

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING**  
**OF THE**  
**ARKANSAS LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**

**Friday August 21, 2020**

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The Arkansas Legislative Council met at 9:00 a.m., Friday, July 28, 2020, in Committee Room A of the Big Mac Building, Little Rock, Arkansas. Co-Chair Jeff Wardlaw called the meeting to order and recognized a quorum of members present. The members present are listed on the sign-in sheets.

**New Business**

CARES Act Discussion

Co-Chair Wardlaw recognized Mr. Jake Bleed, Director, DF&A – Office of Budget to present the CARES Act – Coronavirus Relief Funds report (Attachment 1).

Mr. Bleed began by stating the Coronavirus Relief Funds report is regularly sent to the Bureau of Legislative Research to track the use and standing of all the funds that have been distributed from the Coronavirus Relief Fund. That fund includes the \$1.25 billion that was made available through the federal CARES Act. It does not cover direct payments.

Mr. Bleed continued, stating when the C.A.R.E.S. Act Steering Committee makes a recommendation to transfer funds from the \$1.25 billion to a specific project, if and when that recommendation is approved by the Governor, DF&A will move the amount over to a separate holding fund, but it does not leave the Treasury. The payment is not made out to the agency or anyone else. The agency that is responsible for administering the program will go forward with the program and incur any expenses, invoices, or financial obligations that need to be paid. The agency will then make contact with DF&A and inform them of the total amount incurred. DF&A will then release the funds for those incurred obligations.

Co-Chair Wardlaw recognized Senator Hammer for questions. Senator Hammer asked, in regard to the federal requirements, by the end of the year, is the money considered appropriated or will it have to be sent back to the federal government. Mr. Bleed responded that it would be “goods in hand”, not appropriated, and not even spent, but goods would have to be in hand for whatever has already been paid for. Making a big purchase at the end, would not be allowed. However, there are rules that have been put in place allowing the money to be spent after December 31, 2020 to pay for things that have been received, and that would include contracts.

Co-Chair Wardlaw recognized Senator Joyce Elliott and Senator Kim Hammer for questions. After responses by Mr. Jake Bleed, that concluded discussion of the CARES Act fund.

CARES Act Appropriation Requests

Co-Chair Wardlaw recognized Ms. Stephanie Williams, Chief of Staff, Arkansas Department of Health (ADH) to present her agency request. She stated the request is an additional supplemental appropriation request in the amount of \$16 million to the Arkansas Department of Health to

support contact tracing. Ms. Williams stated the Arkansas Department of Health has been appropriated \$22,000,400 for contact tracing to-date. The original proposal was made and approved through the CARES Act Steering Committee in May 2020, and then appropriated by the Legislative Council. The Department of Health then entered into a contract with *General Dynamics Information Technology (GDIT)* to add 350 contact tracers. At that time, there were less than 2,000 active cases in the state of Arkansas, and the need is calculated based on the number of active cases. When it was realized that the case rate was growing, a second contract was secured with *Arkansas Foundation for Medical Care (AFMC)*. Each contract is for \$20 million, but only half of that amount will be funded from the CARES Act fund. The other is federally funded and will be used after December 31, 2020.

Ms. Williams further stated, that *General Dynamics Information Technology* will receive up to \$10,500 between now and December 2020 if they are fully staffed and performing according to the metrics with 350 contact tracers. The additional funding would be used for both contract vendors to add additional capacity to assist with case investigations, which would be the addition of 20 nurses and an addition of up to another 350 contact tracers.

Co-Chair Wardlaw recognized Ms. Jo Thompson, Chief Financial Officer, Arkansas Department of Health to further present.

After presentation, Co-Chair Wardlaw recognized Senator Jim Hendren, Representative Mary Bentley, Representative Megan Godfrey, Senator Jimmy Hickey, Representative Jim Dotson, Representative Deborah Ferguson, Senator Kim Hammer, Senator Gary Stubblefield, Representative LeAnne Burch, Representative Andy Davis, Senator Linda Chesterfield, Senator Missy Irvin, Senator Alan Clark, Representative John Payton, Senator Blake Johnson, Representative Robin Lundstrum, Co-Chair Cecile Bledsoe, Representative Charlene Fite, and Senator Joyce Elliott for questions.

Co-Chair Wardlaw recognized, Ms. Stephanie Williams, Ms. Jo Thompson, Mr. Jake Bleed, and Ms. Connie Melton, Director, Center for Health Protection, Department of Health, to respond.

Representative Charlene Fite asked how are the hearing impaired population being contacted about their test results or any other information. Ms. Williams responded that ADH has a translation service available and American Sign Language is included in that service. Ms. Melton further responded that ADH has engaged in an agreement with the company *Voice*.

After questions and discussion by members and ADH representatives, Co-Chair Wardlaw then recognized Mr. Ray Hanley, President, CFO, Arkansas Foundation for Medical Care (AFMC), and Ms. Nena Sanchez, Sr. Director, General Dynamics Information Technology (GDIT) to come forward to respond to questions.

Co-Chair Wardlaw recognized Senator Joyce Elliott and Senator Kim Hammer for questions.

