

MINUTES
SENATE INTERIM COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH
HOUSE INTERIM COMMITTEE ON AGING, CHILDREN AND YOUTH
LEGISLATIVE AND MILITARY AFFAIRS

Meeting Jointly

Wednesday, September 11, 2013, 1:00 p.m.

**Room 130, State Capitol,
Little Rock, Arkansas**

The Senate Interim Committee on Children and Youth, and the House Interim Committee on Aging, Children and Youth, Legislative and Military Affairs; met Wednesday, September 11, 2013 at 1:00 p.m. in Room 130 at the State Capitol in Little Rock, Arkansas.

Committee members present were: *Senators* Stephanie Flowers, Chair; Linda Chesterfield, Jane English, Jim Hendren and Gary Stubblefield. *Representatives* David Meeks, Chair; Randy Alexander, Charles Armstrong, Mary Broadaway, Jody Dickinson, Charlene Fite, Mike Holcomb and Sue Scott

Non-Committee members present were: *Senators* Michael Lamoureux and Jason Rapert. *Representatives* Duncan Baird, Ann Clemmer, Harold Copenhaver, John K. Hutchison, Fredrick J. Love, Mark McElroy, Tommy Thompson and Mark Wren

Senator Flowers called the meeting to order.

Consideration to Approve Minutes of July 17, 2013 [EXHIBIT B]

Without objection, the minutes were approved.

Moment of Silence in Remembrance of the historical event of September 11, 2001 - Senator Flowers

Senator Flowers stated she had an issue come up and Senator Hendren would continue the meeting as acting chair.

Update on Veterans' Home Task Force Progress - Senator Jane English

Senator English gave a brief progress report on the Veterans' Home Task Force stating they had made four site visits: two on August 19th at Fort Smith and Russellville and two on August 21st at Haskell and Jacksonville. She confirmed that Arkansas Department of Veterans Affairs director, Cissy Rucker had also visited other sites around the State. She stated that Cissy Rucker was going to discuss the sites at the next meeting of the Task Force scheduled for September 12th. Senator English also stated that the Task Force would be making its recommendations to the legislature by October 31, 2013.

Overview of the Arkansas Attorney Ad Litem Program – Ms. Renia Robinette, Director

Ms. Robinette gave an overview of the Dependency-Neglect, Attorney Ad Litem (AAL) Program. She stated that this is a program designed to represent children and to act in the best interest of children involved in dependency/neglect cases. She discussed the history of the AAL Program in Arkansas, from 1995 to date. She stated that the key responsibilities of the dependency-neglect, attorney ad litem are monitoring the progress of dependency-neglect cases and court proceedings.

Senator Hendren asked, if the 5,604 cases noted in the handout were validated cases of neglect and abuse. Ms. Robinette explained the attorney ad litem is involved because the cases were filed as dependency-neglect and most are proven to be true.

Senator Chesterfield asked, what is the initial step that gets the child to the attorney ad litem? Ms. Robinette responded that the attorney ad litem does not get appointed to the child until the dependency-neglect petition is filed with the court.

Representative Broadway asked in dependency-neglect cases, is there an attorney ad litem appointed to every child and how are attorney ad litem similar to CASA volunteers? Ms. Robinette responded yes, every child is appointed an attorney ad litem. She explained that the Court Appointed Special Advocates Program (CASA) volunteers share information and responsibilities with the attorney ad litem. Ms. Robinette stated, it is a partnership with the attorney ad litem being instrumental in getting relevant information that the CASA volunteer has gathered to the Court.

Senator Stubblefield asked, if they had records of how many complaints had been filed by parents against the attorney ad litem? Ms. Robinette stated that in general they usually have approximately six complaints per year, with few of those complaints being made by parents.

Representative Hutchison asked, what kind of need is there for foster parents? Ms. Robinette stated, that there is a tremendous need for foster homes and Arkansas is ranked as one of the worst states for foster care placement stability.

Representative Meeks announced as a follow-up to Representative Hutchison's question, that the Aging and Youth Committee via a subcommittee is going to tackle the foster care issue. He noted, that Senator Hester and Representative Harris will chair the subcommittee and hopefully, they will be holding hearings in October to try to come up with short and long term recommendations to improve the foster care program.

Department of Human Services (DHS), Division of Children & Family Services (DCFS), Quarterly Performance Report, January 2013-March 2013 [EXHIBIT C] Greg Crawford, Chief Fiscal Officer, DCFS, presented the quarterly performance report. Mr. Crawford gave a brief overview of the Quarterly Performance Report for January, 2013-March, 2013. Mr. Crawford stated that the report contains three parts which are Performance Indicators, Compliance Indexes and Description of Populations and Services. In addition, Mr. Crawford shared that Arkansas has received an Adoption Incentive Grant, which is based upon the number of adoptions that the state does with Arkansas being awarded \$1.7 million dollars, the sixth largest award in the country.

Senator Hendren inquired about the historic trend of the 3,831 children in foster care at the end of the quarter. Mr. Crawford confirmed that the numbers have stayed in that range for about the last six to eight quarters. Mr. Crawford stated the goal is to have fewer children in care. He affirmed that DCFS wants to help families before instances of maltreatment occur and before children have to be removed from the home. Mr. Crawford then stated this would mean an increase in protective service cases but also that the child will remain in the home.

