

Legislative Budget and Finance Committee

A Report on the Pennsylvania Health and Human Services Hotlines

Report Comments by Jason R. Brehouse, Esq., Project Manager

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Good morning. My name is Jason Brehouse, Esq. (Project Manager) and it is a pleasure to be here today with the members of the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee to discuss our report on the Pennsylvania Health and Human Services Hotlines. Present with me today is committee staff person, Anne Witkonis (Analyst II). We are also pleased to have with us today representatives of the Pennsylvania Department of Aging (PDA), Pennsylvania Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs (DDAP), Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH), Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (DHS), Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency (PHFA), Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission (PUC) and the nonprofit Pennsylvania 211 (PA 211) powered by United Way of Pennsylvania (UWP).

House Resolution 2019-507 (HR 2019-507) directed the committee to: 1) identify health and human services hotlines operated or contracted for by the indicated agencies, 2) identify the services provided, staffing, cost and appropriations, contract options, and hours of operation for each hotline, 3) analyze the information maintained by each agency regarding the functioning of hotlines, and 4) identify private and charitable entities that support hotlines. We reviewed the hotlines operated (or contracted) by six Commonwealth of Pennsylvania state agencies and quasi-state agencies and one nonprofit during FYs 2016-17, 2017-18, and 2018-19.

We identified a total of 66 Pennsylvania health and human services hotlines operated (or contracted) at a combined cost of more than \$75.4 million dollars in FY 2018-19. It should be noted this dollar amount does not represent the total cost of all the hotlines as the DOH and DHS agencies were unable to provide costs for a combined total of 18 of their respective hotlines because in many instances the hotline service portion was not broken out separately from other activities. The 66 hotlines are operated as follows: PDA operates – seven hotlines, DDAP operates – two hotlines, DOH operates – 22 hotlines, DHS operates – 31 hotlines, PHFA operates – two hotlines, PUC operates – one hotline, and PA 211 operates – one hotline.

Our analysis identified the services provided, staffing, cost and appropriations, operational hours, etc., for each hotline, to the extent data was maintained and was available from the Commonwealth agencies. This data was gathered utilizing a 15-point hotline information request we developed and provided to each of the agencies.

Contained within my comments below is an overview of some of the data and information collected in relation to the hotlines:

Department	Number of Lines	Agency/Contracted	Cost (FY 2018-19)
PDA	7	Agency & Contracted	\$6,346,353
DDAP	2	Contracted	990,973
DOH	22	Agency & Contracted	5,871,576
DHS	31		
<i>OMAP (3)</i>		Agency & Contracted	4,185,132
<i>OLTL (10)</i>		Agency & Contracted	1,041,956
<i>OIM (3)</i>		Agency	35,756,248
<i>ODP (3)</i>		Agency	NA
<i>OCYF (9)</i>		Agency & Contracted	10,284,442
<i>OCDEL (2)</i>		Contracted	99,995
<i>OA Welfare Fraud Tipline (1)</i>		Contracted	69,786
PHFA	2	Agency	1,260,000
PUC	1	Agency	6,148,348
PA 211	1	Agency	3,314,735
Total:	66		\$75,369,544

HR 2019-507 defines the term “hotline” as follows:

A hotline under this resolution include[s] a call that is live answered or a call that uses an interactive voice response to direct the caller to a staff person who answers the call within the operating hours of the hotline with the goal of identifying appropriate services to address the caller’s needs.

While the term “hotline” is the defined term, we note that when identifying the hotlines the agencies may also refer to such as call centers, helplines, or hotlines.

The report contains a section that corresponds to each agency (PDA, DDAP, DOH, DHS, PHFA, PUC, and PA 211), and provides an overview of the mission and purpose of each agency. Included with the mission and purpose is a listing of each agency’s hotlines, and a brief summary of the hotline’s purpose. Thereafter, each section presents data and information regarding the staffing, cost and appropriations, operational hours, etc. for each

hotline the agency operates (or contracts with another entity to operate). This data and information is displayed in exhibits that are grouped by each agency in the following order: Basic Information, Optional Services, Subject Matter, Disposition of Calls, Call Volume, Average Wait Time, County of Origin, and Annual Operation Costs. Many of the hotlines offered optional services, i.e. translation and deaf/hard of hearing services, as well as texting, web searches and mobile applications. More of the hotlines had translation services than any other option. Texting was the least available optional service. For the roughly half of all hotlines that provided us with average wait times, those times ranged from one second to over 40 minutes. Some hotlines, such as those in DDAP are answered live and have no wait times.

