

Written Testimony of Dr. William B. Vogler  
CEO, Pinebrook Family Answers  
Pennsylvania House Children and Youth Committee  
January 25, 2022

Chairperson Delozier, Chairperson DeLissio and Members of the House Children and Youth Committee:

Three years ago, because of an unfounded lawsuit related to an adoption that took place in 2005, Pinebrook Family Answers was dropped by our carrier for general and professional liability insurance. It was the first time we had ever been sued for this work. The coverage we eventually settled for with a new carrier did not satisfy our contract requirements, and included no retroactive "tail" leaving the agency completely exposed should another similar lawsuit appear. The cost for this inadequate coverage was astronomical. Our annual premium went from \$97,000 a year to \$281,000 per year, for minimal coverage.

You will see from the agency description that follows that Pinebrook Family Answers is a very diverse, multi-service organization. Adoption and Foster Care represent less than 15% of our budget, and only 5% of our client base, and yet the provision of these services increase our insurance costs dramatically. Even if we were to stop providing them (a step we are loath to take because it is an important service) we would still have the exposure from the past.

We rely heavily on local county Human Service Departments, most notably Mental Health, Children and Youth, and Aging. Given our size and service area we contract with multiple counties. It is our experience that the contractual insurance expectations required to maintain these contracts are untenable in today's climate. While some jurisdictions provide waivers, we are still essentially required to always name the county as an additional insured on our policies.

**About Pinebrook Family Answers:**

Pinebrook Family Answers is a nonprofit human service organization located in the Lehigh Valley in Pennsylvania. Our mission is "to transform lives across generations by nurturing healthy children and strong families, supporting seniors, empowering individuals, and strengthening the Greater Lehigh Valley." Our programs reach families in Lehigh, Northampton, and Carbon counties. We have outpatient Psychiatric clinics in Allentown, Easton, and Wind Gap, as well as integrated mental health services in several Lehigh Valley School districts, hospitals, and jails.

Currently our programs include:

**COMMUNITY BASED SERVICES:**

Permanency Services: Pinebrook Family Answers offers a five-tier Foster Care model designed to meet the individualized needs of children who primarily have been traumatized from parental neglect, sexual abuse and/or physical abuse; Kinship Care Permanency Services; and Adoption Services for special-needs children through the StateWide Adoption Network (SWAN). The Agency's Adoption Department also offers limited international adoption services, including home study and post- placement services in collaboration with other accredited adoption agencies. Transportation and Family Visitation Program connects children in out-of-home placement with their biological/legal families providing supervised family visitation to support family reunification goals. The Family Reunification Program is an intensive, family-focused social work service, created to address areas of concern that resulted in an out-of-home placement for a child or children; enable parents to care for their children at home; and prevent the need for the child or children to re-enter out-of-home care after being reunified with their family.

Diversionsary Services: Making the Grade Truancy Intervention Services is a truancy-reduction, family-support program which includes family support services for elementary and middle school children and provides in-home case management and coordination of community services and support. High Fidelity Wraparound Initiative, an evidence-based practice and team-based collaborative process for helping youth with special mental health needs, works with youth and young adults, ages 8 to 21, and their families. A family preservation program, SHAPE serves families with children ages 0-18, providing need assessments, case management, coordination of community services and support. Our newest program, which joined the agency in July 2018 when Child Care Information Services closed, is Unconditional Child Care, a program that works with young children with challenging behavioral issues to help keep them in their childcare placements.

Senior Home Care Services: Under license by the Department of Health, the Agency's HOMECARE program provides care for seniors, those recovering from accidents, injury, surgery, long- or short-term disabilities, and others who need assistance with daily chores of living. Services include personal care needs, light housekeeping, running errands such as shopping, laundry and respite care. We also provide fall prevention and education to our HOMECARE clients.

Forensic Services includes Adult Re-entry Services, including trauma-informed case-management in the jails as well as case-management for incarcerated women's families; Transitional Residence Program, a unique housing program that addresses the needs of

homeless women and enables them to reunite with their children and work toward housing stability; the ALPHA program provides teens on probation with academic, behavioral, and job readiness services designed to prepare them to enter the workforce and success in life; Family Services, which includes evidence-based parenting education classes and supervised contact visits; and theft remediation services.

#### **CLINICAL SERVICES:**

Behavioral Health Services: Pinebrook Family Answers operates three outpatient psychiatric clinics for children and adults, which provide an array of outpatient psychiatric and counseling services to clients from county mental health offices, children in Pinebrook Family Answers' foster care programs, and privately referred clients in the Greater Lehigh Valley Region. The clinics are located in Allentown, Easton and Wind Gap. The Agency is a participating provider of services in the Pennsylvania HealthChoices Initiative and contracts with numerous commercial insurance companies and Employee Assistance Programs. Other behavioral/mental health services include Integrated Behavioral Health Services, a model of service provision that places behavioral health providers in a team environment with other health care providers, such as primary care physicians and schools. The Agency has partnered with St. Luke's University Health Network to place mental health professionals in pediatric clinics, mobile health care vans, and HIV care settings. The agency also has 9 clinicians placed in schools in the Allentown, Bethlehem, Easton and Bangor School Districts.

Family-based Mental Health Services, an in-home therapeutic treatment program, is designed to preserve families with children who are experiencing serious mental health issues. Warmline provides an anonymous telephone support service for Lehigh County residents. The Lehigh County Community Intervention Specialists (CIS) work closely with Lehigh County Police Departments to assess individuals with mental illness who encounter the police, in order to refer individuals to the appropriate services, reduce recidivism, and to promote the Recovery Model.

Agency statistics reflect that the population served by Pinebrook Family Answers is racially and ethnically diverse and 95% living in poverty. Our focus is supporting children, adults and seniors in order to make them healthy, strong and self-sufficient. Last year, Pinebrook Family Answers assisted 4,875 children, young adults, families and seniors and impacted an additional 12,342 family members.