

PRESS RELEASE

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, DONNA COOPER, ANNOUNCES RETIREMENT

A Message from Board President Javier Suarez

June 30, 2025 – Over the last decade, Children First grew to be the largest child advocacy organization in the state, now boasting a team of 27 advocates supported by a budget that is four times larger than in 2013 when Donna Cooper stepped up to lead the organization.

As we celebrate the organization's 45th year of child advocacy, it is with pride and deep humility that we continue to work to improve the lives of our children through effective advocacy in child health, education, and protective strategies for vulnerable youth.

This growth is possible thanks to the thoughtful and strategic leadership of our Executive Director, Donna Cooper, the talent of staff who are relentless in their effort to move the needle for children, and our dedicated Board and donors that play a key role in growing our resources.



Our impact and reach are due, in large part, to Donna's unwavering and dogged leadership. After 13 years at the helm, Donna has decided to retire from her position in 2026. Key to her decision about the timing of her departure is the unparalleled strength of the Children First organization from every vantage point – fiscally, programmatically, and organizationally. Donna's leadership has strengthened the foundation of Children First, allowing for momentum and a secure pathway for the organization's next leader to emerge.

"I took the reins from the amazing Shelly Yanoff who built this child advocacy organization from the ground up. I had a singular goal which was to take the foundation that Shelly laid and to build a powerful advocacy organization for children that has the influence children need and deserve," said Donna.

"This cause is so important because children can't vote or can't afford to hire a lobbyist. I am so proud of how much progress we've made and how strong we are. Now is exactly the right time for a next-gen leader to build on our trajectory of growth and success."

(continued)

Donna's tenure is replete with accomplishments including leading the charge to enact a dedicated revenue source for free pre-k for thousands of children in Philadelphia as well as securing substantial dedicated revenues to support the Philadelphia School District.

At the state level, coalitions launched by Children First are winning lasting changes that improve the lives of children including Pre-K for PA, Start Strong PA, Pa Schools Work, Lead-Free Promise Project, Strong Minds Bright Futures, and the PA Youth Safety Coalition.

Donna's legacy is stellar. The Board is clear that we have the opportunity and obligation to build on it. The Board has rolled up our sleeves and is managing a thoughtful succession process to further solidify Children First's role as Pennsylvania's largest child advocacy organization. Already we are talking with Donna, key partners, and our terrific staff, gathering invaluable insight to inform a formal search for Donna's replacement that will commence this summer.

Children First is already an exemplary organization with a 45-year track record of success and the Board is confident we will be able to attract another leader who will continue to grow the organization, allowing us to continue to fulfil our mission set 45 years ago – improving the life chances of the region's children.

Children First is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that improves the lives of children in Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia counties by developing initiatives and advocating for quality health care, child care, public education, and family stability. Learn more at www.childrenfirstpa.org, and on Facebook, X, Instagram, LinkedIn, Threads, Bluesky, and YouTube at @childrenfirstpa.

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