 message from the county commissions and State legislators
12 as saying the work you do is vital, we know it is not easy,
13 but we have your back.

14 Why people leave, you just heard from two people
15 why people are leaving. However, whether it ever happens
16 to you or not, the underlying pulse in public child welfare
17 is what if a child dies on my watch? The death of a child
18 is a life-changing event. It is a fact of the world we
19 live in and our work is about preventing it when possible.

20 Imagine yourself 25 years old having worked with
21 a family for eight weeks, seeing the newborn once or twice
22 a week. You've brought formula, diapers, food, transported
23 Mom and newborn to the doctors. Then, an early-morning
24 call wakes you from your sleep and you are told that that
25 baby was just slammed against a wall causing fatal

1 injuries. What is the first thing you say to yourself?

2 What could I have done to prevent this?

3 You think of that beautiful baby and have nowhere
4 to go with your personal grief because you know a
5 magnifying lens will now be applied to every element of
6 your character, your work, your judgment, your skill, and
7 your worthiness. Your name and that of the supervisor may
8 be released to the media. The media have been known to
9 scandalize child deaths and to highlight perceived
10 deficiencies before even all the facts are known. Local
11 elected officials are sensitive to media, and it happens
12 that administrators and management of the agencies are
13 fired.

14 There may be a criminal or a civil suit that you
15 are named in. Caseworkers leave. Supervisors direct more
16 cases to court. This will continue unless a child death is
17 approached from a "what can we learn" framework on all
18 levels, the level of caseworker, supervisor, managers,
19 organizations, county structures and protocols, and State
20 systems, to examine all the multi-elements and
21 intersections of where this child and family interfaced
22 with various parts of the community and systems. Imagine
23 what a difference it would make if a professional crisis
24 intervention team swooped in on the agency, came in, worked
25 with the staff, worked with the county, as well as provided

1 the framework for meaningful solutions.

2 I wanted to say a few words about court. The
3 court process is something that people don't usually hear
4 about, yet it consumes a large part of what the child
5 welfare caseworker must be proficient in and spends
6 numerous hours, days, and even weeks at times having to be
7 adept in. There are numerous hearings that the child
8 welfare caseworker -- and I call them the child welfare
9 professional -- must be proficient. And I'm going to just
10 name the number of hearings because this is what part of
11 that life of the daily life of a caseworker is consumed by.

12 Shelter care hearings, adjudicatory dependency
13 hearings, interim permanency reviews, permanency reviews,
14 judicial reviews, termination-of-parental-right hearings,
15 and adoption proceedings. Each one of those hearings
16 requires paperwork for due process notification, court
17 reports, as well as preparation for oral testimony by the
18 caseworker.

19 The caseworker in many of those hearings must
20 testify as to how parental or child behaviors and home
21 environmental characteristics cause serious concern for the
22 safety and/or well being of a child based on the statutes
23 of the Juvenile Act, Child Protective Services law, or the
24 Adoption Act.

25 The Judge has a dependency bench book. This

1 includes questions for the bench to consider. Typically,
2 caseworkers are prepped by their supervisors. Many times
3 in the hearing the judge and/or opposing counsel may ask a
4 difficult question or something may be said that throws the
5 caseworker off balance. It is not uncommon for the
6 caseworker to hesitate or perhaps not even know the answer
7 to the question on the spot. Unfortunately, it is all too
8 often that the credibility of the caseworker is called into
9 question.

10 While trained for that occurrence, that court
11 experience, depending on the temperament of the caseworker
12 and of the bench can be felt as humiliating and defeating
13 over time. And I will say that I have had caseworkers come
14 and resign because of their court experiences.

15 So systemic issues on legal representation of all
16 parties, parents may be represented by an attorney at all
17 stages of the proceedings. Each child is appointed an
18 attorney as a guardian ad litem. An agency solicitor
19 represents the agency. However, the caseworker is not
20 personally represented. The caseworker is not the direct
21 client of the agency solicitor. Often, caseworkers do not
22 even have an opportunity to prep with a solicitor until a
23 few minutes before the hearing outside the courtroom.

24 You already heard that there are many skills
25 necessary involved in the caseworker role. The hiring for

1 those skills sets stands to be changed if something is
2 really going to be done seriously about the retention and
3 hiring for child welfare.

4 There are two mechanisms by which children and
5 youth agencies in Pennsylvania can hire. One, and the most
6 traditional and most common, is still through the
7 Pennsylvania State Civil Service Commission. The other is
8 a State-approved county merit system for hire, which must
9 be approved by the State civil service system after a
10 county applies for this.

11 The Pennsylvania State Civil Service Commission
12 is slow. It is laden with rigid rules that dictate when
13 and what positions are open for testing, how the rule of
14 three must apply in hiring based on test scores, despite
15 actual suitability for the children and youth job. It
16 requires delays as when not authorizing a new list of
17 eligible candidates until several weeks after the previous
18 list had been exhausted, as well as then another two-week
19 delay after the new list is issued so that candidates on
20 that new list can be surveyed for availability. And it
21 goes on.

22 In the dynamic world of child welfare, hiring
23 through civil service is like putting a moped engine in a
24 formula 500 racecar. It contributes to caseworker
25 overload, multi-case transfers per case, and ultimately

1 resignations. This contributes to putting vulnerable
2 children and youth who have been reported to the agency at
3 more risk because less detail can be attended to per
4 investigation and case.

5 You've heard about the training, and I will just
6 add, as I think Nicholas and Shiloh also highlighted very
7 well, that preparing a new worker for today's public child
8 welfare is complicated, it is never-ending. In addition to
9 the foundational laws, philosophy, and interviewing skills
10 that are required, the on-the-job training particularly of
11 personal safety is foremost and must be seriously
12 considered again when looking at the number of cases that a
13 caseworker must carry.

14 Retention, so how to retain a competent,
15 experienced child welfare professional workforce?
16 Financially, the State, through its OCYF office, Office of
17 Children, Youth, and Families, as well as the county
18 structure of the administration and commissioners must
19 ensure adequate funds so that the necessary number of
20 positions can be staffed at the county agency. Optimal
21 State reimbursement for counties to be able to do that
22 would look like a 90 to 100 percent reimbursement on
23 caseworker positions to counties.

24 Due to the nature of the work, caseload size is
25 difficult to quantify. You heard about those family

1 engagement meetings. They are part of the best practices
2 that are employed by children and youth agencies to do the
3 work. They are effective. However, they do require long
4 hours. The use of best practices, the skill of the
5 caseworker, and the intensity of the cases has to be
6 evaluated on an ongoing basis in order to determine what
7 adequate caseload size must look like.

