



Children First Statement on Opioid Settlement Money

June 15, 2023

Delaware County is set to receive \$63 million in opioid settlement funding. These funds are one-time funds intended to address the ravages to individuals, families, and communities associated with irresponsible and deadly practices of the drug manufacturers. While substantial, the funding does not begin to cure the mass addiction epidemic and cannot bring back the countless loved ones lost to addiction intentionally orchestrated by pharmaceutical companies.

Nationally, it is estimated that nearly 5.6 million children live with a parent who uses opioids. Parental substance use is a known adverse childhood experience associated with poor health outcomes such as major depression, heavy drinking, and other substance use challenges later in life. The opioid epidemic has made an incredible impact on our county, and we must not forget the invisible victims of this crisis: the children of parents who use opioids.

Delaware County has been impacted significantly by the opioid epidemic, with an estimated 11,781 individuals living with a substance use disorder in 2020 (the most recent year that data is available). Sadly, there were 205 overdose deaths reported that same year, 84% of which were caused by opioids specifically. It is reported that at least 60% of these victims had at least one opportunity for intervention, including a recent release from an institutional setting, history of prior overdose, or mental health diagnoses. The rate of ED visits related to opioids among children in Delaware County is as high as 17 per 10,000 population. Additionally, 4.3% of all cases of neonatal abstinence syndrome occur among Delaware County residents, the fourth highest county in the state after Philadelphia, Allegheny, Luzerne, and Bucks Counties.

For this reason, Children First firmly believes that the county must make an investment of a portion of these resources in our children to prevent sweeping narcotic addiction to opioids or similar substances as well as mitigate the impact of the opioid epidemic on the next generation.

Given that the opioid settlement funds are not recurring, the county would be wise to identify time-limited uses that build the infrastructure needed to combat substance abuse in a sustained manner. As such we urge the county to invest at least \$15 million of these funds to support the 15 school districts that operate across the county to stand up the full continuum of evidenced-based prevention and intervention activities/services that going forward can be supported by recurring resources including Medicaid, private insurance, CHIP, local behavioral health funds and designated state funds for these purposes.

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At minimum, districts need sufficient funds to assemble the talent needed and craft a district-specific plan that launches the implementation of needed services by the beginning of the 2025 school year. In smaller districts a grant of \$100,000 may be sufficient to get this done and in larger districts a larger planning grant would be warranted.

Specifically, we are asking that the county make planning grants available to each of school district apportioned to the size of the district for the purpose creating a district-wide detailed plan with internal policies, and practices that pave the way for them to operationalize the provision of provide primary, secondary, and tertiary drug use prevention strategies in partnership with insurers and professionals to meet the needs of the diverse students in their districts.

In addition, within that \$10 million pool, we suggest the county make a grant to an expert entity or entities to provide technical support and assemble a collaborative of all the districts so that districts are learning from each other and from professionals so rely on evidence and best practices and optimize recurring funding streams to meet the needs of all their students.

Finally, we urge the county to use these funds to create effective professional development opportunities to teachers, school counselors, and school leaders on the state-of-the-art research on adolescent brain development and triggers of substance use disorder so that all school personnel educating over 77,000 public school students in the county know how they can play a role in health brain development. Within the pool of \$15 million, we know substantial funds will need to be allocated for this purpose so that within the next two years, every school professional completes these trainings.

Children First is ready to serve as the fiscal sponsor for this important work across Delaware County should the county wish us to play that role. With our expertise in coalition building and collaboration, we can ensure that the opioid settlement funds are used effectively to prevent future epidemics by tailoring services to our most vulnerable youth.

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