



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF HEALTH

House Appropriations Committee
Department of Health Budget Hearing

Testimony of
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Good morning, Chairman Harris, Chairman Grove, and members of the House Appropriations Committee. I am Dr. Debra Bogen, Acting Secretary of the Department of Health. Joining me here today are Executive Deputy Secretary Kristen Rodack, Chief Financial Officer Andrea Race, and Deputy Secretary of Administration Danielle Pierre. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the committee to discuss Governor Shapiro's proposed budget for the Department of Health in the 2023-2024 Fiscal Year.

During his Budget Address, the Governor shared a strong framework to further achieve a healthy Pennsylvania for all. In addition to supporting the Department's current work, the Governor's proposed budget focuses on providing resources to bolster healthy communities and ensuring local responses to local health issues.

Families are the backbone of our communities. I learned that firsthand during my 25 years as a practicing pediatrician. We know that healthy parents can better support children's healthy growth and development. Sadly, we also know that preventable complications and deaths associated with pregnancy and the postpartum period occur too often. These losses are devastating to families and have a significant impact on our communities. We can and must do better.

Specifically, complications and deaths during pregnancy and the postpartum period are exacerbated by numerous public health challenges, including lack of access to timely prenatal and postpartum care, support, and interventions. Fortunately, Pennsylvania has a strong Maternal Mortality Review Committee (MMRC) which was established in 2018 to conduct multidisciplinary reviews of pregnancy associated deaths and develop recommendations to prevent future deaths. In 2022, the MMRC issued a report which included recommendations to improve health outcomes for women and infants in Pennsylvania. The Governor's proposed budget supports the ongoing critical work of the MMRC by investing \$2.3 million to implement some of the recommendations by expanding maternal health supports and programs. These new investments will provide resources to help implement prevention strategies to reduce maternal mortality and morbidity. Not only will this investment allow the Department to implement prevention strategies identified by the MMRC, but it will also allow the Commonwealth an opportunity to leverage an additional \$1.25 million in federal funding to enhance the impact of the proposed state investment.

To further invest in our communities, the Governor's budget also proposes additional resources to support the Department's efforts to ensure Pennsylvanians residing in long-term care facilities receive care in safe and healthy environments. As many of you know, the Department licenses and regulates health care facilities, including nursing homes. At the end of 2022, the Department revised the Long-Term Care Nursing Facility regulations to update the minimum health and safety standards for nursing home residents. The updated regulations increase transparency and monitoring of facility owners' financial health to reduce the risk of facility closures and subsequent disruption to residents and save current staff time related to facility closures and relocating residents. The proposed budget will solidify the Department's commitment to ensuring nursing facilities provide safe and stable services for long-term care residents while building a regulatory framework that will keep quality providers in Pennsylvania.

Additionally, the General Assembly passed Act 128 of 2022, which directed the Department to register and regulate temporary health care service agencies working in long-term care settings. While the Act provided for registration fees for these entities, it did not include financial resources to the Department to support the initial implementation of the Act's requirements. While the Department is working diligently to meet the requirements of the Act, efforts to hire staff and develop a registration system are hindered by inadequate financial support.

In this budget, the Governor is proposing to invest more than \$1.9 million for the Department's oversight of long-term care facilities to regulate compliance by facility operators and to help improve quality of care broadly for facility residents. This proposed funding will help the Department hire staff to properly implement the updated Long-Term Care Nursing Facility regulations which are being phased in over this fiscal year. This investment will also support the implementation of temporary health care service agency registration. With these investments, the Governor is staking a strong commitment in the health of our most vulnerable Pennsylvanians.

Further, the Governor's budget proposal invests in our communities by supporting our critical public health infrastructure through Pennsylvania's county and municipal health departments (CMHDs). Pennsylvania currently has seven county health departments in Allegheny, Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Erie, Montgomery, and Philadelphia Counties and four municipal health departments in the cities of Allentown, Bethlehem, Wilkes-Barre, and York. We also know that Lackawanna County is diligently working to stand up its own county health department to further bolster public health infrastructure in the Commonwealth.

This budget will continue to invest in local efforts to support public and environmental health by fully funding Pennsylvania's CMHDs up to the limits allowable in statute. More than 40 percent of Pennsylvanians live in a county or municipality served by a CMHD, and by investing an additional \$1.2 million in their operating budgets and \$6.61 million in environmental health, this budget supports their vital mission, including in the areas of water pollution, food safety, and direct health services to their communities. As a former director of the Allegheny County Health Department, I know these investments are meaningful and help support the critical public health work and outreach done by our CMHDs. These public health workers help support the health of

our local communities and are trusted messengers who have built strong relationships in the communities they serve. These investments will help broaden their already strong impact.

Further, while not directly under the purview of the Department, I am pleased to support the Governor's proposed investments in our health care workforce. The Governor's proposed financial assistance to encourage nurses to enter this critical workforce pipeline – proposing to put up to \$7,500 back in their pockets over three years - is a smart investment that will pay dividends for decades. Our health care heroes worked tirelessly during the pandemic, and, at times, many experienced mental and emotional exhaustion and burnout. This stress has led some individuals to leave the profession. We need to bolster support for those who continue to provide critical care to Pennsylvanians and help to lessen the burden on their shoulders by attracting new nurses into the health care field. This supports our doctors, nurses, and patients. As a former health care provider, I know that nurses are necessary to ensure proper care across the health care landscape. The Governor's proposal will help to do just that.

Thank you for the opportunity to be before you today. I am happy to take any questions you may have of me or my team.