8 The recently enacted Child Protective Services
9 laws included the new data reporting system that you've
10 already heard about, the Child Welfare Information System,
11 aka, CWIS. Caseload size has to incorporate the interface
12 of support personnel to assist with CWIS because it is not
13 working yet to the point to where we all hope it will get
14 to. It also decreases supervisory time. Supervisory time
15 is critical not only to the safety of the children that
16 we're looking at but also to the personal safety of our
17 caseworkers. This is a situation that has to be urgently
18 addressed.

19 So basic recommendations in addition to what I've
20 stated is that when considering any new laws that impact
21 child welfare, remembering the old adage of it taking a
22 village to raise a child must be in the forefront.
23 Questions of how to formulate a cross-systems approach with
24 relevant State partners on new mandates will serve to
25 lessen dramatic impact on any one system and again enhance

1 the achievement of desired outcomes. It may be time for an
2 integrated structural approach to the delivery of services.

3 It is critical that legislators understand the
4 job of the county child welfare worker when considering
5 these new mandates. The job has reached its capacity.
6 Structural approaches to how counties and State can address
7 today's challenges will help the struggling child welfare
8 workforce promote its strengths through a clear identity
9 and a focused mission.

10 I thank you for your time and attention today.

11 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN WATSON: Thank you very much.
12 And I would want to note we're going to keep moving.
13 Notice the hands are up now, keep moving. But I must note
14 the presence of Representative Kim, Representative
15 McCarter, Representative Dan Miller, Representative Dave
16 Parker. And we thank you for joining us. You saw some
17 Members leave. That's because everybody's schedules,
18 meetings on Monday morning because we have a one o'clock
19 start. So we've had people going from one Committee
20 meeting to another. We thank you for coming here.

21 If we may now be joined by -- somebody said shift
22 gears. I don't think so. I think it's this continuum, but
23 we're moving through all the layers that make up our
24 children and youth in Pennsylvania. So we will welcome
25 Cathy Utz, the Deputy Secretary of the Pennsylvania

1 Department of Human Services, her charge specifically, the
2 Office of Children, Youth, and Families.

3 Deputy Secretary Utz has testified before us for
4 a number of times. We appreciate you continuing to share
5 insight and expertise. And I think we're trying to give
6 you Members a general overview of what the system is doing
7 now and what they are. As I said, for those who've come
8 in, this is not the end-all hearing. This is the beginning
9 of what will be a long journey to decide what can we do in
10 terms of policy. What do we do, perhaps in what order.
11 And I honestly think this goes beyond this calendar year of
12 2016. We will get started but it will be ongoing.

13 Deputy Secretary Utz, thank you for being here,
14 and please begin.

15 MS. UTZ: Thank you. Good morning, Chairwoman
16 Watson, Chairman Conklin, Committee Members, and staff.
17 It's my honor to serve as the Deputy for the Office of
18 Children, Youth, and Families. And on behalf of Secretary
19 Dallas, I would like to thank you for the opportunity today
20 to testify regarding Pennsylvania child welfare system.

21 Protecting Pennsylvania's children, I think as we
22 heard, from abuse and neglect is a shared responsibility
23 that doesn't solely rest with the formal child welfare
24 system. It requires the collective collaboration of
25 community partners and Pennsylvania citizens to provide

1 local safety nets for children and families that are facing
2 challenges within our communities and neighborhoods.

3 The past few years have presented unique
4 challenges, yet numerous opportunities, geared toward
5 improving our ability to better protect our children. I
6 think we've all talked about the 24 pieces of legislation
7 that have been enacted by the General Assembly, and
8 together, we've been able to expand our definition of
9 abuse. We've identified more individuals who we want to
10 report abuse, and we've enhanced our clearance
11 requirements. And now, certain mandated reporters are
12 required to obtain training on recognizing and reporting
13 child abuse. And then we've heard about the implementation
14 of the Child Welfare Information Solution.

15 So what I'd like to do is take a few minutes to
16 provide you with some data to let you know that in 2015
17 we've seen an all-time high in the number of reports of
18 child abuse that have been reported and investigated
19 statewide. These numbers increased from 29,520 in 2014 to
20 42,005 in 2015. That represents a 42 percent increase
21 statewide.

22 Additionally, the calls received at the child
23 abuse hotline increased from 165,000 to over 188,000.
24 Additionally, the number of clearances went from nearly
25 600,000 to 1.5 million. Of those 1.5 million, 69 percent

1 were received online through the implementation of the
2 Child Welfare Information Solution.

3 The number of requests for clearances for
4 volunteers increased from 50,000 to 400,000 statewide.
5 Additionally, the number of individuals that were
6 identified as being on the database as a perpetrator of
7 child abuse increased from just over 1,100 to over 2,200
8 individuals.

9 And from November of 2014 to January of 2016,
10 over 600,000 individuals were trained through the three
11 contracts the Department holds with the Pennsylvania Family
12 Support Alliance, the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American
13 Academy of Pediatrics, and the Pennsylvania Child Welfare
14 Resource Center through the University of Pittsburgh.

15 So while that data shows that our efforts are
16 paying off, I think we've really heard about the challenges
17 that are being experienced at the county, local levels, and
18 so that we have much work to do.

19 As you've heard, we're a State-supervised,
20 county-administered child welfare system where the
21 Department provides oversight and technical assistance to
22 the 67 county children and youth agencies, and that we
23 reimburse counties for the services that are delivered to
24 children and families in their local communities. We pay
25 for staff salaries, we pay for placement services, we pay

1 for in-home services, and that ranges from 100 percent
2 reimbursement for certain adoption services, 80 percent
3 reimbursement for staff salaries, and 60 percent
4 reimbursement for placement of children in institutional
5 care. Approximately 65 percent of the county child welfare
6 budget comes from State funds. The remaining comes from
7 county and Federal funds.

8 And I think as we've heard really the first step
9 in our journey to improve Pennsylvania's child welfare
10 system was by amending our Child Protective Services law,
11 which hadn't been amended for over 20 years as extensively
12 as it is today.

13 And so I think what we've also heard about from
14 our staff is that they work tirelessly each and every day
15 to ensure that children are safe, that they have permanent
16 homes, and that their well-being needs are met. Often,
17 that comes at a risk to their own families and to their own
18 emotional well-being. We've heard about vicarious trauma
19 and secondary traumatic stress. They're prevalent in our
20 county child welfare staff, as they are nationwide.

