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OPPORTUNITIES, AND
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SOLUTIONS.*

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HUMAN TRAFFICKING- A HIDDEN PROBLEM



HUMAN TRAFFICKING VICTIMS

A study conducted by the human rights group Walk Free found that approximately one million individuals are living in modern slave-like conditions in the United States.

Protecting Victims of Human Trafficking

by Max Richardson, Research Intern

Human trafficking has emerged as a pervasive global phenomenon, transcending borders and affecting millions of individuals. It consists of both sex trafficking and labor trafficking, though sex trafficking is more prevalent (approximately 79 percent of trafficking is identified as sexual exploitation). In sex trafficking cases within the U.S. involving adults, legal mandates require proof that the victim was subjected to force, coercion, or deception. When a case involves an individual under the age of 18, evidence of coercion or fraud is not necessary.

Most victims of human trafficking are female, and populations most vulnerable to exploitation include individuals who are homeless or otherwise impoverished, people with substance abuse disorders, and those with mental health challenges. This illustrates that human trafficking could stem from underlying societal issues that must be addressed in addition to the efforts aimed at apprehending traffickers and ensuring justice for victims. The impact of human trafficking on an individual's mental and physical well-being can be profound and long-lasting.

A study conducted by the human rights group Walk Free found that approximately one million individuals are living in modern slave-like conditions in the United States. (Although extensive data pertaining to trafficking is not readily available due mainly to the hidden nature of the issue, newer studies like the one conducted by Walk Free use refined methodologies to produce valuable and reliable data.)

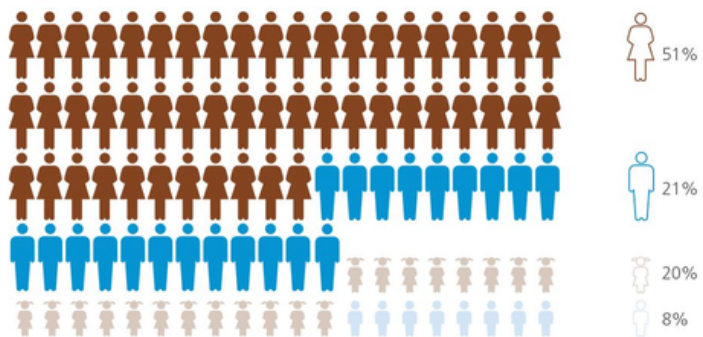
Additionally, the National Human Trafficking Hotline has reported that Pennsylvania is currently ranked as the 9th highest state for reported human trafficking cases. In a span of five years, there have been charges filed in over 870 human trafficking cases across the Commonwealth.

Policy Implications

The Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA) was the first comprehensive federal law to address the problem of human trafficking. This law aimed to fight trafficking through public awareness, protect victims through various support systems, and establish human trafficking as a federal crime. This law has served as a basis for other legislation. The Trafficking Victims Prevention and Protection Reauthorization Act of 2022 is one of the most recent examples of the reauthorization of the original act. Its primary function is to enhance the programming, policy, and funding essential to U.S. efforts to fight against human trafficking.

(Continued on next page)

Trafficking victims can be women, men, boys and girls



Source: UNODC elaboration of national data.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING— A HIDDEN PROBLEM



HUMAN TRAFFICKING VICTIMS

Pennsylvania Senate recently passed legislation that removes the third-party control requirement to access victim services and expands the authority of undercover officers.

Protecting Victims of Human Trafficking (cont.)

The Countering Human Trafficking Act of 2021 was not a direct reauthorization of the TVPA, though it was signed to enhance the federal government’s response to human trafficking. This act required the Center for Countering Human Trafficking (CCHT) to improve the systems and processes throughout the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to fight human trafficking. To carry out this act, the bill authorized the use of \$14 million and ensured that the CCHT was staffed with at least 45 employees to carry out critical work. In the 2022 fiscal year, the efforts of the CCHT resulted in over 3,600 arrests and 600 convictions. This marked a 50 percent increase in human trafficking arrests and a 75 percent increase in convictions relative to the previous fiscal year.

