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SECRETARY OF PUBLIC WELFARE ANNOUNCES NEW OFFICE OF DEVELOPMENTAL PROGRAMS

HARRISBURG – In an effort to continue addressing the needs of Pennsylvanians with disabilities, Department of Public Welfare Secretary Estelle B. Richman today announced the creation of the Office of Developmental Programs.

Richman said the new office was created through a reorganization of the Office of Mental Retardation and the establishment of the Bureau of Autism Services.

“Families have made great strides in the past few years in alerting us to the growing number of children and adults being diagnosed with autism and they have helped us to prepare a path in which to provide for their unique needs,” said Richman. “By establishing this new office, we’re taking an important step to help families access information and supports that are so vital for their loved ones.”

Autism is a lifelong brain disorder that affects as many as 1-of-every-166 children born in the U.S., or one child every 21 minutes. The number of people across the U.S. diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder over the past 15 years has risen by a staggering 2,000 percent.

Creating the new Office of Developmental Programs within DPW was one of the core recommendations of the Autism Task Force, whose findings were released in December 2004. In its

initial stages, Office of Developmental Programs will house a Bureau of Mental Retardation Services and a Bureau for Autism Services, as well as necessary support bureaus.

Kevin Casey, currently the deputy secretary for the Office of Mental Retardation, will continue as the deputy secretary of the Office of Developmental Programs. Nina Wall-Cote will serve as the director for the Bureau of Autism Services, which will provide expertise and supports for all state agencies which serve Pennsylvanians with autism.

For more information about the department or services available to Pennsylvanians with autism, visit www.dpw.state.pa.us.

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The Department of Public Welfare helps people meet their basic needs by providing health care and other critical support services for children, the elderly, people with chronic diseases, persons with disabilities and low income families and adults in Pennsylvania. DPW is dedicated to promoting, improving, and sustaining the quality of family life; breaking the cycle of dependency while protecting and serving Pennsylvania's most vulnerable citizens. Visit DPW on the Internet at: www.dpw.state.pa.us.