21 Recruitment and retention of public child welfare
22 agency staff is a national challenge. Data suggests that
23 one-third of the Nation's child welfare workforce have
24 formal social work education. The annual turnover rate
25 nationwide is 30 to 40 percent. The average caseload size

1 nationwide is 24 to 31 cases, and the average salary is
2 \$33,000.

3 As the realm of social problems grows and
4 intensifies, workers are responsible for serving children
5 and families with multiple challenges. Typically, families
6 include high substance abuse rates, behavioral health
7 issues, domestic violence, and poverty. A majority of our
8 frontline workers have encountered actual violence or
9 threats themselves. Pennsylvania data closely mirrors that
10 of the Federal data.

11 And in an effort to really strengthen our child
12 welfare workforce, we've had a longstanding partnership
13 with our county children and youth agencies, as well as the
14 University of Pittsburgh's Child Welfare Resource Center.
15 And what we're trying to do is support youth and attract
16 our workforce from staff who have bachelor's in social work
17 degrees.

18 We work with 14 schools across the State to offer
19 financial support to approximately 60 to 75 undergraduates
20 in their final year of study. Through this program,
21 students complete an internship at a public child welfare
22 agency, receive child welfare-specific coursework, and are
23 enrolled in the previously mentioned core trainings that
24 the staff talked about earlier. In turn, students commit
25 to employment in a child welfare agency for at least a

1 year. And to date, the program has an 88 percent
2 completion rate.

3 Additionally, we're looking to strengthen our
4 workforce by ensuring that there's an opportunity for
5 bachelor of social work degreed staff to actually then go
6 on and complete their master's in social work. We partner
7 with 12 schools across the State, and then as of July 2015,
8 there were a total of 1,200 graduates from that program
9 with 99 percent of them completing their commitment post-
10 graduation.

11 Twenty five percent of all county child welfare
12 positions are held by a CWEL graduates or current students,
13 and we see a correlation between the success of the program
14 in that individuals who were once CWEL program students now
15 are enrolled in the CWEL program to get their master's.
16 All but 13 graduates actually completed their commitment
17 since 1996. And of all program graduates, only 8 percent
18 have left public child welfare agency for reasons to
19 include death, disability, relocation to another State, or
20 obtaining employment elsewhere.

21 High caseload size, quality supervision, and
22 agency support and paperwork, and lack of pay are among the
23 reasons that we heard earlier for folks leaving our system.
24 Through the statewide Leadership Roundtable, which is led
25 by Supreme Court Justice Max Baer, the Recruitment and

1 Retention Workgroup was charged with exploring these
2 issues. This workgroup is comprised of representatives by
3 both the county, State, legal representatives, the
4 judiciary, and DHS.

5 The first report of that workgroup will be issued
6 in May. The report will include a review of information
7 gathered and a set of preliminary recommendations for how
8 we could move the recruitment and retention efforts forward
9 in this State. Once the report is final, we'll be sure to
10 share it with the Committees that are responsible for
11 oversight of DHS.

12 As we look to identify solutions and retain
13 county staff, we must ensure that we first understand why
14 they choose the field of child welfare, why they chose it
15 as their career path originally. We must remember that we
16 are not alone when it comes to high turnover rates because
17 other States share our challenges and are also seeking to
18 find viable options.

19 Recruiting and maintaining quality staff requires
20 a multifaceted goal that doesn't rest with one agency or
21 entity. It requires a collaborative response and
22 commitment. If it were an easy issue to address, we
23 wouldn't be facing those challenges today.

24 Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

25 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN WATSON: Thank you,

1 Secretary.

2 If you would stick around, I know Lynne is, too,
3 but we are going to move on with testimony so that we try
4 to get back a little bit on schedule. And we would first
5 then welcome, I believe, Brian Bornman. Brian's the
6 Executive Director of Pennsylvania Children and Youth
7 Administrators, which is an arm or a leg -- I'm not sure --
8 of the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania. I
9 would suggest, sir, I don't know which is more important,
10 but indeed it is an important part of CCAP.

11 And you may begin whenever you choose.

12 MR. BORNMAN: Thank you. Yes, I'm not sure what
13 part it would be. It's certainly not the brains of the
14 operation but I'm along for the ride.

15 Chairwoman Watson, Representative Conklin and
16 Moul and the rest of the Committee, Mr. Grasa, I take this
17 opportunity to thank you for the opportunity to address you
18 today.

19 My name is Brian Bornman and I came to this
20 position in a somewhat roundabout way. I actually started
21 in social work in 1988 when I was in the Army stationed in
22 Germany, at the time started volunteering with what was
23 then described as emotionally disturbed children.
24 Throughout that time I obtained a bachelor's in psychology,
25 a master's in counseling, and a law degree from Widener

1 University, and had the opportunity to work as both a
2 caseworker for Child Protective Services, a child
3 therapist, and ultimately as a solicitor for Franklin
4 County Children and Youth representing their child welfare
5 agency.

6 And I can tell of all those positions, by far,
7 the caseworkers do the hardest job. And Mr. Ranney and
8 Ms. Hagerty today who testified, I have known both of them
9 for a number of years, and they're both excellent
10 caseworkers, which is really why we wanted to have them
11 have the opportunity to address you today.

12 Which kind of leads to my first point, many times
13 we talk about the system, the child welfare system and how
14 can we better the system, and I think we sometimes lose
15 sight of the fact that the system are people. They are the
16 caseworkers, they are the legal counsel who represent the
17 agencies, they're the supervisors who direct the
18 caseworkers, they're the commissioners who find funding for
19 them. So I think we always need to keep that in mind and
20 really try to provide the support necessary to allow those
21 people to really do the jobs that we're asking them to do.

22 Some of the challenges in Pennsylvania right now,
23 caseload ratios is something that's been discussed quite a
24 bit up to this point, and I just wanted to advise the
25 Committee of kind of where we're at with that at this

1 point. PCYA and CCAP has approached Penn State University,
2 the Network on Child Protection and Well-Being, tasked them
3 to assist us in doing a comprehensive time study of what is
4 a realistic caseload and is there a better way that we can
5 look at that rather than just saying cases, because right
6 now, the regulations say that a caseworker can carry up to
7 30 cases, but that doesn't specify any number of children.
8 So it could be a single child in that case or it could be
9 15 children in that case depending on how many children are
10 associated with that household.

