



The Arc of Pennsylvania Applauds Nancy Thaler for Disability Advocacy & Welcomes Kristen Ahrens to New State Government Role

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The Arc of Pennsylvania thanks Nancy Thaler for her advocacy on behalf of people with intellectual disability and autism, and their families. Thaler, Deputy Secretary, Office of Developmental Programs, recently announced her retirement from state government. "Her leadership has created a Pennsylvania in which the voices of people with intellectual disability and autism are honored and respected, where families are supported, and services are designed to enable people to live the life they wish to live," says Mike Marsh, Board President, The Arc of PA.

Much has been accomplished under her leadership. The resilience of families and their strength in planning for and with their family member was recognized and celebrated. Thanks to Thaler's efforts, the 2017-18 state budget was the best budget for people with intellectual disability and autism in 10 years. People with autism and children birth to twenty-one now have access to needed support programs offered through the Office of Developmental Programs. During her tenure, additional services were developed to better meet the needs of people with disabilities and their families. Also, this year's budget ensures that 800 public school graduates with intellectual disabilities and/or autism will be able to access support services at the time of graduation and 100 individuals will be served from the emergency waiting list.

Under her leadership, Hamburg Center in Berks County, is now closed. Not only will the 80 people living at Hamburg Center in January 2017 have the opportunity to experience an EveryDay Life, this center is no longer available to house and segregate people with disabilities. The closing of Hamburg Center is another step in making the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania an "institution free" state and reduce the reliance on institutional care. The closure of Hamburg Center is a sign of commitment to assure that all persons with disabilities grow up in families, go to school alongside their peers, and as adults, have opportunities for employment and community life.

"Nancy Thaler's unique combined perspective as a mother of a son with disabilities, advocate and public servant made her a premier champion for individuals with disabilities in Pennsylvania and across the nation," says Cronin. "Self-advocates, families, providers, and other stakeholders have been so fortunate to have her leadership for the past three years. Ms. Thaler is a strong supporter of The Arc and we were proud to serve alongside her, advocating for the rights of people with disabilities."

It is such a pleasure for The Arc of PA to welcome Kristen Ahrens as Acting Deputy Secretary for the Office of Developmental Programs. Ahrens has a long history of connection to The Arc movement. She was part of Youth Arc and served as a board member for The Arc of Philadelphia. "We truly wish her success as Acting Deputy Secretary. Most importantly, we thank her for the willingness to serve," said Cronin. Ahrens was the Bureau Director of Policy and Quality Management under Thaler.

For the past 69 years, The Arc of Pennsylvania has advocated for the full inclusion of persons with disabilities into Pennsylvania's communities. We have worked to ensure that children and adults with autism and intellectual/developmental disabilities receive the services they need, are included in their community, and have control over their own lives. With over 33 local chapters across the Commonwealth, The Arc of PA strives to ensure that all Pennsylvanians with disabilities are no longer segregated and can enjoy life as a valued member of their community.

**Editor's Note: The Arc is not an acronym; always refer to us as The Arc, not The ARC, and never ARC.
The Arc should be considered as a title or a phrase.**

The Arc of Pennsylvania
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