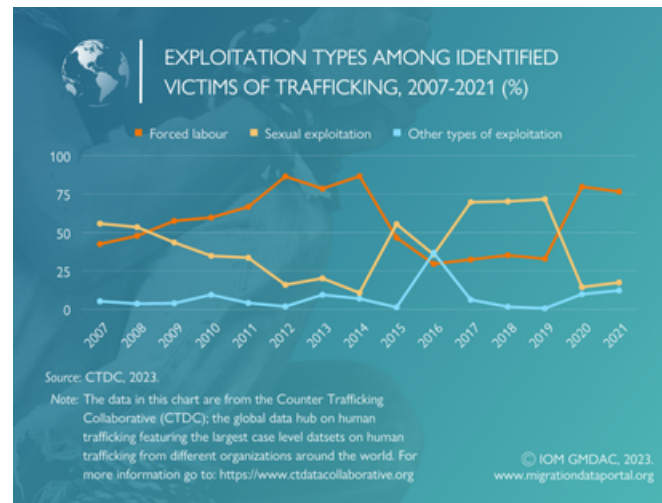
At the state level, the Pennsylvania Senate recently passed legislation that removes the third-party control requirement to access victim services and expands the authority of undercover officers (allowing law enforcement to pose as a third party selling a minor into exploitation). Under previous Pennsylvania law, minors who were exploited were required to identify a third party in order to be considered victims of human trafficking. This rule was an unnecessary barrier for children who had already been subjected to trauma and needed resources for relief and healing.

Conclusion

The crime of human trafficking likely results from inequities within social and economic systems. Highly vulnerable populations are particularly prone to trafficking due to their financial situations, so while prosecuting traffickers and seeking justice for survivors is essential, this is not enough to put an end to human trafficking. Increased support and services for vulnerable people are necessary to reduce trafficking on a larger scale.

There is a need for more community-based programs focused on financial security and economic mobility to minimize population vulnerability. There have also been efforts to establish programs that create pathways for economic opportunity while emphasizing professional development. In 2015, The Department of Health and Human Services launched a training program called Stop, Observe, Ask, and Respond to Human Trafficking (SOAR). The program was designed to train professionals to recognize and respond to trafficking. Evaluations of the SOAR program confirmed its presence in nearly every state and many workplaces. Among the 195,076 people who completed the SOAR training online, 92 percent agreed they would use the knowledge and skills they learned, and 49 percent planned to develop their knowledge about helping individuals who have been or are at risk of being trafficked further.

Finally, it is essential to acknowledge that trafficking leaves victims vulnerable to prosecution for crimes they were forced to commit. Policymakers in the Commonwealth can consider measures that allow for immunity and diversion. For example, Kentucky allows immunity for trafficked youth charged with certain status offenses. North Dakota allows immunity for trafficked youth charged with misdemeanor theft, misdemeanor forgery, credit offenses, and controlled substance crimes. Pennsylvania does not currently offer relief that prevents or diverts trafficking victims from such prosecution.