11 So one of the things we're really looking at both
12 with the support of Penn State and with Deputy Secretary
13 Utz and her staff are how can we better quantify that? Is
14 there a better way to weight those systems or to weight
15 those caseload ratios so that we can have a little more
16 science behind it rather than simply pulling a number out
17 of the air and saying 15 cases is what can be handled
18 because not all cases are the same and not all agencies are
19 the same.

20 There are some rural counties where the
21 caseworkers provide all the in-home services. And there
22 are many counties where the caseworkers really do true case
23 management, and those services are contracted out to the
24 providers. And I know Ms. Bianchi will be addressing this
25 Committee shortly. So I think that's something that really

1 needs to be looked into is what's a realistic caseload and
2 how can we better look into that and ascertain what that
3 should be.

4 There's been some discussion about the increases
5 based upon the Child Protective Service law mandates that
6 went into effect beginning of 2015 and those changes. And
7 yes, they have had a dramatic impact. PCYA has been
8 tracking those in a number of counties throughout the year,
9 and what we have seen has been an increase generally
10 anywhere from 32 percent to some counties maintaining a
11 sustained 100 percent plus increase in investigations.

12 And I'm not talking about referrals. I'm talking
13 when you even boil that down and you receive multiple
14 referrals, how many actual investigations are being done.
15 And we're looking at 32 to 100 percent, primarily looking
16 at the class 4 and higher counties because you get some
17 really screwy numbers when you start looking at the very
18 small counties that get very few reports over the course of
19 a year.

20 Part of the problem with that is that, because of
21 the way it falls within each base budget cycle, the staff
22 weren't able to be added to that because at the time that
23 the budget -- everybody knew this was coming but nobody
24 knew what the increase was going to look like. So in good
25 faith OCYF could not say, okay, you can do a 30 percent

1 increase in your intake staffing complement because there
2 were no numbers to back that up. And because of the needs-
3 based budget process, it was unrealistic to be able to add
4 that.

5 So one of the things I think we really need to
6 look at, both for this legislation that came out and has
7 such a dramatic impact but all legislation that comes out
8 is how can we have some mechanism in place either to have a
9 supplemental appropriation to support additional staffing
10 if it turns out to have a dramatic impact and the needs
11 that arise there or some means to reopen the budget in
12 order to determine whether or not additional staffing need
13 to be added.

14 Because really at the point we're looking at now,
15 those staff were able to be justified in the budgets that
16 were submitted in August of last year because now you had
17 numbers to back it up and support it. But they won't be
18 able to be funded until July of next year because of the
19 way the needs-based budgeting cycle.

20 So if the counties were lucky enough to have some
21 additional funds in their budget that were under-spent in
22 other areas, they could submit a revised budget and shuffle
23 some funds around to bring additional staffing on. But if
24 they weren't one of those counties that were lucky enough
25 to have additional funds elsewhere in their budget, there

1 was really nothing they could do other than try to
2 struggle.

3 And what the result has been, as the caseworkers
4 testified, a dramatic overload of our intake departments,
5 which now are carrying upwards -- I've seen some counties
6 -- and I've had the luxury of going to all 67 counties at
7 this point -- some counties that actually were carrying
8 upwards of 75 cases in their intake unit simply because
9 they had so many cases coming in and they had nowhere for
10 them to go. And they didn't have sufficient staff to be
11 able to handle that.

12 And I can tell you that with 75 cases, you're not
13 getting quality casework, and we don't want to see a
14 situation where the best intentions lead to negative
15 outcomes because we're so overloaded that no good work is
16 getting done.

17 There's been discussion about the Child Welfare
18 Information Solution or System, and again, this is
19 something that's been long-needed in Pennsylvania, some
20 type of comprehensive data system. And PCYA is working
21 closely with Deputy Secretary Utz and her staff to try to
22 improve that system and how the data systems at the county
23 level interact with the State system. But as Ms. Rainey
24 from Bucks County testified, I don't think we're there yet.

25 This is still a great source of frustration for

1 the counties. What used to be a simple matter of faxing in
2 a two-page document at the completion of an investigation
3 now requires anywhere from 2 to 2 hours of working with the
4 computer system before it can finally go through and be
5 accepted. And what we're finding out now there's been a
6 number of errors and many of the counties are getting lists
7 of hundreds or even thousands of cases back that need to be
8 corrected because there's validation errors in the system.

9 And what we really don't want to see is a
10 situation where we're jeopardizing children's safety, which
11 should be the very core of what we do in Pennsylvania
12 because we are looking for data. And I have concerns with
13 that sometimes when I see how much time and effort is being
14 spent at the county level to fix data and that those are
15 all caseworkers that are not then spending time in the
16 field doing assessments.

17 So some suggestions on improvement because I'm
18 sure no one here wants us to just come in and tell you what
19 all is wrong, I think we really are at a point where we
20 need to have some type of moratorium and to the extent
21 possible not put any additional mandates or regulations on
22 the counties, really let all these changes sink in, let
23 counties get their staffing levels back up to where they
24 need to be, and really try to stabilize because many of the
25 counties I've been to are in this kind of perpetual startup

1 mode where they have a lot of new staff, they get
2 overloaded, and those new staff are gone inside of a year
3 and kind of the old workhorses, the more experienced,
4 stable staff are just getting overloaded and we're starting
5 to burn out some of our very experienced staff. And that's
6 truly a crisis point for the system.

7 We need to be realistic in what a caseworker can
8 do. And I think the time study is going to help greatly
9 with that.

10 And many of these mandates, while they're very
11 important, the psychotropic medications, the educational
12 stability, the family finding, all of these are needed for
13 the kids in care, but I'm not sure that we can always keep
14 giving it to a caseworker and saying now you're going to be
15 an expert on this, now you're going to be an expert on
16 psychotropic medication because they're caseworkers. They
17 need to be focused on safety. They need to have
18 specialized training in that area.

19 So we may need to look at, as Ms. Rainey said, a
20 more comprehensive system-wide approach in bringing in
21 physicians and educational experts to really help address
22 many of those other ancillary issues for kids in care to
23 make sure that they get the best services available but
24 without dumping it all on caseworkers.

25 When the new mandates are passed, it will impact

1 the workload, again supplemental appropriation, and we need
2 to work at timing those so that there's enough lead time to
3 get the system where it needs to be to absorb those.

4 There's a lot of changes that are going to be coming out
5 with the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening
6 Families Act.

