

## MINUTES

### HOUSE & SENATE HEALTH SERVICES SUBCOMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE & SENATE INTERIM COMMITTEES ON PUBLIC HEALTH, WELFARE AND LABOR

August 14, 2017  
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The House and Senate Health Services Subcommittees met Monday, August 14, 2017 at 1:30 p.m. in Committee Room A, of the Multi-Agency Complex (MAC) Building, Little Rock, Arkansas.

**Senate Health Services members attending:** Senators Missy Irvin, Co-Chair; and John Cooper.

**House Health Services members attending:** Representatives Chris Richey, Chair; Justin Boyd, and Robin Lundstrum.

**Other legislators attending:** Senators Lance Eads, Jason Rapert, and Larry Teague. Representatives Charles Blake, Bruce Coleman, Charlene Fite, Vivian Flowers, Joe Jett, Rebecca Petty, DeAnn Vaught, and Carlton Wing.

#### **Comments by the Chairs**

Senator Missy Irvin called the meeting to order.

#### **Consideration to Approve the October 10, 2015 Meeting Minutes (EXHIBIT C)**

Senator Irvin stated that without objection, the minutes from the October 10, 2016 meeting are approved.

#### **Presentation and Discussion of Interim Study Proposal, ISP2017-079 - "REQUESTING THAT THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC HEALTH, WELFARE AND LABOR STUDY METHODS TO ENHANCE ACCESS TO IMMUNIZATIONS IN ARKANSAS BY OVERCOMING CHALLENGES TO IMMUNIZATION ACCESS."** (EXHIBITS D-1 & D-2)

Representative Justin Boyd, Sponsor, Heather Mercer, Executive Director, Arkansas Immunization Action Coalition, Eddie Ochoa, MD, FAAP, Section Chief, Community Pediatrics, University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, UAMS, Duane Jones, B.Pharm, Pharmacy District Manager, Harps Food Stores, Inc. (Springdale), and Don Heard, Ed.D., UAMS West, Center Director, Family Medicine Clinic (Ft. Smith); presented the discussion of ISP2017-079.

Representative Justin Boyd initiated the discussion with a brief background on the purposes and importance of ISP2017-079:

- ❖ Arkansas ranks at the bottom of all 50 states for children's vaccination
- ❖ 3 out of 4 Arkansas children are on a state-funded health program
- ❖ Primary care providers in 20 Arkansas counties send children who are on Medicaid to their respective county health department

Heather Mercer, Executive Director, Arkansas Immunization Action Coalition, presented a brief overview of the coalition from its inception in 2012 to the present time. The purpose and mission of the coalition is to address disparities and access issues of the immunization program in Arkansas. Low reimbursement rates and lack of access to transportation are the main barriers of the Arkansas immunization program. Ms. Mercer detailed the entire cost requirement to successfully raise immunization rates safely in Arkansas. The coalition is funded by The Blue Nu Foundation.

Ms. Mercer also listed the necessary equipment and supplies needed to safely immunize the public. Since immunization reimbursement rates are below what is needed, she asked the legislature to re-examine Arkansas reimbursement rates and consider an increase to cover the cost of immunizing Arkansas citizens.

Eddie Ochoa, MD, FAAP, Section Chief, Community Pediatrics, University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, UAMS, described his experience and the day-to-day operations in his Southwest Little Rock Clinic. He addressed his concerns and those of the medical community, of the vaccination programs in Arkansas. Dr. Ochoa stated the reimbursement immunization rates are grossly insufficient; and he advocates for an increase in the reimbursement rate. Dr. Ochoa's clinic has a back-up generator in case of power outages, because vaccines have to be kept at a certain temperature.

Duane Jones, B.Pharm, Pharmacy District Manager, Harps Food Stores, Inc. (Springdale), discussed the barriers to successful immunization in Arkansas, and asked the Subcommittee members to please re-evaluate the reimbursement rates. There are only 3 vaccines available that clinics can bill for through Medicaid; they are shingles, pneumonia, and the flu vaccine. However, the reimbursement rate for the pneumonia vaccine is \$12.34, but the cost is \$92. Mr. Jones echoed the complaint that the major barrier is the extremely low reimbursement rate from Medicaid.

Gary Wheeler, M.D., Medical Director, Arkansas Department of Health, explained Arkansas immunization programs for adults, and for children.

Don Heard, EdD., UAMS West, Center Director, Family Medicine Clinic (Ft. Smith); presented the discussion of ISP2017-079. Mr. Heard described the staff and the day-to-day operations of UAMS West in Fort Smith, Arkansas. He also discussed the barriers and problems of achieving high immunization rates; citing low reimbursement rates and lack of access to transportation as major barriers.

Representative Justin Boyd stated that the immunization payment structure for children is more challenging than it is for adults, especially in Arkansas.

Senator Irvin suggested the Arkansas Department of Health and the Department of Human Services be invited to future meetings to discuss how to resolve the immunization inadequacy in the Arkansas health system.

Representative Robin Lundstrum made a motion to adopt ISP2017-079 for discussion and study during the 2017-2018 Interim. The motion carried without objection.

The meeting adjourned at 2:25 p.m.