DRAFT: 2021 / FINAL 3.3.21

Dear Leader \_\_\_\_and Chairman \_\_\_\_:

I respectfully request your support to maintain the full $750,000 line item for the New Choices / New Options program in the 2021/2022 Labor and Industry budget. Governor Wolf included this funding in the Administration’s budget proposal.

Shortly after the shutdown due to COVID, Pennsylvania Women Work, the non-profit organization that runs New Choices / New Options, quickly pivoted to offer the program on virtual platforms, while also expanding the program’s geographic reach. The organization is now receiving more inquiries than they ever have. **PA Women Work has seen demand for the New Choices / New Options program increase by 32%** over the same period last year. This is a direct result from the surge in unemployment, particularly among PA Women Work’s target population of women, minorities, justice-involved individuals, and mature workers who were expected to be nearing retirement.

As the Legislature prioritizes workforce development, it is vital that we invest in programs that have a proven track record of success. This worthy program has maintained a 3-to-1 return on state investment for 28 years and has helped over 68,000 Pennsylvanians find lasting employment. Through the New Choices / New Options program, PA Women Work helps women who need intensive services resolve their obstacles to employment and find lasting jobs that pay a family-sustaining wage. In this life-changing program, participants gain self-esteem by learning professional communication and conflict resolution, tools they use in all aspects of their lives. PA Women Work sets women on a path to achieving their professional goals, resulting in an 82% placement rate into jobs or continued education.

For more than nearly three decades, New Choices / New Options has turned recipients of state benefits into Pennsylvania taxpayers, and has improved the economic health and quality of life in our Commonwealth. Clients find living-wage jobs that give them the power to break the cycle of generational poverty and find stability for themselves and their families. At intake, clients have an average annual household income of $18,000, but after New Choices, participants earn an average annual income of $29,000.

In 2019/2020, this program delivered many successful outcomes and savings for the state. Graduates’ average starting wage in their new employment was $16/hr. Considering added tax revenue, Medicaid savings and more, New Choices provides the state approximately $1.5 million in savings.

New Choices / New Options is needed now more than ever. I urge you to support a 2021/2022 budget that includes the full investment into New Choices/New Options so that the program is funded at its full $750,000 level.

Please let me know if you have any questions or need additional details. I appreciate your consideration or continued support of this critical program funding.

Sincerely,