INCREASED MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS IN CHILDREN



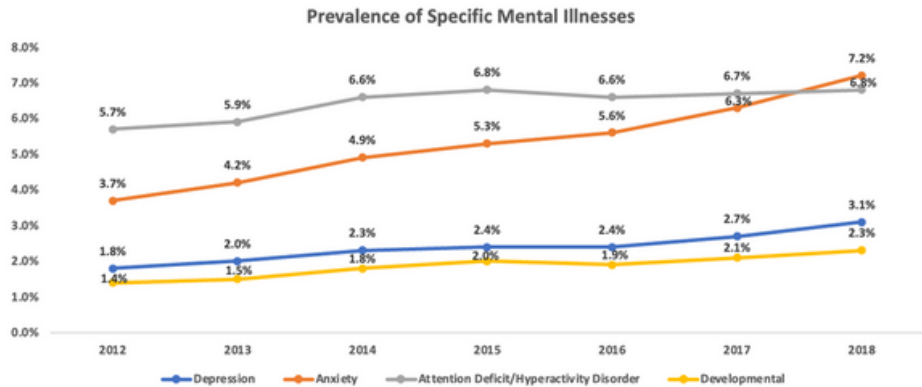
Mental Health Challenges Among Youth

by Ruoqi Yao, Research Intern

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), nearly six million children (9.4 percent) aged three to 17 years suffer from anxiety. Nearly nine percent, or 5.5 million, struggle with behavior problems. Over four percent, or 2.7 million, experience depression. These numbers appear to be increasing. The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality reported that the rate of emergency department (ED) visits among children and adolescents – due to mental health – rose from 784.1 per 100,000 in 2016 to 869.3 per 100,000 population in 2019. The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated the issue. From 2008 to 2020, the rate of death by suicide for youth aged 12 to 17 years increased from 3.7 per 100,000 to 6.3 per 100,000 population.

YOUTH AND MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS

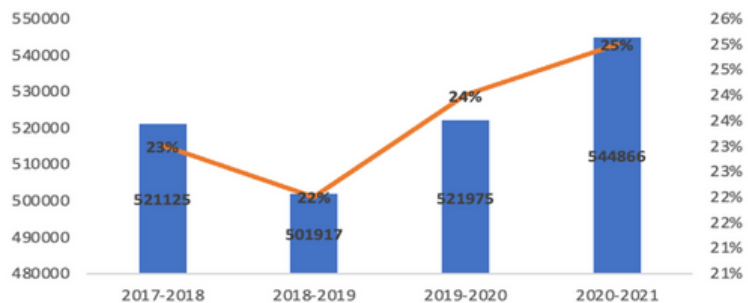
In the United States, the cost of addressing mental disorders in children is close to \$10.9 billion each year.



In the United States, the cost of addressing mental disorders in children is close to \$10.9 billion each year. The high cost of medical spending can increase the financial burden on families of children with disorders, with an estimated \$300,000 loss to lifelong family income.

More specifically, the number of Pennsylvania children with one or more emotional, behavioral, or developmental conditions increased from 522,125 (23 percent) in 2017 to 544,866 (25 percent) in 2021.

Children who have one or more emotional, behavioral, or developmental conditions



INCREASES IN MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS IN CHILDREN

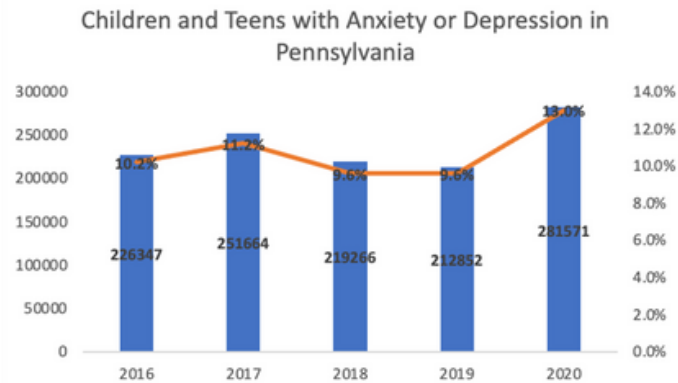


YOUTH AND MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS

Many states and school districts are leveraging these funds to facilitate access to counseling and therapy services, take preventative measures to reduce the risk of mental health crises and improve outcomes while minimizing disparities.

Mental Health Challenges Among Youth (cont.)

Furthermore, the number of Pennsylvania children experiencing depression and/or anxiety increased from 226,347 (10.2 percent) in 2016 to 281,571 (13.0 percent) in 2020.



Policy Implications

The American Rescue Plan offers significant financial support to improve mental health care for youth, including \$80 million to integrate behavioral health care into pediatric settings, \$20 million for youth suicide prevention and crisis programs, and \$10 million to improve access to trauma care. Furthermore, the Department of Health and Human Services has invested \$190 million to improve behavioral health care.

