



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 7, 2017

This Budget is a Win for Children

Statement by Donna Cooper on the Governor's 2017 Budget Address

Governor Wolf's proposed budget is a refreshing commitment to one special interest – the state's children. Despite the state's dire deficit and gaping partisan divide, the Governor's budget wisely puts the needs of children first and in doing so serves the interests of taxpayers by paving the way for reduced government spending on corrections and safety net costs in the years ahead.

The compelling research that undergirds the investments in pre-k and home visiting programs demonstrates the wisdom of investing an additional \$85 million in these programs. The returns on these investments will shrink the demands on government by more than a half a billion dollars as these children grow up better prepared for work, college and community life.

Public schools are not only the great equalizer, they, too, are one of the most efficient ways for the government to boost economic competitiveness and drive down social expenditures on things like prisons and drug treatment. The proposed \$100 million increase for Basic Education Funding indicates the Commonwealth's commitment to high performing public schools. This new funding will go to districts using a predictable and well-founded formula that was wisely adopted by the legislature last year. These funds have the potential to unleash the kinds of impressive gains in student achievement last seen between 2004-2010, when the state was considered the leader among all states with respect to public school outcomes.

The proposed \$25 million in new funding for special education distributed through the legislature's new special education formula is critically needed and once again shows a willingness to put children first. That carefully crafted formula protects children and taxpayers and must be applied equally to traditional public and charter schools so that children with special education needs in all public schools can reach their full potential.

The legislature must continue to find ways to add to the school funding proposed by the Governor to keep pace with rising mandated costs and the needs of our students. The reality is that in spite of the proposed increase in school funding, local property taxes inevitably will rise for the next school year simply to keep pace with mandated costs such as charter payments and pensions. The best way to

deliver real property tax relief for Pennsylvanians and boost student achievement is for the state to carry out its constitutional obligation and put sufficient funding for schools in the state budget.

The Governor's bold call for an increase in the minimum wage to \$12.00 an hour would put Pennsylvania on the same path as the majority of states that are giving working parents a shot at lifting their family out of poverty. Over the last five years, every school district in our region has had more poor children walk through their doors than the year before. Only by boosting household income can those children be relieved of the hunger, stress and dysfunction of poverty so they can concentrate on school and focus on achievement.

The Governor's broad proposals to reduce waste, redundancy and inefficiency is exactly the kind of reform that taxpayers of every stripe should support. To accomplish all the Governor has proposed will not be easy because a myriad of special interests will push back. We urge the legislature to follow the governor's lead and use this budget proposal as the starting point for putting the interests of our children first.

Donna Cooper, Executive Director
Public Citizens for Children and Youth

--

CONTACT: David Kim, davidk@pccy.org
215-563-5848 x23 (w) or 215-900-9030 (c)

###