

**August 20, 2020**

## **Human Services Reminds Pennsylvanians to Report Child Abuse and Keep Kids Safe at Home**

**Harrisburg, PA** – Today, Department of Human Services (DHS) Secretary Teresa Miller encouraged Pennsylvania families during this back-to-school season to consider taking proactive steps to keep kids safe in their home environments and reminded all Pennsylvanians that the responsibility to protect children from abuse and neglect belongs to each of us.

“Many, many thousands of Pennsylvania children are going back to school -- but not yet back to the classroom. While necessary to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and save lives, remote learning is a fundamental shift in daily life for many families that has potentially significant implications for children,” Secretary Miller said. “This is an important opportunity for Pennsylvania families to very deliberately consider the environment of their child’s education, as there can be potential dangers for children even in our own homes.”

DHS is responsible for oversight of Pennsylvania’s county-run child welfare system through the Office of Children, Youth and Families (OCYF), which also administers statewide programs like ChildLine, Pennsylvania’s child-abuse reporting hotline. OCYF also analyzes child fatality and near-fatality data and identifies trends to inform the work of developing policy that can prevent tragedies.

OCYF Deputy Secretary Jon Rubin reminded Pennsylvania families to ensure that their home environments are as safe for children as possible. Specifically, families should consider gun and gun storage safety; pool and water safety; safe storage of medication and other dangerous substances; and potential fall/heights hazards.

“Taking proactive, deliberate action now can prevent accidental tragedies in the future,” Rubin said. “We want Pennsylvania families to go into the 2020-21 school year with the peace of mind that they’ve carefully considered the environment of their child’s education and taken necessary steps to keep them safe in that environment.”

Secretary Miller also reminded Pennsylvanians that we all share the responsibility of protecting children in our communities from abuse and neglect. DHS administers ChildLine, which is a 24/7 hotline available to anyone concerned for the safety or well-being of a child. To report a concern, call 1-800-932-0313.

“With so many schools starting the 2020-21 school year with an entirely virtual or hybrid learning model, we must acknowledge the potential impact of reducing interaction between children and educators,” Secretary Miller said. “We saw a roughly 40 to 50 percent decline in child abuse reporting back in the spring after schools closed. Even this summer – with summer camps and sports camps and library story times canceled –

we've seen a 10 to 12 percent decrease in ChildLine reports compared to the same months in 2019.”

This decrease in calls is most likely an unfortunate side effect of school closures and limited interactions between children, their teachers and other mandated reporters in school settings. Of the 39,040 reports made by mandated reporters to ChildLine in [2018](#), for example, more than a third were reported by school employees.

Anyone can make a report to ChildLine. Anyone who is not a mandated reporter can make a report to ChildLine anonymously. 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. 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](#).

Pennsylvanians can learn more about the signs of potential abuse at [www.keepkidssafe.pa.gov](http://www.keepkidssafe.pa.gov).

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.

Families struggling to afford food should consider applying for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, also known as SNAP, or food stamps. Pennsylvanians can apply any time at [www.compass.state.pa.us](http://www.compass.state.pa.us).