



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## **Drug and Alcohol Secretary Joins Legislators, Stakeholders to Discuss Prevention of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder**

**Harrisburg, PA** – Today, Drug and Alcohol Programs Secretary Jennifer Smith was joined by the Department of Human Services, Rep. Tom Murt, individuals impacted by Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), and advocates to raise awareness and discuss prevention of the disorder.

FASD is an umbrella term describing the range of effects that can occur in an individual whose mother consumed alcohol during pregnancy. Children with FASD can have serious lifelong disabilities, such as learning disabilities and serious behavioral problems.

“The leading known cause of developmental disability and birth defects is FASD, a group of conditions in babies that is caused by pregnant mothers drinking too much alcohol,” said Smith. “Our message today is: prevent harm to babies. Don’t drink while you are pregnant.”

“Pre-natal alcohol exposure can have a profound impacts after a birth and throughout a child’s life,” said Human Services Secretary Teresa Miller. “Total abstention from alcohol while pregnant is a simple choice that is imperative to keep children safe and set them up for a healthy life free of long-term complications that are entirely avoidable.”

Since 1981, the U.S. Surgeon General as advised that there is no known safe amount of alcohol use during pregnancy and, that due to the risk of birth defects, women who are pregnant or are considering pregnancy should abstain from alcohol. Alcohol disrupts proper development of fetal organs, even at very early stages of pregnancy - before a woman may know she is pregnant. Alcohol passes from the mother’s bloodstream into the developing baby’s blood stream.

Damage to a baby’s brain caused by the mother’s alcohol use can result in problems throughout a person’s lifetime: impaired memory, learning disabilities, inability to think and reason properly, deficits in sensory processing, impaired ability to interact or socialize with others, and disruptive or otherwise inappropriate behaviors.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that one out of 100 children are born with FASD annually, and the lifetime cost of caring for a person with FASD is estimated at least \$ 2 million. The damage of FASD caused by a mother’s drinking during pregnancy is permanent and 100 percent preventable. The impact on children born with FASD is staggering:

- About 80 percent enter the foster care system or adoptive care system;
- Approximately 50 percent will have a disrupted school experience of suspension, expulsion, or drop out;
- More than 60 percent will encounter problems with law enforcement; and

- More than a third will develop substance use disorders.

Despite all of the adversities they face, people with FASD can graduate from college, own a business, become employed skilled craftsmen and craftswomen, and live independently. While there is no cure for this condition, **early intervention can improve a child's development and enable them to live an everyday life.**

Many people with FASD benefit from the support of one-on-one counseling. In addition, they often require intensive service coordination if they do not have someone who can coordinate the many services they need, such as ongoing individual therapy, job coaching, housing, and transportation.

"The Wolf Administration wants to spread the word to all Pennsylvanians – if you are pregnant or trying to get pregnant, don't drink alcohol," Smith said.

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