{Section II – PDA}

The mission of PDA is to enhance the quality of life of older Pennsylvanians. PDA contracts with other entities to provide for seven health and human services call centers, helplines, and hotlines.

Five of the hotlines are operational Monday through Friday with PACE Provider Services/ProDur and the Report Elder Abuse/Adult Protective Services hotlines functioning on a 24/7 basis. Annual costs for PDA hotlines were \$6.3 million in FY 2018-19 and required 142 full-time and 23 part-time employees. In addition 95 volunteers from 10 AAAs staff the PDA Apprise Helpline. Not all optional services, for example translation services, are available.

PDA's Report Elder Abuse Hotline is the same as the Department of Human Service's Adult Protective Services Hotline. Prior to March 2020, the Elder Abuse/Protective Services Hotline was automated and electronically transferred calls to 52 Area Agency on Aging (AAA) based on the phone number. The transferred hotline calls were answered and responded to by AAA staff. The hotline is under the purview of the Protective Services (PS) program within PDA. Other than basic information, optional services, call volume, and costs to operate, no other data is available for the Elder Abuse Hotline.

County of origin is only available for the PACE Application Call Center and PDA Link to Aging and Disability Resources Center Call Center.

{Section III – DDAP}

DDAP develops and implements programs to reduce substance abuse and dependency (i.e., drug, alcohol, and gambling abuse) through education, prevention, intervention, rehabilitation, and treatment programs. DDAP contracts with other entities to provide for two health and human services hotlines.

Annual costs of operation for DDAP's two hotlines – PA Get Help Now and PA Compulsive & Problem Gambling – were \$990,973 in FY 2018-19. Operations for both hotlines are contracted and operate on a 24/7 basis with 25 full-time and 27 part-time employees.

Both hotlines offer all optional services and all calls are answered live.

{Section IV – DOH}

DOH operates and contracts with other entities to provide for 22 health and human services call centers and hotlines.

Of the 22 hotlines, 19 are operational Monday through Friday and three lines function on a 24/7 basis. Annual operating costs for 15 of DOH's hotlines were \$5.8 million in FY 2018-19. Costs for the other hotlines were not available. Operations for 13 of the hotlines are contracted, with the remainder agency-run. The 22 hotlines require 71 full-time employees. Optional services vary by hotline.

DOH could not provide disposition of calls or county of origin.

{Section V – DHS}

The mission of DHS is to improve the quality of life for Pennsylvania's most vulnerable individuals and families. DHS operates substantive programs in six areas. Five of which utilize 30 helplines and hotlines, including the DHS Fraud Tipline/Hotline. DHS operates a total of 31 health and human services helplines and hotlines with agency staff or via contract.

The DHS health and human services hotlines are grouped by each DHS office, as indicated, which I will describe:

Office of Medical Assistance Programs. OMAP operates three hotlines, with annual costs of \$4.2 million during FY 2018-19. The hotlines are all agency operated with some contracted staff. EVS is agency run, but through an automated line. All hotlines are operational Monday through Friday and require 71 full-time employees.

For OMAP, the cost of the hotlines is only available for FY 2018-19, except EVS for which cost is not available. County of origin is not available.

Office of Long Term Living. OLTL has ten hotlines, seven of which are operational Monday through Friday, although the Public Partnerships (PPL) Customer Service Line has limited hours on Saturday. The Bureau of Human Services Licensing Complaint

Hotline and the Adult Protective Services Hotline are functional on a 24/7 basis. Five of the hotlines are agency run, with the remainder being contracted, and require 185 to 196 full-time and eight part-time employees. OLTL hotlines include a mixture of optional services.

OLTL hotlines data does not identify county of origin, nor are hotline costs available with the exception of the CHC Participation Hotline, which cost \$1.04 million in FY 2018-19. No other data, other than Basic Information and Optional Services, is available for the Adult Protective Services Hotline.

Office of Income Maintenance. OIM operates three hotlines with an annual operating cost of \$35.8 million in FY 2018-19. All hotlines are operational Monday through Friday, and are agency operated and require 422 full-time and 195 part-time employees, 177 of whom are contingency staff for the OIM Customer Service Center. Several optional services are available for the hotlines. OIM does not track disposition of calls or county of origin.

