

MINUTES OF THE MEETING
OF THE
ARKANSAS LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

August 27, 2021

The Arkansas Legislative Council met at 1:00 p.m., Monday, August 9, 2021, in Committee Room A of the Big Mac Building, Little Rock, Arkansas. Co-Chair Terry Rice called the meeting to order and recognized a quorum of members present. The members present are listed on the sign-in sheets. Senator Ronald Caldwell attended via *Zoom*.

Review of American Rescue Plan Act Appropriation Increase Requests

Co-Chair Rice referred members to the requests listed on the agenda as Items B.1 and B.2, and noted that action by the Legislative Council is needed for those items.

Co-Chair Rice recognized Ms. Dawn Stehle, Deputy Director/Medicaid Director, Mr. Mark White, Chief Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs, Ms. Cindy Gillespie, Secretary, Department of Human Services (DHS), and Ms. Rachel Bunch, Executive Director, Health Care Association, to present the request to address the short term funding issues that nursing homes are facing in the state. The requested assistance would be available to all state nursing homes.

1. Department of Human Services:

- Unreimbursed COVID-19 Costs of Unskilled Nursing Facilities - \$116,412,000

After the presentation, Co-Chair Rice recognized Senators Ronald Caldwell, Jane English, Kim Hammer, Gary Stubblefield, Keith Ingram, and Representatives Charlene Fite, Mary Bentley, Jim Wooten, and DeAnn Vaught for questions.

Senator Hammer requested to receive information on the total number of beds and current occupancy, specific to each nursing home in District 33, Saline County. Senator Hammer also requested information on the average time frame of the nursing facilities' reimbursements, as well as the average census, by each population, prior to COVID-19.

Representative Wooten requested to receive information on the population reduction in occupancy - a comparison of occupancy being 20% now, to what it was pre-pandemic. Representative Wooten also requested the dollar amount and the number of staff and patients each facility has lost due to the pandemic.

Senator Ingram requested to receive the guidelines that reflect the bio hazardous medical waste material requirements from Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) compared to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

After questions and discussion, Co-Chair Rice recognized Senator Linda Chesterfield for a motion.

Senator Chesterfield moved to approve the request for \$116,412,000 for the Department of Human Services.

Co-Chair Rice recognized Co-Chair Jeff Wardlaw for a statement. Co-Chair Wardlaw stated he will refrain from voting, as he is employed by this industry.

After the statement, the motion was seconded and passed by voice vote.

Co-Chair Rice again recognized, Ms. Dawn Stehle, Mr. Mark White, Ms. Cindy Gillespie, with DHS, and Mr. Bo Ryall, President/CEO, with Arkansas Hospital Association, to present the request for funding to help stabilize the existing workforce of hospitals throughout the state. The proposal will cover all hospitals in the state and is largely aimed at the staffing issues.

2. Department of Human Services:

- Arkansas Hospital COVID Surge Staff Funding Proposal - \$129,209,000.

Co-Chair Rice asked a question to which Mr. Bo Ryall responded. Afterwards, Co-Chair Rice recognized Senators Bob Ballinger, Kim Hammer, and Joyce Elliott, and Representatives Nelda Speaks, Jim Dotson, Mary Bentley, John Payton, and Rick Beck for questions.

Senator Hammer requested to receive a copy of the audit report, when it becomes available, from DHS on how each hospital's funds were expended. Senator Hammer also requested to receive a list of hospitals that do/do not have policies in place for vaccination exemptions and what those policies are.

After questions Co-Chair Rice recognized Senator Joyce Elliott for a motion.

Senator Joyce Elliott moved that the request for the staff funding proposal from DHS be approved. The motion was seconded and passed by voice vote.

After the motion, Co-Chair Rice recognized Representative Mark Lowery and Senator Kim Hammer for questions. Senator Hammer requested to receive a list of hospitals that are now requiring staff vaccinations.

After questions and discussion, that concluded the presentations.

Adjournment

At 10:20 a.m., the meeting was adjourned as there was no further business to come before the Legislative Council.

Respectfully submitted,

ATTEST:

Senator Terry Rice
Co-Chair, Senate

Marty Garrity
Executive Secretary