

MINUTES**Senate and House Committees on Public Health, Welfare, and Labor****Senate and House Committees on Education****Joint Meeting****Thursday, August 20, 2020****2:30 P.M.**

Committee Members Present: Senators Missy Irvin, Chair; Jane English, Chair; Linda Chesterfield, Lance Eads, Scott Flippo, Kim Hammer, Jim Hendren, Bart Hester, Jimmy Hickey, Jr., Mark Johnson, David Wallace, Vice-Chair; Representatives Bruce Cozart, Chair; Jack Ladyman, Chair; Rick Beck, Mary Bentley, Justin Boyd, LeAnne Burch, Karilyn Brown, Bruce Coleman, Jim Dotson, Jana Della Rosa, Jon Eubanks, Brain Evans, Kenneth Ferguson, Justin Gonzales, Michelle Gray, Lee Johnson, Fredrick Love, Mark Lowery, Richard McGrew, Stephen Meeks, Josh Miller, Reginald Murdock, Vice-Chair; Clint Penzo, Joy Springer, Nelda Speaks, Dan Sullivan, DeAnne Vaught, and Jeff Wardlaw

Other Legislators Present: Senators Alan Clark and Bruce Maloch Representatives Fred Allen, Craig Christiansen, Joe Cloud, Nicole Clowney, Cameron Cooper, Cindy Crawford, Dan Douglas, Marsh Davis, Charlene Fite, Vivian Flowers, Jimmy Gazaway, Megan Godfrey, Steve Hollowell, Monte Hodges, Roger Lynch, Tippi McCollough, Jay Richardson, Johnny Rye, Jamie Scott, Matthew Shepard, Stu Smith, Dwight Tosh, Danny Watson, and Carlton Wing

Call to Order and Comments by the Chairs: Senator Irvin called the meeting to order. She touched on an application process offered by DHS for eligible organizations for the Emergency Solutions Grant. This is a direct result from CARES Act. This program will support Arkansans who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless during the COVID-19 pandemic. Senator English, Representative Cozart, and Representative Ladyman commented on how rapidly the COVID-19 situation is changing daily.

Buffalo River Conservation Committee (BRCC) Update and Funding Recommendation Wes Ward, Agriculture Secretary, State Department of Agriculture discussed the projects conducted so far using the money appropriated to the BRCC. \$250,000 has been utilized in the city of Jasper for a waste water treatment facility and two unpaved roads for a total of \$570,979. In sum, \$820,979 out of the \$1 million allocated to the BRCC has been used.

Representative Ladyman moves to approve the BRCC expenditures.

Senator David Wallace seconded the motion.

Without objection, the motion passed.

CARES Funded Vaccination Program Anna Strong, Executive Director, Arkansas Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics discussed the drop in child well visits at the beginning of the pandemic due to parent fears of taking their children to the doctor. In turn, immunization rates dropped 30% and the Measles, Mumps, Rubella (MMR) vaccine administration rates dropped by 42%. The CARES Act Steering Committee approved \$8.77 million for the investment of discovering strategies to administer vaccines to those who did not receive them during the pandemic. It is applied to expenses incurred from March through the beginning of October. This is for outreach programs only, not the actual payment of immunizations. Those will be paid for as normal.

Elizabeth Pittman, Deputy Director, Division of Medical Services explained that the deadline of October 1 was mainly implemented because the deadline for school immunizations.

Back to School Protocols and Plans for Reopening Public Schools in Arkansas Johnny Key, Secretary of Education, Arkansas Department of Education and José Romero, MD, Secretary of Health, Arkansas Department of Health discussed plans to ensure the safety of students all across the state of Arkansas returning to school. At the start of the pandemic, many school districts were unprepared for teaching students via virtual learning. Since the spring, schools have been able to shift very quickly to create alternative methods of instruction in a very short amount of time. With the help of teachers across the state, the Department of Education was able to create a playbook that addresses the interruption of learning that occurred for students. It identifies the standards that may have been lost and attempted to create resources for teachers to better assist them in making up for that instruction time. A webpage has been set up to inform teachers and the public about guidelines for returning to school. The Department of Education and Department of Health have worked in conjunction with one another when it comes to the return of school. The expansion of laboratories has been a goal of the Department of Health to better ensure a quick response in the case of an outbreak within an educational facility; this includes the number of individuals available for contact tracing. Any information regarding contact tracing is stream lined through a point of contact within schools in the case of an outbreak. Information provided by the school should not violate any HIPAA laws because no specific medical information is needed on the part of the Department of Health.

Districts are being contacted to ensure they have Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) distributed directly to them. Data on how much money is being spent on PPE is being tracked with most schools buying PPE with unrestricted funds. Teachers with underlying health conditions may require more PPE or additional accommodations in relation to their teaching environment. Students are not being tested before the start of school, but they are screened before entering the school. They are required to have their temperature taken and asked a series of questions. Normal day-to-day elements of a traditional school year may also be limited to prevent the spread of COVID. The need for quarantine is on a case by case basis. All precautions being implemented, are expected to continue for at least another year.

Participation in School Athletics and Other Extra-Curricular Activities Dr. Joey Walters, Deputy Executive Director, Arkansas Activities Association discussed the history of the AAA and the importance for maintaining the presence of extra-curricular activities within schools.

Coronavirus Data Analysis in School Districts Joe Thompson, MPH, MD, CEO, Arkansas Activities Association discussed COVID-19 data as it relates to the state. The community-level cumulative and active COVID-19 case numbers were used to create a heat map throughout the state. School district boundaries are used to assign positive cases to different districts, however, the number of positive cases within prisons are excluded from the school districts they may fall within. The overall amount of opening risk varies school to school.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 5:30 P.M.