Senator Chesterfield stated she was concerned about what is precluding our citizens here from adopting our children, while they seem to be able to go to other countries and adopt leaving our children here underserved. Mr. Crawford responded that in order to adopt their children you have to undergo an adoption home study and training which takes approximately six months to complete. Mr. Crawford stated that another factor that plays a role in adoptions is the population. The types of children DCFS has for adoption may be children with emotional and mental health issues, special needs, developmental and physical disabilities, which requires a little more work from adoptive parents.

Senator Chesterfield requested an explanation of the reporting on (page 55) where it states "no" legal action taken on the child fatality. Mr. Crawford clarified that "no legal action taken" on the report meant, no action by DCFS. He further noted that these cases are always turned over to the prosecuting attorney, who determines the legal action to be taken, if any.

Representative Hutchison asked if most of the children were adopted by other family members like their grandparents and were the parents receiving a check that should be cut? It was noted that most checks are cut when the child is adopted. Mr. Crawford responded that the majority of their adoptions are outside of the family and no relation. He also confirmed that the adoptive parents normally receive some type of assistance.

Representative Scott stated that it was mentioned that November is "Adoption Month" and that she would like to see "every" month be adoption month and "every" year, adoption year here in Arkansas. She asked how many adoptions resulted in that amount of money being received from the grant and how they plan to spend the money in order to foster more adoptions? Mr. Crawford advised that they finalize approximately 700 adoptions per year and that some of the money will most likely be spent on post-adoptive services. He went on to state that they had not met to make concrete plans on how the money will be spent, because Ms. Blucker is out on medical leave.

Representative Scott asked how are citizens, who want to adopt, informed that these children are available and what is the process? Mr. Crawford responded that in the counties, they have Adoptive/Foster Parent Inquiry meetings, where interested persons can discuss foster care and/or adoption and the training required. There is also an adoption website where they can review characteristics of children available for adoption.

Senator Hendren stated that the adoption website is outstanding and encouraged members to visit it.

Representative Scott asked if they had an advertising budget for adoptions. Mr. Crawford stated the budget is spent more on pamphlets and sending workers out to events. Most recently, they sent workers to Riverfest, where there was a high concentration of people. He noted that the budget has been geared more toward taking care of the children first and advertisement buys for adoption was something they have not been able to do.

Senator Hendren asked what would be the out-of-pocket expense of the legal process for a family to adopt a child. Mr. Crawford explained gas and mileage is paid if the training is not available in their town. He noted that there would be no attorney fees or court fees involved because DHS-DCFS handles the legal costs.

Representative Holcomb inquired about the maltreatment chart (pg. 18) stating 70% were white and was that because of the population break down. Mr. Crawford responded that the national stats were just the opposite but that Caucasian children are the majority in maltreatment reports here in here in Arkansas.

Representative Meeks reminded the committee, that the budget for Department of Children and Family Services is the same no matter how many children they take in. He advised when thinking of ways to improve the foster care system that they take into consideration staffing issues and all of the home studies that will be needed, if suddenly you have this influx of people wanting to be foster parents or wanting to adopt.

Department of Human Services (DHS), Division of Behavioral Health Services, Child and Adolescent Service System Program (CASSP) Report Card for 4th Quarter SFY 2013 [EXHIBIT D]

Paula Stone, Assistant Clinical Director, DHS, Division of Behavioral Health Services gave a brief overview of the Report Card. Ms. Stone stated that page two of the Report Card shows the activities of the regional team meetings over the past quarter, including attendance by members from the community. Page three, gives the numbers of children served through wrap around and MAPS team meetings.

Rep. Alexander asked Ms. Stone to define "wrap around" and MAPS. Ms. Stone explained, that these are service teams for children with behavioral health disorders. MAPS stands for Multi-Agency Plans of Service, she noted that this type of assessment is for those children with medium needs. She stated that instead of just having the therapist that is treating the child with behavioral health disorders, this team effort includes all the

members of the community that interact with the child, to come up with a more comprehensive plan of action. She noted that typically, what they see with a child with behavioral health issues, is that they also have issues in other settings particularly, the school setting or they have involvement with other systems such as DCFS or DYS, so the goal is to make sure that all the members of the team are at the table to address those issues. Ms. Stone explained wrap around as being a practice which is very specific for those children and youth with intensive needs, the ones that typically transition in and out of residential care and foster homes and again, they have a whole team at the table. The wrap around service is typically centered on care for the parent and the family, so there is a lot of family engagement involved in wrap around.

Senator Hendren asked if information describing trends and comparing quarters could be given. Ms. Stone stated that they are seeing about the same level of involvement with this particular program. She noted that they have definite needs across the state but they are being addressed. Ms. Stone stated, they continue working on having everyone at the table from the community because these are meetings in which they want to make sure that all of the different players in the community are involved.

Next meeting - September 30, 2013 at 1:00 p.m. in Room 130, State Capitol

Without further business, the meeting adjourned at 2:20 p.m.

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