



# bits and bytes

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**Brian Hudson**, executive director of the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency (PHFA), opened the House Appropriations Committee hearing this morning. Mr. Hudson addressed several questions raised by the committee, including those about the numbers served and financing for HEMAP (Housing Emergency Mortgage Assistance Program). Hudson said most of the homeowners served by PHFA are average working families, with incomes ranging up to \$75,000 annually. Last year the Governor proposed that PHFA oversee bond issuance to provide money to rehabilitate and repair private day care centers. It is included in the 2008/09 proposal as well. Several Republican committee members raised concerns about PHFA's involvement in this kind of project.

Issues of long-term care, solvency of the Lottery Fund, funding for area agencies on aging, elder abuse prevention, loss of federal dollars, were just a few of the issues addressed by **Aging Secretary Nora Dowd Eisenhower**. Joining her before the Committee were Deputy Secretary for Long Term Living **Michael Hall**, **Thomas Snedden**, Bureau Director for the pharmaceutical programs, and **Ivonne Bucher**, chief of staff. Secretary Eisenhower reported that Pennsylvania has more people over the age of 60 than ever before and there will be \$500 million fewer in federal money coming to Pennsylvania to serve the elderly. About concerns that the growth of the slots gaming industry could hurt the Lottery Fund and the programs it finances, Secretary Eisenhower said the Lottery is a much better product than it was just a few years ago. She also assured committee members that they are looking into the "hold harmless" feature of funds going to all area agencies on aging but added that while removing the "hold harmless" provision would help some counties, it would undoubtedly hurt others.

Access to primary health care, expansion of mobile clinics, nursing home inspections, health care-related infections and health literacy were among the issues raised with **Secretary of Health Dr. Calvin B. Johnson**. Dr. Johnson was joined by **Terry Matio** and **Brian Ebersole**. The national beef recall is "not connected to any health-related incident," according to Dr. Johnson and his office does not anticipate a problem in Pennsylvania. One member urged him to keep a watch on the need for compulsive gaming treatment and for Tobacco Settlement prevention and cessation. The frequency of nursing home inspections was raised by another member but Dr. Johnson said despite a reduction in funding, the department will meet its statutory responsibilities. Handgun violence as a public health concern and the closing of obstetrical departments in some hospitals were part of the discussion.

**John G. Bertoty**, executive director, Blueroof Technologies, in McKeesport, Allegheny County and **Dr. Katherine D. Seelman**, Associate Dean Disability Programs and Professor of Rehabilitation Sciences and Technology at the University of Pittsburgh, served as panelists for the committee. The two work on a variety of projects that integrate technology and housing which allows the elderly, disabled and people with mental retardation to live more independently than in the past and ultimately saving the state money. For more about the work done by Blueroof, visit <http://www.bluerooftechnologies.com>.

**Auditor General Jack Wagner** told the committee the role of his office is continually expanding and audits of cyber schools, charter schools, the Gaming Control Board and pension plans all fall under his purview. **Secretary of State Pedro Cortes** briefed the committee about his department's oversight of the Lobbying Disclosure Act. In addition, Cortes defended Gov. Rendell's decision to extend the petition filing deadline earlier this month because of the weather. Gov. Ridge issued a similar executive order in 2000.