Many states and school districts are leveraging these funds to facilitate access to counseling and therapy services, take preventative measures to reduce the risk of mental health crises and improve outcomes while minimizing disparities. For example, the Oklahoma State Department of Education has launched the Oklahoma School Counselor Corps, a grant program that supports hiring school-based mental health care providers. The Iowa Department of Education has partnered with the University of Iowa to establish the Center for School Mental Health, with the goal of training student teachers as well as practicing teachers. In New Hampshire, the Department of Education has taken a similar approach – partnering with the Community Behavioral Health Association to provide camp counselors with mental health training and assist with hiring mental health professionals for service at summer camps. The New York City Department of Education has hired hundreds of social workers, including school psychologists, to fulfill a commitment to staffing every school with at least one mental health clinic or social worker.

In addition, nearly \$300 million is being disbursed through the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act and the FY2022 Omnibus. Over the course of five years, the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act will invest \$1 billion in school-based mental health support, with the goal of doubling the availability of social workers, counselors, and other mental health professionals. This funding will cover initiatives such as the Mental Health Service Professional (MHSP) Demonstration Grant Program to invigorate the mental health care workforce and the School-Based Mental Health (SBMH) Services Grant Program.

At the state level, Pennsylvania's Governor Josh Shapiro supports streamlined efforts to enhance accessibility to mental health care, and lawmakers have approved \$100 million for in-school services. Every district will receive base grants of \$100,000, and charter schools will receive \$70,000.

With an array of funding streams available, schools, counseling centers, healthcare providers, social service organizations, workforce development agencies, institutions of higher education, and other entities can collaborate to form innovative solutions that address the unique needs of their communities. Strategically braiding funds will facilitate the sustainability of efforts and allow various stakeholders to leverage diverse expertise in a holistic approach to children's mental health care.



STATE LEGISLATIVE BRIEFING

A curated briefing of state legislative proposals and recent legislative actions

STATE BRIEFINGS

- Economic Development Investments
- Blueprint for Higher Education
- Supporting Local Communities

Governor Shapiro Visits Honesdale to Highlight Proposed \$25 Million Investment

On February 16th, Governor Josh Shapiro and Department of Community Economic Development (DCED) Secretary Rick Siger joined local leaders to highlight the Governor's proposed investments in Pennsylvania Main Streets, small businesses, and local communities.

As part of the 2024-2025 budget proposal that focuses on creating economic opportunity for all in communities across Pennsylvania, Governor Shapiro and Secretary Siger visited small businesses on Honesdale's Main Street business district.

The visit included announcement of a new \$100,000 Keystone Partnership grant to continue the work on storefront improvements and fund loans for local business owners to afford new equipment, renovation projects, and business marketing.

The Governor's proposed Main Street Matters program will be administered through DCED and will build on the existing successes of the current Keystone Communities Program in supporting downtowns, main streets, and surrounding neighborhoods.

Governor Delivers New Blueprint for Higher Education

On January 26th Governor Josh Shapiro released a new blueprint for higher education in Pennsylvania, focused on competitiveness and workforce development, and grounded in access and affordability.

After his first budget address, Governor Shapiro brought together a working group of higher education leaders and engaged stakeholders across the Commonwealth to examine these significant challenges and offer recommendations for a path forward.

The three-part blueprint for higher education includes:

- Creating a new system to address Pennsylvania's needs
- Increasing access and affordability
- Increasing transparency and improving outcomes

Precautionary Tests Continue in Beaver and Lawrence Counties

One-year after the Norfolk Southern train derailment in East Palestine, the Shapiro Administration is continuing to conduct precautionary tests of the soil and water in Beaver and Lawrence Counties.

The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), through an independent contractor, and Department of Agriculture (PDA) continue to conduct precautionary environmental testing to ensure the health and safety of residents, with results posted publicly on DEP's website. To date, samples have been taken at 85 individual private potable water sources, 97 surface soil locations, 18 surface water locations, and 14 crop locations within the Commonwealth - totaling hundreds of samples. Pennsylvania agencies have not found any long-term contamination in Western PA related to the derailment in East Palestine.

