

MINUTES
SENATE COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGING, CHILDREN AND YOUTH, LEGISLATIVE AND
MILITARY AFFAIRS
SENATE COMMITTEE ON STATE AGENCIES AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

MEETING JOINTLY

Friday, November 13, 2020

10:00 AM

Room A-MAC

Little Rock, Arkansas

Committee members present: Senators Trent Garner, Vice Chair; Breanne Davis, and David Wallace; Representatives Charlene Fite, Chair; Craig Christiansen, Cindy Crawford, Denise Garner, Tippi McCullough, Jay Richardson, Keith Slape, Stu Smith, Joy Springer, Danny Watson, and Jim Wooten

Other members present: Senator Scott Flippo; Representatives Fred Allen, Stan Berry, Kenneth Ferguson, David Fielding, Jack Ladyman, Reginald Murdock, and Johnny Rye

Senator Garner called the meeting to order.

Approval of Minutes October 19, 2020, Meeting [Exhibit C]

Representative Fite made a motion to approve the minutes from the October 19, 2020, meeting, and without objection, the motion carried.

Appointment to the Child Maltreatment Investigations Oversight Committee

Representative Fite made a motion to approve the appointments of Senator Alan Clark, Representative Sonja Barker, Ms. Cheryl Anderson, and Ms. Tess Fletcher to the Child Maltreatment Investigations Oversight Committee, and without objection, the motion carried.

Arkansas Department of Veterans Affairs

Mr. Austin Booth, Chief of Staff/Chief Financial Officer, Arkansas Department of Veterans Affairs (ADVA) and Colonel (Retired) Nate Todd, Cabinet Secretary, ADVA, stated that in March 2020, ADVA conducted a thorough analysis of accounts receivable for the veterans homes located in Fayetteville and North Little Rock. The results showed the combined revenue of each home was approximately \$20 million, with an outstanding balance of \$2 million--the homes collected only 90% of their revenue. Mr. Booth stated the issue is challenging because it encourages nonpayment from other residents that are able, but unwilling, to meet their financial obligations. He noted it is inconsistent with the obligation of financial stewardship owed to the taxpayers, and without some form of long-term systemic change, it allows ADVA to accumulate large amounts of accounts receivable that will eventually impact the ability to help veterans. In March, ADVA contracted with a law firm on a limited trial basis to help with collection cases that exceed their legal capability. By strengthening and maintaining the financial positions of the homes, it is hopeful they will be able to operate without relying on general revenue.

Discussion of Grant Programs for Veterans from Federal CARES Act [Exhibit F] Mr. Jay Hill, Director, Division of Aging, Adult, and Behavioral Health Services, Department of Human Services (DAABHS), spoke on the programs dedicated to veteran services. The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act Steering Committee has approved a proposal by the DAABHS to fund mental health services, outreach/education, and crisis intervention through December 2020 for veterans experiencing mental health issues during the pandemic. The Community Mental Health Centers (CMHC) will receive a portion of the funds to work with the state's public mental health system to disperse information regarding available services. For veterans that are not located near a VA hospital, there are 12 CMHCs in the state providing services to those without the means to travel. Veterans were notified by mail of the services available to them at no cost. DAABHS is working diligently to enroll uninsured veterans in the Arkansas Works Medicaid Extension Program for Veterans.

CMHCS also offer training in suicide intervention to law enforcement, local EMS providers, and Veteran Service Organizations, at no cost. A mental health provider in the state will offer 100 nonprofessional VSO employees an 8-hour virtual course on Mental Health First Aid to prepare them for encounters with veterans in a mental health crisis. Other allocations for the \$5 million provided by the CARES Act include working with the four Crisis Stabilization Units (CSU) located in Fort Smith, Fayetteville, Little Rock and Jonesboro (covers 40 counties). DHS has licensed CSUs as Acute Crisis Centers to serve veterans that encounter law enforcement during a behavioral health crisis. The CSUs will stabilize the veteran up to 96 hours at which time they are discharged with a continuum of care and no criminal charges. Through December 30, 2020, non-profit VSOs will have \$3.4 million available to cover equipment, training, food, housing, outreach, information technology support, and to deliver direct services to veterans experiencing mental health conditions. Depending on the number of employees, the awards range between \$15,000 and \$100,000.

Adoption and discussion of ISP 2019-164 by Senator Chesterfield - An act requiring the Legislative Council to establish a Medical Marijuana Oversight Subcommittee to perform oversight functions related to the Arkansas Constitution, Amendment 98 [Exhibit G]

Senator Garner made a motion to adopt ISP 2019-164, and with a second by Senator Davis, the motion carried.

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 11:00 a.m.