7 House Bill 477 was passed and signed into law.

8 At the time it was signed there was two weeks for the
9 entire State to train all of the caregivers in the State
10 from the time it was actually enacted, and that's patently
11 unrealistic to expect a system as large as the Pennsylvania
12 child welfare system to be able to absorb that and train
13 all of those people in that short of a time frame. So we
14 need to be a little more plan-full in rolling out these
15 mandates.

16 We need to assure stable funding through budget
17 impasses, and I know, I don't want to get down that road at
18 all but just that there needs to be a means that counties
19 can know they can rely on funding so that we don't have
20 staff freezes and things like that.

21 We need to be realistic about the data needs, as
22 I suggested, and just always keep in mind that whenever we
23 have a loss of a child or one of these high-profile cases
24 that that caseworker did not want that to happen. They
25 have done everything they possibly can to assure that. And

1 it pains me greatly when I see some of the high-profile
2 cases and just the level of scrutiny that caseworkers are
3 placed under. I truly believe in my heart of hearts that
4 the caseworkers are doing the very best they can with the
5 resources and the knowledge they have available. And it's
6 terrible to see them kind of thrown under the bus when
7 something bad happens.

8 Unfortunately, it's a reactionary system. We
9 only are involved when something bad has happened for the
10 most part, and there's no crystal ball. Whenever you go
11 into one of the homes, you don't know what's going to
12 happen when you walk about that door, so you make your best
13 assessment based on the best science and the best training
14 that you have available to you. But there's really no way
15 of knowing what might happen.

16 Not meaning to sound like all doom and gloom,
17 this is a good opportunity for the system in Pennsylvania.
18 Through the stress of many of these impacts recently and
19 some of the turmoil in the system, there's been some very
20 good partnerships made, the partnership working with the
21 Office of Children, Youth, and Family and PCYA has grown
22 stronger, I believe. We work very closely with Deputy
23 Secretary Utz and her staff on retention issues, on the
24 CWIS issues. We have regular standing work group meetings
25 to try to resolve many of these issues and free line of

1 communication there.

2 The work with Penn State, I think, is going to
3 benefit the system as a whole in Pennsylvania, and we're
4 hoping to have something coming out of that by the end of
5 the year. So I think we're in a good place moving forward.
6 There are a number of issues that need to be addressed, but
7 I think we are moving in the right direction at this point.

8 Once again, thank you for this opportunity to
9 address the Committee.

10 Oh, and I would extend an invitation to anyone on
11 this Committee if you would ever like to see anything in
12 action at the county level, I would be more than happy to
13 set that up. And I know a number of counties that would be
14 very happy to have you come and ride along, see what it's
15 like to actually do the work of a caseworker. Thank you.

16 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN WATSON: Thank you,
17 Mr. Bornman.

18 And now, to build on that perspective and that is
19 more at the local level since indeed Children and Youth
20 Services are administered at the local level, we're honored
21 to have with us today the Honorable George P. Hartwick,
22 III. Mr. Hartwick is a Dauphin County Commissioner, and
23 Commissioner Hartwick also oversees Children and Youth
24 Services in Dauphin County. He is someone who is extremely
25 engaged in both statewide and nationally on these issues.

1 We've had the opportunity to meet once before, so I can
2 personally say that's absolutely true. We are delighted
3 that you would come today to give us something of your
4 assessment, expertise, and suggestions you may have.

5 Commissioner, begin.

6 MR. HARTWICK: Thank you, Chairman Watson,
7 Chairman Conklin, Members of the Committee. Representative
8 Kim, it's good to see you.

9 I'm going to do a little something different
10 today. I've written a lot of testimony. I think it's
11 probably good to have an engaging conversation related to,
12 I think, some of the experiences that we've had, talk about
13 specific suggestions and areas where I think some concerns
14 particularly from the local level.

15 I'd like to first offer and expound on what Brian
16 had suggested to Members of the Committee. One of the
17 things that I sought out to do when I was a Commissioner
18 and I've just done again in the past couple of weeks is
19 work each one of the jobs that we're responsible for
20 providing the oversight of. Be an intake worker, CPS, GPS,
21 go out, do investigations, work in the schools and see the
22 issues that exist in our own communities that we oftentimes
23 talk about. But without that firsthand experience, we all
24 know that sometimes in bureaucracy the stories that
25 translate from folks versus what you know as a kinesthetic

1 learner, when you see, feel, and touch, it's a whole lot
2 different.

3 So I'd like to extend an invitation to any
4 Members of the Committee to be able to come along and ride
5 along with us as a caseworker and understand the complex
6 challenges that exist. They're expected right out of
7 college to be in a position at a low wage, paying back
8 student loans, oftentimes with young families, and they're
9 asked to be experts in areas of medical advice, addiction
10 counseling, significant mental illness, the ability for
11 them to juggle multiple caseloads that are high stress,
12 high volume, while trying to manage their own lives in a
13 way that's just getting them a foothold back out of a
14 college experience.

15 It's an extraordinarily difficult job, and I know
16 the people that work in our areas and we've had significant
17 turnover. As you're aware, Dauphin County has had some
18 challenges in a high-profile case. But the ability for us
19 to retain and keep good staff is essentially important.
20 We've actually seen a 30 percent turnover of staff
21 countywide, and we've also seen an increase of 128 percent
22 in referrals and investigations, 128 percent. That is
23 significant in our county.

24 And I think what we've heard is we're raising the
25 awareness. April is Child Abuse Awareness Month, so it's

1 perfect timing to have these meetings. I've got my blue
2 little pin on today. I also know that what we've heard
3 about the child welfare legislation is it's increasing
4 referrals. We're seeing a number of investigations that
5 didn't happen prior to these mandates being made.

6 The challenges at the local level, we're the ones
7 who have to implement the changes that occur. And in the
8 future instead of such sweeping changes that occur, the
9 idea of incremental implementation at the local level, I
10 think, is something that we would prefer to be able to work
11 along with.

12 And I don't want to point fingers today because
13 I'm a person who wants to figure out a way to solve
14 problems, and Lord knows when you have one out, there's
15 usually three coming back at you. The idea of figuring out
16 how can we work together based upon these current changes
17 in an environment that is becoming more and more difficult
18 to retain staff, we've seen increased caseloads, we're
19 uncertain about our financial future.

20 And I want to say Cathy Utz has been a great
21 partner for us to work with. I know with the amount of
22 work that exists I know the burden is great, but she's been
23 open and communicating with the county and supporting us
24 through some challenging times and difficult times as well.