(Continued on the next page)





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STATE BRIEFINGS

- **Increases in State Funding for Public Transit**

Over the last year, DEP's independent contractor continued DEP's sampling of public water supplies, private water wells, surface water, and soil. The contractor also evaluated and verified DEP's data, compared data to Pennsylvania's environmental standards, and made recommendations for additional sampling. DEP has not identified any impacts related to the train derailment to date.

Last year, Governor Shapiro directed Norfolk Southern to distribute \$1 million to communities in Western Pennsylvania to assist with community relief. The funding was a key part of the multi-million dollar commitment secured from Norfolk Southern CEO Alan Shaw. Communities in Western Pennsylvania have put the funding to work, helping first responders, the environment, and local municipalities.

Proposal to Include Major Increase in State Funding for Public Transit

Governor Josh Shapiro announced that his 2024-25 budget proposal will offer potential for the first increase in the state share of public transit funding in over a decade. The proposal will increase the state share of public transit funding by 1.75 percent – a \$282.8 million investment, and include nearly \$1.5 billion in new state funding over five years.

This significant investment in transit systems is intended to support Pennsylvanians' travel needs and spur economic growth. This is a statewide investment benefiting multiple regions across the Commonwealth.

As part of the discussions around this proposal, the Governor insisted SEPTA address concerns about cleanliness and safety on the system – and he has asked local counties in Southeastern Pennsylvania whose residents benefit from the system to meet this moment with additional support.

Conversations between SEPTA and the five counties that rely on and benefit from SEPTA service will explore potential solutions to meet the system's funding needs.

The Governor's plan would deliver the funding needed to avoid immediate service cuts or fare increases on SEPTA and would create a more balanced and stable funding structure for SEPTA for the future.





STATE LEGISLATIVE BRIEFING

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STATE BRIEFINGS

- Independent Energy Office
- School Funding
- Polling Places Legislation

Senate Bill 832 - Independent Energy Office

The Senate Appropriations Committee approved Senate Bill 832, sponsored by Senator Gene Year (R-23) to establish an Independent Energy Office (IEO) within the Commonwealth. The IEO would be modeled after Pennsylvania's Independent Fiscal Office (IFO), which was created by Act 120 of 2010 and Act 100 of 2016. The IFO does not support or oppose any policy it analyzes, and discloses the methodologies, data sources and assumptions used in published reports and estimates.

Latest Action: Re-reported as committed, February 5th, 2024 [Senate]

School Funding at the Top of Legislative Priorities

On January 11th, the Basic Education Funding Commission held a hearing and voted 8-7 to approve the 2024 Basic Education Funding Report.

The report reaffirms the Commonwealth Court's ruling in William Penn School District, et al. v. Pennsylvania Department of Education, et al., a decision deeming the system of funding public education unconstitutional.

"The journey toward creating a new education funding formula will surely have its own challenges. I remain hopeful that my colleagues and I will usher in a new era of fair funding that will speak to a system of inclusion that benefits all students, regardless of their ZIP code." - Senator Tim Kearney

Legislation to Ban Carrying Firearms at Polling Places

Representatives Tim Brennan and Mary Daley have introduced legislation that would prevent people from bringing firearms to polling locations. Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Ohio, South Carolina, and Texas were cited in the legislation as already having laws that prohibit people from carrying at polling places. The ban would not apply to law enforcement or active military personnel who have firearms while voting. The bill has been referred to the House State Government Committee.





STATE LEGISLATIVE BRIEFING

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STATE BRIEFINGS

- Voter ID Requirement
- TAP Tax Credit
- Promoting Start-Up Initiatives

House Bill 891 - Voter ID Requirement

Republicans in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives revealed plans to act on a voter ID measure by using a parliamentary maneuver that could get the proposal on the ballot for voter consideration in November.

House Republicans intend to introduce a discharge resolution – a parliamentary tool that allows lawmakers to pull a bill out of committee and bypass a committee vote. HB 891 would add a universal voter ID requirement to the state constitution, if voters approve it in a ballot referendum.

House Bill 1745- 529 TAP Tax Credit

State Reps. Kristin Marcell (R-Bucks) and Paul Friel (D-Chester) have introduced legislation to expand the 529 TAP Tax Credit (HB 1745), which has passed unanimously in the House of Representatives.

