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First Lady Wolf Emphasizes Importance of Community-Based Services for Female Reentrants During Trip to Lancaster

Harrisburg, PA – Today, First Lady Frances Wolf reiterated the importance of community-based programs for female reentrants and the Wolf Administration’s commitment to addressing the challenges faced by women following incarceration. The first lady visited with [Recovering Mothers with Newborns \(ReNew\)](#), [Milagro House](#) and [HDC MidAtlantic](#), three Lancaster-based programs that provide services to women with substance use disorder (SUD) or experiencing homelessness, who also have criminal histories.

“In our conversations with reentry advocates, we continue to hear about the importance of local programming in meeting the needs of reentrants,” said First Lady Wolf. “I commend ReNew, Milagro House, and HDC MidAtlantic for confronting the various obstacles that have historically hindered women’s ability to reestablish their lives after incarceration. Programs like these are improving outcomes for female reentrants by proactively creating opportunities that position them to prioritize their health, their education, and their families, and to positively contribute to the community at large.”

The first lady started the day with ReNew, a prevention program of [Bethany Christian Services](#) that supports expectant mothers with a history of substance use who are also incarcerated. Mrs. Wolf attended the graduation ceremony for ReNew’s most recent group of women and remarked on the women’s strength and dedication to themselves and their families.

“Overcoming addiction, incarceration, and intergenerational trauma is no easy feat,” said Jamie Minick, assistant branch director of Bethany Christian Services of Central Pennsylvania. “We are so proud of these mothers who have worked hard to start a new chapter in their lives for themselves and for their children.”

Minick served as a panelist in the First Lady’s most recent virtual conversation, [Women in Reentry: Mental Health](#), discussing the effects of trauma and substance use disorder on justice-impacted women.

ReNew was established in 2019 in response to the opioid epidemic in Pennsylvania and its impact on women, children, and families. The program provides specialized case management and wraparound support services for incarcerated mothers, allowing them to attain positive, life-changing behaviors in a sustainable way. Their process includes identifying program-eligible women and screening them upon entry into Lancaster County Prison (LCP); conducting an assessment to identify each woman's needs; coordinating treatment prior to her release from LCP; providing a continuum of care up to one year after the birth of the child; and providing recovery support. Seventy percent of the mothers who have entered the program have graduated.

Then, Mrs. Wolf visited Milagro House, a program that provides education, housing and support services for women and their children who would otherwise be experiencing homelessness. Education is the underpinning of the Milagro House program; it is the foundation on which women can obtain a job at a family-sustaining wage, stabilizing their families over the long term. In addition to helping women obtain their high school equivalency and/or post-secondary degree, Milagro House provides a holistic scaffolding support that focuses on life skills (budgeting, parenting, nutrition and healthy relationships) customized case management and post-program assistance to support each woman's individualized journey to independence. Currently, about a quarter of the women at Milagro House have a nonviolent criminal record.

The first lady was joined by Representative Mike Sturla and Lancaster Mayor Danene Sorace.

"Utilizing its partnership with HDC MidAtlantic, Milagro House's growth has been critically important in supporting female reentrants and breaking the cycle of homelessness and poverty," said Rep. Sturla. "I thank First Lady Wolf for coming to see firsthand how vital their work is to the Lancaster community."

Milagro House has been a part of the Lancaster community for more than 23 years and has helped hundreds of women and families escape poverty. The First Lady toured their space and discussed their recent partnership with HDC MidAtlantic to reach more women in the area.

In November, HDC MidAtlantic and Milagro House announced their collaboration in the development of 50 affordable apartments and residential living suites as part of Phase Two of the Apartments at College Avenue development. A portion of the renovated space will be owned and managed by Milagro House as residential living suites for the women and children of their program.

"The redevelopment of the former UPMC/St. Joseph's hospital site into a mixed-use, mixed-income community will fill many critical needs for affordable housing in Lancaster," said Dana Hanchin, President and CEO of HDC. "We are excited to partner with Milagro House because we share the critical vision of helping vulnerable families stabilize as they transition away from homelessness. This housing is designed to help anyone who needs it, including women and their children as they re-enter society following incarceration. By combining efforts with Milagro House, we can leverage our strengths and create a greater impact for local families."

HDC's mission is to "build hope and opportunity for all residents to reach their full potential by creating, preserving, and strengthening affordable housing communities." In their effort to promote housing opportunity and equity, HDC has updated their policies to remove barriers that may have been excluding people from accessing their properties, especially because of past criminal records.

A 2019 [article](#) from the American Psychological Association further reiterates the need for strong community resources that assist in a woman's transition from jail or prison. It notes that upon release, women face uphill battles with health challenges as well as emotional and behavioral disorders and that for those who have not received the mental health or SUD treatment needed during incarceration, rates of relapse are high, especially in the absence of appropriate community-based services. Furthermore, it states that a parent's incarceration significantly increases the chances of a child offending themselves and homelessness across their lifespan.

To further highlight the people and programs supporting female reentrants, First Lady Wolf hosts *Women in Reentry*, a series of virtual conversations. Past topics included [maternal health](#) and [mental health](#). The next discussion is scheduled for Wednesday, December 15 and will focus on employment barriers and opportunities for female reentrants.

The conversations can be viewed on the [One Lens Facebook page](#) and [PAcast](#).

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