

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Human Services Secretary Encourages All Pennsylvanians to Help Report Child Abuse Amidst COVID-19 Public Health Crisis

Harrisburg, PA – Department of Human Services (DHS) Secretary Teresa Miller and Angela Liddle, President and CEO of the PA Family Support Alliance, today reminded Pennsylvanians that DHS' ChildLine, a 24/7 hotline for reporting concerns of child abuse or neglect, is still fully operational and available at 1-800-932-0313 for Pennsylvanians seeking to report potential cases of child abuse or neglect. April is Child Abuse Prevention Month, and as scheduled recognition activities and regular life has shifted due to COVID-19, DHS and child welfare advocates implore all Pennsylvanians to learn signs of potential abuse or neglect and, if they suspect abuse, make the call to ChildLine.

“As we navigate this public health crisis and the necessary disruptions, we cannot lose sight of our obligation to do all we can to keep kids safe and prevent child abuse, and the Wolf Administration is not compromising that duty,” said Secretary Miller. “Life has changed, but we all can still do what we are able to look out for children in and around our lives. Whether it is a neighbor, family member, student, client, or someone you encounter in a store – if you suspect something is wrong, anyone can call ChildLine and make a report.”

ChildLine is available 24/7 to anyone wishing to report child abuse and general child well-being concerns at 1-800-932-0313 and at www.KeepKidsSafe.pa.gov. Mandated reporters should report online. ChildLine supervisors are constantly monitoring calls and assuring proper response and assignment to county agencies for investigation of all incoming reports. ChildLine response will not change because staff are teleworking from their homes, and Pennsylvanians who suspect abuse or neglect should help protect children by making the call to ChildLine.

Since March 19, calls to ChildLine have ranged from a daily low of 287 calls to a high of 365 calls on weekdays. The number of calls on Saturdays and Sundays is lower – ranging from 138 to 169 calls per day. These numbers represent a roughly 50 percent reduction in average daily calls to ChildLine since the commonwealth's implementation of significant social-distancing measures advised by public-health professionals to slow the spread of the COVID-19 virus and save lives.

Decreased calls do not mean that abuse and neglect is not occurring. Rather, one unfortunate effect of school closures is the limited interaction between children, their teachers and other mandated reporters in school settings. Of the 39,040 reports made by mandated reporters to ChildLine in [2018](#), more than a third were reported by school employees.

Anyone can make a report to ChildLine, and if you are not a mandated reporter, calls made to ChildLine are anonymous. DHS is encouraging all Pennsylvanians to learn more about the signs of potential abuse or neglect and make a report to ChildLine if they begin to suspect abuse or neglect. Reporters do not have to prove abuse and neglect, and reporting to ChildLine allows trained child welfare and law enforcement professionals to properly investigate cases of suspected abuse.

“Each and every one of us can play a role in protecting children from abuse or neglect. You do not have to be a mandated reporter to protect a child by making the call to ChildLine,” said Secretary Miller. “Making the call allows trained child welfare professionals and, if necessary, law enforcement to follow up, collect information, and determine if assistive services or other intervention is necessary.”

Signs of potential abuse or neglect can include:

- Numerous and/or unexplained injuries or bruises;
- Chronic, pronounced anxiety and expressed feelings of inadequacy;
- Flinching or an avoidance to being touched;
- Poor impulse control;
- Demonstrating abusive behavior or talk;
- Cruelty to animals or others; and,
- Fear of parent or caregiver, among [others](#).

Social distancing measures and closure of schools may cause other behaviors or changes to arise that could indicate a concern. Neighbors, teachers participating in virtual schooling, extended family, and others who interact with families and children should be cognizant of:

- Changes in a child’s behavior or mood;
- Noticeable changes in a child’s weight or physical appearance that could suggest concerns with care; and,
- Significant changes in participation and engagement in school activities.

“Due to social distancing, children are not in school and that extra set of eyes from their teachers, bus drivers, daycare workers just isn’t there,” said Angela Liddle, President and CEO of the Pa Family Support Alliance. “This is a very difficult time for parents, caregivers, and families who are dealing with an enormous amount of stress and that can lead to a higher risk for potential abuse. April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month and we want to encourage everyone to check-in on the children in your life through virtual means with phone calls and video conferencing during this pandemic. If you suspect that something is wrong, please don’t hesitate and call ChildLine immediately. It’s more important than ever for all of us to come together and protect Pennsylvania’s children.”

DHS also encourages parents and families who are struggling to cope during this time of crisis to reach out for help. Anyone struggling with mental health and in need of referrals to helpful programs can call Pennsylvania’s new Support & Referral Helpline, which is operated 24/7 by skilled caseworkers who can provide emotional support during this difficult period. The number to call is 1-855-284-2494. For TTY, dial 724-631-5600. Another helpful resource is the 2-1-1 [hotline](#) operated by the United Way, which can connect people and families to local resources that can help during the public health crisis.

Visit pa.gov for a [“Responding to COVID-19” guide](#) or the Pennsylvania Department of Health’s dedicated [Coronavirus webpage](#) for the most up-to-date information regarding COVID-19.