25 But we do see a lot of things on the front lines

1 that need significant attention and improvement, and I'm
2 going to mention some of those today. First of all,
3 caseworker pay, again, we're talking about a caseworker I
4 in Dauphin County making \$33,758.40 as a caseworker I,
5 knowing those liabilities, responsibilities, and the amount
6 of stress and burden on those jobs. That's a very
7 challenging salary to be able to pay back student loans and
8 to be able to face these kinds of challenges.

9 We also know that issues with ChildLine referrals
10 is a major concern. I think you heard that earlier. The
11 time that our staff spends in trying to ensure that the
12 information coming from ChildLine is correct can be
13 anywhere from five minutes to an hour per referral. And
14 that's essential time with caseloads that are significant
15 that we could be out in the field, making sure that we work
16 on the appropriate level of information and referrals that
17 oftentimes usually come electronically to the county is
18 going to be critically important.

19 We've also talked about caseload sizes, what are
20 the appropriate caseload sizes. You know, obviously, the
21 State mandate, the maximum is 30. I think you heard from
22 child welfare professionals today with the complex issues
23 that exist the idea of trying to spend more time with a
24 family rather than less is a definite and critical
25 component to ensuring the safety of our kids.

1 Look, I'm a father of four. I understand that
2 the safety of our kids is the most critical thing that we
3 can be doing at any level of government. And can I safely
4 sit here today with the volume of caseload what I've
5 experienced and seen in our agencies, the amount of cases
6 that exist every day. And again, from the two days that
7 I've worked, there are multiple follow-ups, individuals
8 that have the ability to provide referrals for services,
9 the ability to engage with families becomes strained the
10 more and more cases that they continue to build up and then
11 the more and more paperwork that they're required to fill
12 out inside of county government, which sometimes, you know,
13 it really takes significant time away from those critical
14 and timely cases.

15 And meeting those regulatory requirements are
16 important to all of us, but it's not just about meeting
17 those boxes and regulatory requirements; it's about
18 protecting and making sure our kids are safe. And in order
19 to do that, we're looking forward to working together in
20 order to get those tools.

21 One of the things that I believed in Dauphin
22 County we would not have had success in trying to address
23 the turnover issues had we still been in the State civil
24 service system. We were a county that transferred out from
25 our civil service system to a county-based merit hire

1 system.

2 The county-based merit hire system has expanded
3 our pool of applicants, it's allowed us to reach
4 individuals in our community who we never would have gotten
5 through a civil service process. We've been able to
6 actually attract people from neighborhoods who are
7 represented and culturally competent, able to support the
8 same neighborhoods that they grew up in, from the same
9 communities that they grew up in. That could have never
10 happened had it not been for our transition and the ability
11 to have a county-based merit hire system.

12 I know other counties across the Commonwealth may
13 not have that option, and I think the Civil Service
14 Commission is now at a point where they realize they have
15 to make some level of changes. And it's particularly
16 distressing in rural counties where the selection of
17 candidates are even fewer, and it becomes even more and
18 more distressful to get through the rule of three and the
19 process and the list of candidates. A lot of times it's
20 the same candidates that you may be seeing over and over
21 again rather than an ability to have a larger pool to
22 maintain and as folks continue to leave, to be able to
23 actually hire them from the list of candidates that you
24 currently have. And our county-based merit hire system has
25 allowed us to do that well.

1 Our caseworkers see the very worst in human
2 behavior, and it's especially hard when the victims are
3 young children. Again, as a result of the heightened
4 awareness of the child abuse caused by the Sandusky case,
5 we've seen reporting go up. In Dauphin County and across
6 the Commonwealth, children and youth caseworkers are
7 committing to protecting the children in our communities,
8 but these dedicated workers need the Legislature's support.
9 It's imperative that the State provide the resources needed
10 to ensure we have enough caseworkers to handle the
11 increased workload and that these caseworkers are certainly
12 properly compensated.

13 We also need to ensure better coordination and
14 cooperation at all levels before implementing laws that
15 impact the child welfare system. Enactment and effective
16 dates that fail to consider the timing of the needs-based
17 plan and budget put counties in a really tough spot with
18 the potential for costs driven by changes implemented now
19 that are not captured in the budget until sometime in the
20 future.

21 Perhaps implementation in pilot counties with the
22 time to analyze impact would make sense, or timing
23 effective dates to the budget process could be the standard
24 the Legislature agrees to for the future.

25 In exit interviews, our caseworkers often report

1 frustration with the requirements to fill out lengthy and
2 often duplicated paperwork. We've talked about that. The
3 lack of clarity and the regulatory lack of clarity is also
4 a challenge. I know we've asked for and hopefully received
5 the cooperation with so many law changes and so many
6 bulletins and regulatory changes.

7 Oftentimes it's very difficult to find out in
8 writing what is the actual change. And as you know, in a
9 changing environment, it's critically important that we
10 have those laws very clearly that are communicated to us so
11 we're able to provide the training necessary in order to
12 meet those regulations. That is something that I know
13 we've got a commitment from the Department to work through
14 but still seems to be a concern.

15 Another obstacle encountered by county children
16 and youth agencies is providing quality training to staff
17 to assure that they are complemented.

18 I know we have also enacted a new training
19 program at Dauphin County that is something that I wanted
20 to highlight as well. It is called the Field Staff Safety
21 Awareness training. And we had heard some of us talk about
22 some of the training programs and regimented. We actually
23 worked through a process with Harrisburg Area Community
24 College.

25 Right now, we're going to actually -- we've been

1 so successful in developing the curriculum. It's real
2 hands-on training for both senior staff and direct staff
3 that has the ability to be in situations, to do home
4 assessments, to walk through and actually again being a
5 kinesthetic way, seeing, feeling, touching, and interacting
6 and dealing with specific instances that they're going to
7 see in the field. It's really assisted us, and I know
8 we've received great feedback from our staff. And I know
9 now it's being considered as a curriculum also statewide.

10 So with that, I'd like to end my portion of the
11 testimony and ask if there's any questions of the
12 Committee.

13 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN WATSON: If I might,
14 Commissioner, I want to bring up our last testifier,
15 Bernadette Bianchi, and then we'll open it up for
16 questions --

17 MR. HARTWICK: Great. Thank you.

18 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN WATSON: -- so please do not
19 go away because certainly -- and, ladies and gentlemen,
20 there's a lot more that he has on those pages so you're
21 going to want to take a look at that, too.