The bill expands the tax credit to encourage workforce development and ease the financial burden of higher education for Pennsylvania families.

It also offers incentives for employers to support their employees' aspirations for higher education by contributing to their 529 college savings accounts, potentially removing barriers to educational accessibility.

Eight-Bill Package to Support Startup Initiatives in Pennsylvania

A group of House Republicans announced a package of bills designed to support and promote startup initiatives across the Commonwealth.

The bills aim to capitalize on Pennsylvania's "many assets, including talented, hard-working people and valuable geographic location."

The eight bills are sponsored by Reps. Mike Armanini (R-Clearfield/Elk), Valerie Gaydos (R-Allegheny), Aaron Bernstine (R-Lawrence/Butler), Marla Brown (R-Lawrence) and Michael Stender (R-Northumberland/Montour).

KEYSTONE STARTUPS INITIATIVE

- ARMANINI:** Designates March 18-24 as Commonwealth Startup Week.
- BERNSTINE:** Establishes the Student Startup Incubator Network to empower student entrepreneurs to build their companies in PA.
- ARMANINI:** Establishes the Task Force on Startup Venture Opportunities.
- GAYDOS:** Provides uncapped and non-expiring operating loss deductions to in-state startups.
- M. BROWN:** Establishes the Startup Investment Tax Credit to connect startups to early-state investors.
- M. BROWN:** Leverages the power of the Research and Development Tax Credit to incentivize technology research by startups.
- STENDER:** Restores the Commonwealth's funding for venture investment back to a level commensurate with the technology sector's importance.
- ARMANINI:** Builds a robust venture ecosystem in PA to develop homegrown startups.

Source: pahousegov.com





FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE BRIEFING

A curated briefing of federal legislative proposals and recent legislative actions

FEDERAL BRIEFINGS

- 2024 State Legislative Topics
- Spending Bill
- Childcare Tax Credit Bill
- Student Debt Cancellation

Workforce Still Top of Mind for States in 2024

National Conference of State Legislatures experts identified the most pressing topics facing state lawmakers in 2024.

Along with tracking state and federal actions and information requests from legislators and legislative staff, NCSL surveyed 30-plus leaders nationwide to determine the significant issues states are expected to tackle next year.

Trending legislative topics for 2024 include:

- Budgets and fiscal health
- The workforce
- Technology
- Health policy

Other pressing topics include:

- Criminal justice
- Cannabis
- Education
- Infrastructure
- Transportation
- Energy
- Housing
- Election-related legislation

Lawmakers Approve Spending Bill, Averting Shutdown

On March 21st, lawmakers released the text of a \$1.2 trillion government funding bill negotiated by the White House and leaders of both parties to avoid a partial government shutdown over the weekend.

The spending deal includes funding for the departments of Homeland Security, Defense, State, Labor, Health and Human Services and other parts of the government.

On March 23rd, the Senate gave final approval to the spending bill, averting a shutdown by sending the legislation to President Biden's desk just hours after a midnight deadline.

Senator Casey Introduces Childcare Tax Credit Bill

SB 3657) could significantly assist parents with childcare costs. Co-sponsored and co-written by Pennsylvania Democratic Senator Bob Casey, The Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit Enhancement Act of 2024 would amend the Internal Revenue Code and increase the amount of tax credit parents can receive based on their spending for daycare, summer camps, after-school programs, and babysitting.

The new bill could increase the maximum credit to \$4,000 per child, allowing families to receive up to \$8,000 in tax credits.

Latest action: Read twice and referred to the Senate Committee on Finance (1/24/2024)

Biden Cancels Nearly \$6 Billion in Student Loan Debt for Public Service Workers

President Joe Biden announced that the White House has approved the cancellation of nearly \$6 billion in federal student debt for thousands of public service workers.

The 78,000 eligible public service workers include teachers, nurses, and firefighters.

It is the latest student debt cancellation move through Public Service Loan Forgiveness programs, which allow eligible borrowers debt forgiveness if they have made a certain number of payments and work for approved employers.



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