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House of Representatives
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Harrisburg

COMMITTEES

HUMAN SERVICES,
MAJORITY CHAIRMAN

CONSUMER AFFAIRS

PA ATHLETIC OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE,
CHAIRMAN

February 21, 2017

To all House Members:

Dear Colleagues,

I am utterly baffled by Governor Wolf's proposal to dismember and bury our legislatively established, cabinet-level Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs and I am writing to share my concerns.

This is Pennsylvania's response to the drug epidemic raging outside our doors and inside many of our homes? 3,383 have died and our response is to decimate and dismember the lead agency and bury it in a giant bureaucracy?

The Governor's idea is by no means a new one. The drug and alcohol abuse prevention and treatment agency has been housed in the Health Department and the Welfare Department in the past and even for a time, out of the Governor's office, always without the viability and the authority to meet the enormous drug challenges of our times.

Just a few years ago, we addressed this problem by working together to establish the cabinet-level Department from a bureau in the Department of Health. We established the Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs by near unanimous votes of the House and Senate with the express purpose of bringing laser focus and muscular leadership to this problem so devastating to our families and to our communities.

As bad as the epidemic is in the state, I can only imagine how much worse the problem would be but for the leadership of the flagship Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs.

From its start-up in 2012, the Department got to work and in short order, the Department established the Overdose Task Force comprised of representatives from law enforcement, emergency medicine, addiction treatment, coroners, county and state government and individuals and families in recovery. The Task Force has been a catalyst for the Department's robust response to the epidemic.

In its leadership role, the Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs in collaboration with the Single County Authorities on Drug and Alcohol developed “warm hand-off” processes that put overdose survivors into treatment, worked with Medicaid to establish a multi-county project for people coming out of jail and into treatment and worked with the Department of Transportation, law enforcement and others to implement a project to enforce DUI treatment laws. Working with insurers and other donors, the Department has raised thousands of dollars to pay for Narcan for our police and for drug takeback boxes placed in 60 counties. Do you see the common thread here?

Why on earth would we disrupt the work and leadership of this Department?

I just don't get it. According to the Administration, moving the Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs is expected to save no money – none at all.

Yet, last year the Governor allocated \$15 million to create 45 ill-defined centers of excellence while providing no new funding for the already existing and well established 47 Single County Authorities on Drug & Alcohol that provide locally tailored prevention and treatment. I hope that the Administration is not planning to do away with our county Single County Authorities on Drug & Alcohol – we need them.

Colleagues, we did the right thing in establishing the Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs. Let's strengthen its authority, not bury it in a new and bloated bureaucracy.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gene DiGirolamo". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Gene DiGirolamo, Chairman
House Human Services Committee