



**GIVE. ADVOCATE. VOLUNTEER.**

**United Way  
of Pennsylvania**

December 13, 2021

**House Children & Youth Committee Testimony  
Trauma Informed Care and Adverse Childhood Experiences**

Good morning, Chairwoman DeLozier, Chairwoman DeLissio, and members of the committee. My name is Kristen Rotz, and I am the President of the United Way of Pennsylvania. The United Way of Pennsylvania is a 501(c)(3) membership organization whose mission is to champion United Way as a leader and partner in building more financially resilient families and thriving communities throughout Pennsylvania. United Way has the expertise and relationships to develop meaningful and lasting solutions to community challenges through root cause analysis. United Ways leverage donors' resources to facilitate cross-sector solutions to the problems their communities face. Through the generosity of donors, United Ways possess the ability to reduce burdens on public sector programs.

Local United Ways are also part of a national and international network which can scale solutions to achieve positive impacts across the country and around the world. In Pennsylvania, 51 local United Ways work to address community needs related to the basic building blocks for quality of life - health, income, and education. We envision an inclusive, impactful, and collaborative network of United Ways working with business, community, faith, and government leaders through the Commonwealth to advance equitable access to health, education, and financial stability for all Pennsylvanians.

United Way and our partners have been able to address root-cause factors which in the past have moved the needle in a positive direction on high school drop-out rates and reading at grade level by third grade. A growing body of local work in our state is focused on trauma as a confounding variable to achieve better health, education, and financial stability outcomes in our communities. Adverse Childhood Events are some of the most intense sources of stress that children can be exposed to. This includes intergenerational sources of trauma like child maltreatment, interpersonal violence, and parental substance use and/or mental illness.

At this moment in history, we must consider the additional trauma that many children in Pennsylvania have experienced due to the pandemic. Some lost relatives to COVID, many had their school routines interrupted, and in doing so, may have lost contact with positive adult mentors that helped anchor them outside of their home. They may have experienced more interpersonal violence or even abuse and neglect in their home, with fewer opportunities for a mandated reporter to see what's going on and report. And some families have experienced periodic or sustained poverty which was exacerbated by the pandemic.

Children will experience adversity. Public policy has a role to play in prevention and intervention, You, as elected officials, can positively affect the funding and service delivery of publicly funded programs that work to get up-stream with preventative strategies, as well as to help parents and families escape unsafe situations or seek treatment for an addiction. More complex, but very important, is to dismantle inequities which have been

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created by our historically and predominately white-led, able-bodied decision-makers. Solutions can't be prescribed by those of us who have historically held the strongest voice and must be developed with the voice of racial and ethnic minorities, people of all different abilities and ages, gender identities and sexual orientation.

Trauma-informed care is about building an understanding of trauma into systems and organizations so that people-serving systems can understand and then work to help children and adults flourish. So many of our public systems are fundamentally human and our ability to spread trauma-informed practice will directly affect systemic and individual outcomes. This is important not only in education and social services, but also in our courts, the criminal justice system. For example, corrections officers who are trauma-informed learn to recognize that an inmate's behavior be stimulated by environmental factors which are triggering a biological response to stress which flares due to previous exposure to trauma.

Recognition of trauma is not just an awakening of the public sector – in fact some Pennsylvania employers are deepening their own understanding of what this means for recruiting and retaining a work force to create safe workspaces and productive teams.

Trauma-informed care realizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery; recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others; and responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices, and seeks to actively resist re-traumatization.

This year, we launched a statewide grassroots coalition called Resilient PA. Resilient PA strives to foster resilient Pennsylvania youth, families, and communities through promoting trauma-informed care and systems across sectors as well as promoting efforts to reduce risk factors and increase protective factors for youth and families to break cycles of family and community trauma.

This coalition exists to raise awareness on the impact of trauma, ACES, trauma as experienced by different cultural, racial, and ethnic groups, and benefits of adopting trauma-informed and resiliency building practices and strategies to address critical social challenges at both the community and state level.

Resilient PA acts as a statewide platform to connect local communities engaged in or interested in adopting a trauma-informed approach, highlight and share local best practices in trauma-informed care, systems and communities, and act as a unifying and magnifying vehicle for local communities and trauma-informed care champions to advocate for trauma-informed and resiliency building polices, practices and funding.

We have called together statewide trauma-informed champions on three occasions this year to share best practices and make key connections between professionals all over the state. In addition, we have formed a partnership with HEAL PA to preserve the knowledge of their experts and move it through our communication channels to deliver information to the people who need to know it, when they need to know it.

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In the new year, Resilient PA will continue the work of creating a space for trauma-informed champions to share their successes and collaborate around solutions for their community. Our website will serve as a place to host resources and register for reoccurring conversations that any member of the community can join focused on different aspects of trauma-informed care such as trauma in children, trauma and the criminal justice system, and acute community trauma after acts of violence. We will also continue to work with the HEAL PA team to formulate plans to disseminate their expertise, advocate for increased attention to the adverse effects of trauma and gather best practices across the state.

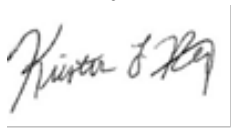
In addition to the work of Resilient PA, our local United Ways are engaged in community efforts to raise awareness about trauma informed care and ACEs. The United Way of Erie County and the Erie Coalition for a Trauma Informed Community (ECTIC) champion trauma informed practices at a growing number of Community Schools throughout Erie County. ECTIC was founded to create a bridge to healing by building a supportive, connected community dedicated to enhancing resiliency and reducing the impact of trauma. It is comprised of citizens from throughout Erie County as well as individuals representing local faith-based organizations, service providers, businesses, schools, person-serving systems, and community centers.

In 2018, the United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey, the Thomas Scattergood Behavioral Health Foundation, and Philanthropy Network of Greater Philadelphia launched *Trauma Informed Philanthropy*. This guide highlights best practices in leveraging resources and relationships to advance trauma-informed practice and move from knowledge to action and is a follow-up to prior work. In addition, the United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey partnered with Lakeside Global Initiative to develop, deploy, and scale a systematic trauma training program for different audiences, including parents, educators, and behavioral health specialists, and to provide the resources and tools necessary to understand trauma.

Joining me today is Beth Tomlinson, Senior Director of Education at United Way of the Greater Lehigh Valley, and co-founder of Resilient Lehigh Valley. Beth is here to share some information about the work her local United Way and trauma informed coalition are doing in their communities. At the conclusion of her testimony, we are happy to answer questions from the members of the committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on these important issues and share the perspective of the United Way of Pennsylvania, Resilient PA, and our network of local United Ways.

Sincerely,



Kristen Rotz  
President  
United Way of Pennsylvania

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