



Notes from the Director



August 2021

We are currently in the process of finalizing several different plans and budgets for the coming year(s) which had opportunities for public comment/feedback, including the hearings I mentioned in my note last month. A limitation of having several different hearings is that people may be confused about which funding source applies to them and which hearing is the appropriate place to share feedback. That's why I encouraged folks to use the email address DHS-Ideas@alleghenycounty.us any time - I want you to think creatively and broadly, and for our staff to figure out where your ideas fit into our plans and budgets. My goal for next year is to have one unified planning process, as well as various avenues available all year to easily submit thoughts and feedback.



I also hope that having one streamlined process will help make it more clear how these planning documents reflect DHS's goals and priorities. For now, to help illustrate that, I'd like to highlight a few key planned initiatives and how they fit in with the goals I shared with you in June.

One of our goals is to increase our investments in economic security. In line with that, we included a request in our Needs Based Plan and Budget to expand the reach of the Learn and Earn program, an employment program for young people aged 14-21 who meet certain requirements, and raise wages for participants. The Needs Based Plan also includes a request for an increase in the per diem rates for kinship caregivers, who historically have received lower payments than non-kinship foster families, and a proposal to provide monetary assistance and concrete goods to families who are transitioning out of shelters into permanent housing.

All of our goals are closely related, and many initiatives further more than one goal. For example, an investment in higher wages for young people furthers the goal of economic security as well as the goal of expanding prevention so individuals and families can avoid entering our systems whenever possible. Also in line with this prevention goal is significant investment in evidence-informed community violence prevention programming, such as a new evidence-based program called Becoming a Man (BAM). BAM is a school-based group counseling program that helps young men in 7th - 12th grades learn and use social cognitive skills like showing empathy for others and identifying and evaluating consequences before acting. Other initiatives related to this goal are our investment in Hello Baby, transitioning Family Centers to a hub model, and redesign of In-Home services. (Which are also tied to the goal of creating big, wide-open access to human services.)

This is just a small sample of what's included in these plans - I haven't even touched on the initiatives that advance our goal to support people, their families, and first responders when people are in crisis, which I'll talk about in an upcoming edition of DHS News. My goal here is just to draw some connections from the goals, which can sometimes feel abstract, to the concrete initiatives included in our plans. I'm also calling attention to some of the overlap to demonstrate why moving toward a singular process will lead to less confusion and more transparency.

I'm looking forward to continuing to hear from you about what's important to you and your communities, and to shaping our goals and priorities accordingly.