Office of Developmental Programs. ODP has three hotlines: ODP Customer Service Line, ODP Claims Resolution, and the Bureau of Supports for Autism and Special Populations Services Helpline, which are all agency run. All three hotlines are operational Monday through Friday with varying operating hours, and require seven full-time employees and five part-time employees. The hotlines do not provide an opportunity for customer feedback. The ODP Claims Resolution Helpline has no optional services. DHS was not able to provide operational costs for ODP hotlines.

Office of Children, Youth, and Families. The nine hotlines that are operated within OCYF are both contracted out and agency operated. Most hotlines are available Monday through Friday, with the Childline Hotline and the Safe Haven Helpline open on a 24/7 basis. In FY 2018-19, costs to operate all hotlines were \$10.3 million, and required 170 full-time and 13 part-time employees.

There are two lines for which we do not have data or exhibits in the report. The SWAN Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange (PAE) number (1-800-227-0225) is auto answered and, while it meets the definition of a hotline under HR 2019-507, all calls are passed to the SWAN Helpline or the SWAN LSI Warmline and therefore, any data is included in those corresponding helplines. The KinConnector Helpline (1-866-KIN-2111) is an active OCYF helpline, however, this helpline was only operational as of FY 2019-20; and no data was included in the report because it is outside the scope of HR 2019-507.

Please note that while DHS does not collect county of origin data, the SWAN Helpline collects data by region only and the Safe Haven sometimes captures county of origin.

Office of Child Development and Early Learning. OCDEL has two hotlines, the PAKIDS Helpline and CONNECT Helpline. Both hotlines are contracted and operate set hours Monday - Friday. Annual operating costs in FY 2018-19 were \$99,995 and required two full-time employees.

Office of Administration Welfare Fraud Tipline/Hotline. OA Welfare Fraud Tipline/Hotline annual operating costs for FY 2018-19 were \$69,786. Operations are contracted on a 24/7 basis and require one full-time employee. There are no optional services. Subject matter for all calls was reported by DHS to be suspected provider and recipient fraud.

{Section VI – PHFA}

PHFA is a state-affiliated/quasi-state entity that provides capital for decent, safe, and affordable homes and apartments for older adults, low-and moderate-income Pennsylvanians and their families and individuals with special housing needs with the goal of making Pennsylvania a better place to live while fostering community and economic development. PHFA operates and contracts with other entities to provide for two health and human services hotlines/call centers.

Although the PHFA hotlines had annual operating costs of \$1.3 million in FY 2018-19, the hotlines are mainly self-funded through mortgage servicing revenue. The Customer Solutions Center (CSC) Hotline is agency-operated, with 12 full-time employees. PA-HousingSearch.com is contracted to Socialserve, which serves an additional 29 states, plus the District of Columbia.

There is no data available for the PAHousingSearch.com, other than basic information and optional services. PHFA does not track county of origin or call disposition for either hotline.

{Section VII – PUC}

PUC is an independent quasi-judicial state agency that seeks to balance the needs of consumers and public utilities while fostering new technologies and competitive markets in an environmentally sound manner that furthers economic development. PUC's Bureau of Consumer Services operates and maintains within the Commonwealth a sole consumer complaint hotline.

The PUC operates its Consumer Hotline in house with 15 to 50 full-time employees because call volumes increases significantly over the winter heating season. There are also 10 part-time employees. In FY 2018-19 operating costs were \$6.1 million.

{Section VIII – PA 211}

The nonprofit PA 211 (powered by UWP) and the United Way of Pennsylvania (UWP) are partners supporting the PA 211 community-strengthening service. PA 211 is a starting place and gateway for all Pennsylvania health and human services and PA 211 connects people with government programs (i.e., federal, state, and local) and private nonprofit organizations by providing them with a description of the program/organization and the service(s) offered, and provides contact information. The nonprofit PA 211 operates and maintains within the Commonwealth a sole health and human services hotline with the same nomenclature.

PA 211 had an annual operating cost of \$3.3 million in FY 2018-19, of which \$750,000 comes from the Department of Human Services. Other funding resources include county United Way organizations, as well as county and municipal governments. PA 211 has 44 full-time and 34 part-time employees and can be reached on a 24/7 basis by dialing 211.

In closing, we extend thanks to the various stakeholders that provided guidance and insight with regard to our numerous inquiries. In particular, we thank the staffs of PDA, DDAP, DOH, DHS, PHFA, PUC, and PA 211 for their cooperation and input.