22 I should say for the benefit of those here, we
23 had, as you can see, even running a bit late, but a full
24 agenda of testifiers. However, Committee Members, you have
25 additional testimony that indeed different groups sent and

1 wanted you to have on the issue, and that is in your
2 packet.

3 I would like to assure everyone who's here
4 attending, my Members are diligent. I can vouch for them.
5 They started off when we first formed the -- well, when I
6 got the Committee with a 400-page task force report that I
7 handed each of them with their names on it. So I know they
8 read and they pay attention and they ask questions.

9 I should say we will try to get this in, but if
10 we can't get all of your questions in, would you write them
11 to Mr. Grasa. He's going to collect and forward them to
12 all our testifiers, too, because, you know, we have to be
13 on the Floor. It's one o'clock. We're running against, as
14 usual, time here. And we will continue. But I thank all
15 of you for being here, and I want to assure everyone if you
16 sent testimony in, it will indeed be read by the Members of
17 this Committee. They do a terrific job.

18 Our last testifier, indeed, someone I've had the
19 opportunity to work with, and that is Bernadette Bianchi,
20 Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Council of Children,
21 Youth, and Family Services.

22 Thank you for being patient, joining us today.
23 Sorry you're last on the agenda, but please begin your
24 testimony, Bernadette.

25 MS. BIANCHI: Thank you for this opportunity. I

1 appreciate the time and interest of the Committee Members
2 in this subject. And it is nice to be last because it's
3 not often that I have experienced this kind of testimony
4 where all of the players, all of the components in our
5 child welfare system in Pennsylvania are on the same page.

6 You've heard the same issues over and over and
7 over again, and I could repeat every one of the concerns
8 voiced by my colleagues at the State level and at the
9 county level. And the practitioners and the caseworkers
10 really share the experiences of the private sector.

11 So I work for the membership of the Pennsylvania
12 Council of Children, Youth, and Family Services. We're a
13 statewide membership association of the private providers.
14 We're kind of the rest of the story in the child welfare
15 system in Pennsylvania. We really work collaboratively
16 with the counties. The counties have the option of doing
17 all of the services internally or they can contract for
18 certain services. And most often, that's done with private
19 agencies, and that's where we come into play.

20 We really share in those common goals of
21 permanency and safety and well-being as the outcomes for
22 children, youth, and their families. And the recruitment
23 and retention of staff is a problem that has been long
24 shared with our public sector colleagues, and the magnitude
25 of the staffing issues has just continued to increase in

1 recent years.

2 I began my career in the late '70s as a
3 protective services caseworker in Allegheny County. I've
4 been around for a decade or two, and I've seen this issue
5 continue to grow in its challenges and in the
6 responsibilities that are imposed upon all of the direct
7 service workers across our system.

8 We recognize and support the issues around
9 training and compensation for our county counterparts.
10 They're really the first responders in these situations.
11 They're in there doing the intake and the investigations,
12 the assessment, the screening, and the referrals. And it's
13 at that point that many private agencies then become
14 involved with the county worker.

15 Our providers offer a broad variety of services.
16 You've heard about how the issues and the needs of families
17 cross-systems, that's what the provider network really
18 does. And so we offer in-home services, we offer
19 prevention services, services focusing on truancy. We
20 provide placement services, everything from working with
21 kin families, non-relative families, group care, congregate
22 care. And so the referrals that we get can cross over all
23 those systems.

24 We also have many members who've expanded into
25 behavioral health services and education services, early

1 intervention services. So when you look at that broad
2 array of services that it takes to really keep children
3 safe in Pennsylvania, the private provider network is at
4 that ground level in delivering those services.

5 We share in the goal with our public sector
6 counterparts of really looking at high-caliber services to
7 those families that are involved with our system, and all
8 of this takes experienced and well-trained staff. We're
9 experiencing similar challenges in the private sector
10 sometimes for the same reasons and sometimes for other
11 reasons that I'd like to address.

12 We estimate that about 75 percent of the direct
13 services in the child welfare system are delivered through
14 the private sector. That's a lot of services, a lot of
15 families, a lot of children that are touched by private
16 agencies.

17 Public and private agencies do differ slightly in
18 the financial constraints that are experienced, as well as
19 the personnel criteria used to hire employees. You've
20 heard a lot of references to civil service. We're not
21 bound by those. We're not bound by a merit process. But
22 we do have accreditation standards, we do have regulatory
23 standards imposed upon us in terms of education and
24 experience.

25 We have many, many contractual requirements.

1 Sixty-seven counties really do their contracts in 67
2 different ways, so when you look at duplication of effort,
3 you look at variation and documentation and requirements,
4 it all comes through. Many of our providers contract with
5 managed care, and again, they're imposing criteria. And
6 then many of our agencies have also adopted prerequisites
7 for employment, education requirements, experience
8 requirements. And they're configured by their board of
9 directors as nonprofit agencies.

10 The realities faced by private agencies include
11 increased prescriptive unfunded and underfunded performance
12 expectations. And a lot of these come through in contract
13 requirements. Recently, in the recent years, contracts are
14 more often dictated than negotiated. Fixed or uniform
15 rates for services that haven't been adjusted for years add
16 to our problems in retention and recruitment. And an
17 inability to secure reasonable rate adjustments reflect at
18 actual cost also add to the challenges of delivering
19 mandated services.

20 This current year, fiscal year '15/'16, was
21 really challenging for private agencies because of the
22 budget impasse. Not only was there a delay in dollars
23 flowing through this State to the counties and ultimately
24 to the providers, there was also delays in contracting.
25 And so midyear private agencies were still trying to figure

1 out what their operating budgets were going to look like
2 for the rest of the year. It is extremely difficult to
3 deal with personnel costs and wage adjustments when you
4 don't know what your realities are going to be around
5 budgeting.

6 And in the midst of all this, our basic operating
7 costs, occupancy, even if a building is owned by an agency,
8 you still have maintenance. Transportation costs: Many of
9 our agencies are involved in transporting children for
10 visitation to medical appointments, to court hearings, to
11 sibling visits. All of those quality pieces of service
12 that we want for our children in child welfare are often
13 done by private agencies. Insurance coverage, health care
14 operating insurances all have continued to increase, really
15 creating fiscal challenges for private providers.

16 Many agencies have gone without salary increases
17 for a number of years. Those that were fortunate enough to
18 get a 1 or 2 percent increase in recent years often have to
19 have the employee pay that back to the agency to cover
20 increasing health care costs, double digit health care
21 costs with many of our agencies because they're small and
22 they don't have leverage to negotiate.

