

MINUTES
ARKANSAS LEGISLATIVE TASK FORCE ON AUTISM
Monday, October 10, 2022
1:00 PM
Room 171, State Capitol
Little Rock, Arkansas

Committee members present: Senator Keith Ingram, Co-Chair; Representatives Marsh Davis, Co-Chair; and Keith Brooks

Non-legislative members present: Ms. Karan Burnette, Dr. Randal Hundley, Ms. Christy Plunkett, Ms. Alyssa Thomlinson, and Ms. Melissa Weatherton

Senator Keith Ingram called the meeting to order.

Discussion on Autism Clinics Across the State

Melissa Weatherton, Director, Developmental Disabilities Services (DDS), Department of Human Services (DHS) discussed the discovery of applied behavioral analysis programs across the state that provide more than forty (40) hours a week in therapy to school aged children, indicating that the child is not attending school. This appears to affect approximately 700 children. She discussed potential licensing requirements and the need for additional data before making any recommendations to the committee.

Discussion of the Expansion Waiver

Ms. Melissa Weatherton, Director, DDS, DHS discussed the state and federal process for the approval of the approximately 3,000 additional waivers available for the state and the intent to have those waivers released in the next three years. Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) diagnosis is one of the five qualifying diagnoses for the waiver.

Discussion of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Request Regarding In-Home Services

Ms. Melissa Weatherton, Director, DDS, DHS discussed a portion of ARPA titled 9817 Funds for which the state applied and was granted. Ms. Weatherton touched on what programs the funds cover, measures to audit the funds, educating the public on related technology available, educating first responders to recognize ASD and facilitate treatment, and implementing a strategic plan for when funds expire.

Other Business

Dr. Rocky Haynes of Northeast Arkansas spoke regarding the field of behavior analysis in Arkansas, the support of families of “home bound” children, and the virtual reality technology available to assist disabled individuals to live fully and independently.

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 2:20 p.m.