



GOVERNOR WOLF SEEKS OVERHAUL OF WORK, HOUSING PROGRAMS FOR PUBLIC BENEFIT RECIPIENTS

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Harrisburg, PA – Governor Tom Wolf today announced a proposed overhaul of state programs to help Pennsylvanians receiving public benefits earn career-building skills, find good jobs, and access affordable, permanent housing, among other goals.

The overhaul would create greater accountability for programs aimed at getting people into the workforce, increase collaboration between benefit agencies and workforce development, and transition funding used for General Assistance to increase access to housing.

“It is a worthy goal to get more people working, and these revamped programs will ensure people obtain not just good jobs, but family-sustaining careers, and remove barriers to obtaining affordable housing, which can help them transition off public assistance benefits for the long term,” said Gov. Wolf. “If they are able and healthy, we want more people in the workforce. These steps will move us towards that goal without putting people at risk of losing their health care.”

According to Community Action Association of PA, a sizable majority of poor Pennsylvanians are working; more than 60 percent of households in the state include one or more people who worked at least part-time. The challenge is finding people jobs that they can keep, that provide a career path, and that pay enough to support a family. That challenge is compounded by barriers that can seem insurmountable for finding and keeping a good job. Barriers include a lack of child care, transportation, and affordable housing.

“We must do a better job connecting individuals with employment that provides them with worthwhile opportunities and removing those roadblocks or barriers that are keeping them from finding and keeping that good job,” Gov. Wolf said. “Revamping our programs means working to help people on public benefits get in the workforce if they are able and providing them with help that makes that job easier to get and keep. Like my colleagues in the General

Assembly, my administration wants more people, not fewer, to have meaningful careers, access to health care and housing, and an end to the cycle of poverty.”

The program overhauls were developed after Gov. Wolf charged the Department of Human Services (DHS), which administers various employment and training programs, to better understand the clients served by the department, the barriers they face to employment, and the reasons why current programs are not working.

Through conversations with employment and training program participants, program providers, and other stakeholders, DHS learned that existing programs such as Employment Advancement and Retention Network (EARN) and Work Ready are focusing too much on job placement and not enough on reducing barriers to employment and long-term outcomes.

For example, of the 31,000 Pennsylvanians referred to EARN in 2017-18, less than 50 percent enrolled in the program. After six months, just 1,000 remained employed.

“All Pennsylvanians should have the opportunity to find a field and career that they can excel in and allows them to support their families and invest in their communities,” said Human Services Secretary Teresa Miller. “For too long, we’ve focused on meeting existing work requirements by focusing on job placement. This is not effective. We need to help people navigate and overcome barriers in their lives and communities so they’re able to excel in work. These program redesigns allow us to do that, so we can truly help people find family-sustaining jobs and lead more fulfilling lives.”

DHS is partnering with the Department of Labor & Industry (L&I) to redesign the jobs programs, shifting from focusing on placement to long-term success through comprehensive case management that will address barriers and prioritize long-term goals. This partnership will better leverage the PA CareerLink network to equip participants with the education and skills they need to find a job and succeed in employment. DHS will be issuing a competitive procurement later this year.

“Our collaboration with the Department of Human Services allows us to focus on shared workforce goals and initiatives, saving time and money by ending duplication of services and speeding up connections between job seekers and businesses,” said L&I Secretary Jerry Oleksiak. “Together, we are working towards a more modernized workforce system of vibrant business engagement, revitalized training programs, and successful outcomes for Pennsylvania job seekers, workers, and employers.”

This employment and training redesign is one part of a larger effort to invest in programs and services that address the whole person and advance their long-term success and well-being. DHS, L&I, the Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED), and Department of Education (PDE) are all committed to a successful overhaul and reinvigoration of programs, to deepening agency engagement with employers and workforce development experts, creating new tools to assess client needs and help them access local resources, and funding innovative educational programs that provide comprehensive support services for low-income, single-parent families as the parent pursues higher education.

Part of the overhaul includes supporting access to affordable housing for low-income individuals through reallocating \$50 million from the General Assistance (GA) program to invest in housing for extremely low-income individuals who may be eligible for GA cash assistance through the Pennsylvania Housing Affordability and Rehabilitation Enhancement Fund (PHARE).

Rather than eliminating the program as current legislation seeks to accomplish, this alternative approach would utilize PHARE, which has received bipartisan support, to help address one of the most significant barriers faced by extremely low-income Pennsylvanians so they can begin to work towards employment.

“Housing is a serious threat to a person’s ability to find and maintain a job and reach self-sufficiency,” Gov. Wolf said. “Instead of eliminated cash assistance, let’s direct those resources to help the same target populations by availing ourselves of a successful bipartisan program – PHARE. I look forward to working with the General Assembly as it considers this alternative.”

According to the National Low-Income Housing Coalition, Pennsylvania has a shortage of more than 261,000 affordable and accessible rental units for extremely low-income Pennsylvanians.

“These redesigned programs and increased supports will allow for a more coordinated, efficient and effective delivery system that will address barriers to employment and help people to get, and keep, a job that makes it possible to live a healthy, productive life,” said Gov. Wolf. “We are going to help people take that step up and create a stronger Pennsylvania for all of us.”

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