23 We recently did a salary survey. We do them
24 every two or three years within PCCYFS, and we looked at an
25 average statewide turnover rate of about 25 percent. That

1 really varied. It was lower in some areas, much, much
2 higher in other areas. And the top reasons for leaving the
3 position really mirror what we've heard already from our
4 county counterparts. Low wages, dissatisfaction with the
5 job, feeling overwhelmed, caseload is too high, taking a
6 better position, and other personal reasons.

7 And while salaries were a factor in evaluating
8 job satisfaction, other issues really came into play in
9 evaluating worker satisfaction. Excessive paperwork and
10 documentation, one issue that you've heard a couple times
11 this morning. Increasing caseload size, agencies trying to
12 cut costs, caseload size is increasing. Limited
13 opportunities for advancement, minimal financial support
14 for advanced education, being on call, evenings and weekend
15 work schedules, worker safety, and negative public
16 perceptions all are factors that are identified in our
17 challenges around not only recruiting credible individuals
18 to our field but also retaining them.

19 One big difference between the public and private
20 sector is the absence of support for that graduate-level
21 education and ultimately loan forgiveness that you heard
22 addressed in the CWEB and the CWEL program. While private
23 agencies can participate in the ongoing programming
24 available through the Child Welfare Resource Center. The
25 specific programs of CWEB and CWEL are limited to county

1 employees.

2 Inadequate preparation and understanding of job
3 responsibilities are frequently also noted as a reason for
4 leaving the field. Worker shortages require shorter
5 orientation, shorter training times, people are assigned
6 caseloads, they feel overwhelmed, they don't stay with us.

7 Most importantly in all of this and with all of
8 the issues that you've heard already this morning, the
9 effects of staff turnover in the lives of the individuals
10 that are served by the agencies is really the biggest
11 consequence. These are the children, youth, and families
12 that really are depending upon appropriate, consistent
13 supports and interventions to enable them to achieve and
14 maintain stability within their family. And a change in
15 workers at any level disrupts these relationships. It
16 often causes them to step backward in their treatment
17 process. How many times can you ask someone to tell their
18 story and yet that's often the situation when workers
19 change.

20 Each change in worker creates another loss
21 situation for that child if there's been a relationship
22 established, and certainly another trust challenge for the
23 adults in that family as they work to address their plan.

24 There are also hard costs associated with each
25 worker that we lose in our field, and one agency identified

1 a total cost of about \$3,000 in that process when you look
2 at advertising, training time, overtime for others covering
3 cases, and all the indirect costs related to the strains
4 that are put on the workers who are retained in our field.

5 Because Chairwoman Watson has reassured us
6 several times that you all are going to read every word of
7 every document, I am going to advise that there are
8 numerous quotes taken from our private provider members on
9 several pages in the document. And I couldn't offer any
10 better insight or any better descriptives of what the
11 challenges are around this issue than they themselves have
12 offered, so I would encourage you to read their words and
13 understand that even though these are taken from individual
14 agency responses, they are truly reflective of statewide
15 experiences in the private sector.

16 We've been actively engaged in supporting the
17 provision of high-quality services in the child welfare
18 system for 40 years as a membership association. We've
19 addressed this issue of worker retention and worker
20 recruitment on a number of occasions in years past. I
21 pulled testimony that we offered in 2004 to this Committee
22 on this same issue. We were in crisis mode then. We're
23 back in crisis mode now.

24 There's a need for improved public perceptions,
25 affirmation of the value of the role that these individuals

1 fill in our society in Pennsylvania and the funds to
2 address not only wages but all of the other related issues
3 that you've heard this morning.

4 And we ask that as this Committee and this debate
5 and this discussion and in future hearings really looks at
6 options and solutions around child welfare issues that you
7 not overlook the value and the component that is really
8 filed by private agencies because we are a very active part
9 of the child welfare system in Pennsylvania to address
10 child safety and family stability.

11 We stand ready, just as Brian offered counties as
12 examples and as opportunities, private agencies would love
13 to be here. I've given you the condensed version in the
14 spirit of time constraints this morning. We could have 200
15 agencies in this room really all sharing their experiences
16 and their concerns around being able to maintain their
17 service array to continue providing the services that they
18 are providing.

19 So again, I stand with my colleagues ready to
20 answer any questions and assist in any way in this effort.
21 Thank you for this opportunity.

22 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN WATSON: Bernadette, thank
23 you very much.

24 I am looking at the clock and know there really
25 isn't time to do what we should do, which would probably be

1 almost an hour of questions that everyone has. I would ask
2 Members, would you write your questions and email them to
3 Greg. We are going to funnel them out to you folks to get
4 an answer.

5 Please know, ladies and gentlemen, we said it at
6 the beginning but it's been a long two hours, this is only
7 the beginning. We certainly want things to happen from
8 this, but that isn't what it's about. It's about making a
9 difference. It's about moving us into what I call part 2
10 that we've done some of the legal work in the legislation,
11 but the implementation is equally as important. That's
12 where we are now. I think it will stretch over a long
13 period of time, but we need to hear from you. We will come
14 back to you for additional comments probably, along with
15 answers to questions.

16 And we think it's an important process that we
17 are beginning and we will see it through -- that is the
18 Committee -- to its conclusion, much as we did with the
19 legislation to improve child protection in Pennsylvania.

20 Chairman, you might have something to say.

21 DEMOCRATIC CHAIRMAN CONKLIN: Just a well-run
22 meeting. In closing, I think we got it. No legislation
23 without proper monetary representation, just like the
24 Boston Tea Party, let's go for it.

25 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN WATSON: Good thought.

1 REPRESENTATIVE KLUNK: Madam Chair, can I just
2 ask one quick question of Deputy Secretary Utz since she's
3 here in the room and we're all here together?

4 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN WATSON: How about if we
5 grab --

6 REPRESENTATIVE KLUNK: Okay.

7 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN WATSON: -- Secretary Utz and
8 we'll do that because I know people want to get to the
9 Floor, and I understand that --

10 REPRESENTATIVE KLUNK: Okay.

11 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN WATSON: -- to be there. So
12 I'm going to adjourn the meeting officially. Please stick
13 around if you can, ask your questions, and know,
14 testifiers, we thank you.

15

16 (The hearing concluded at 12:56 a.m.)

1 I hereby certify that the foregoing proceedings
2 are a true and accurate transcription produced from audio
3 on the said proceedings and that this is a correct
4 transcript of the same.

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