

ARKANSAS LEGISLATIVE TASK FORCE ON AUTISM
MEETING MINUTES
JUNE 20, 2014

The Arkansas Legislative Task Force on Autism met Friday, June 20, 2014, at 1:00 p.m., in Room 151, State Capitol, Little Rock, Arkansas. Senator Uvalde Lindsey, Senate Co-Chair, presided.

Task Force members present were Senator Uvalde Lindsey, Representative Randy Alexander, Ms. Karan Burnette, Ms. Tina Davis, Dr. Charlie Green, Ms. Glenda Higgs, Mr. John Harriman (*for Dr. Michael Martin*), Dr. Steve Kahler, Mr. Eric Moxley, and Dr. Tyra Reid.

Advisory members present were Ms. Denise Ennett and Ms. Tonya Williams.

Senator Lindsey called the meeting to order. The minutes from the May 16, 2014, Arkansas Legislative Task Force on Autism meeting were approved by acclamation.

Senator Lindsey welcomed Mr. John Harriman, Legal Counsel for the Arkansas Insurance Department. Mr. Harriman stated he will review any legal complaints regarding autism coverage that come through his department. He said Insurance policies not covered under the federal budget can be covered under the Affordable Care Act (ACA) Exchange.

Presentation of Updates on the Home Community Based Waiver and Community First Program

Dr. Charlie Green, Division Director, Arkansas Department of Human Services, Division of Developmental Disabilities Services (DDS), was recognized. Dr. Green provided a handout titled *Arkansas Healthcare Payment Improvement Initiatives for People with Developmental Disabilities*. His handout listed three DDS Community First Programs:

1. **Choices Program:** Home and Community Based Services for Adult Arkansans with Developmental Disabilities
2. **Family Support:** Home and Community Based Services for School Aged Arkansans with Developmental Disabilities
3. **Developmental Disabilities Health Home (DDHH):** Case coordination for Arkansans with Developmental Disabilities. Converting Health Care records through electronic recording

Dr. Green said the Community First programs will replace the Home Community Based Waiver (HCBW) waiting list and eliminate the extensive wait-time for individuals who need services. Once the draft manuals have been submitted and approved through public meetings and the legislative review process has been completed, DDS will begin converting individuals from the HCBW waiting list to the Community First Programs starting January 1, 2015. Dr. Green stated there are 2,800 on the HCBW list. DHS received \$85 million from federal funding to implement the Community Based Programs for the next six years. The Community First Program provides services for families who have a child with a developmental disability requiring institutional level of care.

Senator Lindsey said individuals on the waiting list need to be informed about the Centers for Disease Control hotline number and resource guides that are available in the state.

Karan Burnette said families who have an autistic child attending preschool also need to be informed about services available, including the hotline number.

Presentation of Updates on Insurance Coverage for Autism

Mr. Booth Rand, Chief Counsel, Arkansas Insurance Department (AID), was recognized.

Mr. Rand addressed concerns regarding a case filed by a parent whose individual policy did not include autism coverage. The case was brought before both the Exchange staff and the policy holder's insurance carrier and determined that the individuals insurance carrier was not required to provide autism services because the policy was not under the Autism Mandate. Parents who have the non autism coverage plans may qualify for special enrollment under the Exchange or wait until the next open enrollment to sign up for the Exchange. Mr. Rand said open enrollment for ACA insurance coverage begins November 1, 2014, through February 2015. He said individual policies within the Exchange will be included in the Autism Mandate Group Plan. The autism mandate now applies to individual policies because AID chose the small group plan to be the benchmark plan. If it is not an individual exchange issue policy, then it was either grandfathered before March 2010 or it is a non-grandfathered extended individual policy. Mr. Rand stated retroactive legislation that impacts individual health insurance contracts could create legal issues. Mr. Rand said task force members may email him with questions or concerns as they begin developing legislation regarding autism health insurance coverage.

Presentation of Updates on the Arkansas Better Choice Program and Helping Kids with Autism

Ms. Tonya Williams, Division Director, Arkansas Department of Human Services, Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education, was recognized. Ms. Williams said Congress signed \$1.25 billion to fund Early Learning Initiative programs from birth to five years of age. Of those funds, \$500 million has been appropriated for early head start child care partnership grants to expand services to children from birth to 3 years of age. Her division partnered with local entities to meet with early child care centers around the state. The goal was to encourage and assess the number of early head start centers who plan to apply for the grant. Ms. Williams said approximately 15,000 three and four year old preschoolers in Arkansas who qualify for Arkansas Better Chance services are unable to apply due to lack of state funding. Ms. Williams' department is in the process of renewing its state budget plan and is waiting for approval from the Department of Education and the Governor's office. Her department's flat budget is \$111 million. They are asking for 2.5% cost of living increase. Ms. Williams said her department's Resource and Referral Agency disseminated autism materials to providers around the state. She will report back to the task force on any feedback her department has received.

The meeting adjourned at 2:30 p.m.