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Human Services Secretary Celebrates Autism Awareness Month, Highlights Resources and Services to Live an Everyday Life

Harrisburg, PA – Department of Human Services (DHS) Secretary Teresa Miller today celebrated Autism Awareness Month by highlighting supports and services offered to individuals with disabilities and their families and discussing Governor Wolf’s proposed budget and how it pertains to individuals living with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

“We want all individuals with autism or intellectual disabilities to have autonomy, choice, and opportunities to lead everyday lives,” said Secretary Miller. “Every day we need to celebrate individuals who are breaking barriers and contributing to their communities, excelling in employment, and promoting self-advocacy. I encourage everyone to be more kind to one another as we celebrate Autism awareness and acceptance. All Pennsylvanians deserve to be treated with respect and dignity.”

Secretary Miller was joined by Michael Bomberger, who is served by the Adult Community Autism Program (ACAP). ACAP serves adults with autism and is administered by Keystone Autism Services in collaboration with the Bureau of Autism Services in DHS’ Office of Developmental Programs (ODP). ACAP provides supports that promote independence and employment. Currently, more than 50 percent of ACAP participants are employed. By July 2019, ACAP will expand to serve 200 people, the maximum size permitted under the current contract.

DHS is responding to Autism Spectrum Disorder’s increased prevalence by expanding access to services and working to address the need to build capacity of professionals trained to assist individuals with autism and their families across the lifespan. The state-funded Autism Services, Education, Resources and Training (ASERT) initiative provides support and information to the estimated 30,000 Pennsylvanians with Autism Spectrum Disorder. ASERT also maintains a collaborative that brings together medical centers, centers for autism research and services, universities, and other providers involved in the treatment and care of individuals of all ages with autism and their families to support service providers, individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder, and their families.

Since 2015, the Wolf Administration has made the following policy changes to better empower individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder to live an everyday life:

- All services and supports provided by ODP are now available for people with autism spectrum disorder.

- All ODP participants have a support coordinator to plan for the future and access community resources, even while waiting for formal services.
- Every 21-year-old who graduated or is graduating from a public school from 2018-20 is provided access to support services upon graduation, avoiding a supports cliff and helping graduates maintain life skills taught during their time in public school.

Governor Tom Wolf's 2019-2020 budget proposal continues to build off these investments by providing an additional \$15 million to serve 765 individuals on ODP's emergency waitlist and 100 people who experience unanticipated emergencies through Community Living and Consolidated Waiver programs.

"We are committed to helping all individuals access opportunities to support their goals and dreams, but there is still more work to be done," said Secretary Miller. "We will continue to work closely and collaboratively to make an everyday life possible for all Pennsylvanians with autism spectrum disorder and intellectual disabilities."

To learn more about Autism Spectrum Disorder and ASERT resources, visit www.paautism.org.

For more information on Governor Wolf's 2019-20 proposed budget visit www.budget.pa.gov.

[Please visit the Pennsylvania Internal News Service for images and video.](#)