Co-Chair Wardlaw then recognized Senator Missy Irvin for questions. Senator Irvin asked how many bilingual staff had been hired and if any speak Marshallese. Ms. Sanchez responded that her company has 31 bilingual staff members, (none are Marshallese), and use a service called *Language Line*, where a caller can connect with an interpreter within 30 seconds. Mr. Hanley reported that his company had recently hired their first Marshallese employee, and have hired

about 30 Hispanic employees. Mr. Hanley also stated that his company uses a translating service, but prefer to use bilingual employees due to efficiency.

Co-Chair Wardlaw recognized Senator Linda Chesterfield for questions. Senator Chesterfield asked approximately how many contacts have there been with individuals to help them better utilize the services. Ms. Sanchez stated that her company has been assigned over 3,200 cases and has generated over 5,200 contacts, with 91% complete. Mr. Hanley responded that at this time, he did not have the exact number, but the goal is to do the work for as many cases as the Arkansas Department of Health sends.

Co-Chair Wardlaw recognized Representative Charlene Fite, Senator Gary Stubblefield, and Representative Fredrick Love for questions. Representative Love expressed his concerns with the contractors having challenges with recruiting Marshallese staff.

Co-Chair Wardlaw recognized Senator Kim Hammer for questions. Senator Hammer asked what obstacles did each contractor face when trying to hire Marshallese staff. Mr. Hanley responded that their experience has been trying to find Marshallese or bilingual workers who meet the requisite skills for the job, like customer service.

Co-Chair Wardlaw recognized Representative Fredrick Love for a motion.

**Representative Love made a motion to approve the \$16,000,000 for contact tracing for the Arkansas Department of Health.**

**Co-Chair Wardlaw recognized Senator Linda Chesterfield. Senator Chesterfield made a motion for immediate consideration. The motion was seconded and passed by voice vote.**

**The motion to approve the \$16,000,000 for contact tracing for the Arkansas Department of Health was seconded and passed by voice vote.**

A roll call was initiated on the motion to approve \$16,000,000 for the Arkansas Department of Health.

**Upon a showing of three hands, a roll call, by division, was initiated, starting with Senate members. The Senate roll call resulted in a twelve (12) to ten (10) vote for the motion; the House roll call resulted in a twenty-three (23) to three (3) vote for the motion, therefore the motion passed.**

Co-Chair Wardlaw made an announcement that Item C.2(a) had been withdrawn from the agenda by the Arkansas Department of Health.

Co-Chair Wardlaw moved on to the next item on the agenda. Co-Chair Wardlaw recognized Ms. Stephanie Williams, Chief of Staff, Arkansas Department of Health (ADH), and Dr. Pearl McElfish, Vice Chancellor, UAMS, Northwest Arkansas Campus, to come forward to present their request.

*Co-Chair Wardlaw had to momentarily step away from the Chair.*

Co-Chair Cecile Bledsoe recognized Dr. McElfish to give an overview of their agency's request. Dr. McElfish stated that prior to her appointment as Vice Chancellor, UAMS, Northwest, she founded the Office of Community Health at UAMS in Northwest Arkansas, where the primary focus is addressing health disparities, specifically in the Marshallese and Hispanic communities. Dr. McElfish further stated that about half of her staff of 60 are bilingual. She further stated, UAMS has recruited a Marshallese physician, one of two in the world. They have also hired Marshallese nurses, with there being less than 20 in the world. She stated a healthcare transformation division had also been created and when the COVID-19 pandemic started, the group's focus shifted to specifically addressing COVID-19. Dr. McElfish further stated that in Northwest Arkansas, 70% of people with COVID-19 are Marshallese or Hispanic.

Co-Chair Bledsoe recognized Representative Fredrick Love for questions. Representative Love asked Dr. McElfish, if the opportunity was provided, how many contact tracers could she gather. Dr. McElfish responded that without funding approval, there are preliminary steps, but she is confident that from the number of people that have already been hired, she could hire Marshallese and Spanish staff within two (2) to three (3) weeks, with funding approval. Representative Love asked if the project was put off for another 30 days, what would be the impact. Dr. McElfish responded it would be a real problem for people in the community.

Co-Chair Bledsoe recognized Senator Linda Chesterfield for a motion.

**Senator Linda Chesterfield made a motion to approve the \$7,000,000 appropriation request for Arkansas Department of Health – Northwest Arkansas Council.**

Senator Chesterfield spoke to the motion. Co-Chair Bledsoe recognized Senator Missy Irvin for comments against the motion.

*Co-Chair Wardlaw returned to preside as Chair.*

Co-Chair Wardlaw recognized Senator Joyce Elliott who spoke in favor of the motion.

Co-Chair Wardlaw recognized Senator Kim Hammer who spoke against the motion. Co-Chair Wardlaw recognized Representative Andy Davis for questions. Co-Chair Wardlaw recognized Representative Robin Lundstrum for comments. She stated her concern with spending more money on contact tracing is that there is also a need for food, shelter, and other needs outside of contact tracing.

Co-Chair Wardlaw recognized Representative Jim Dotson for comments. After comments, Representative Dotson requested to make a substitute motion.

**Representative Dotson made a substitute motion to approve \$4,000,000 for the Arkansas Department Health – Northwest Arkansas Council and direct the Arkansas Department Health to use a portion of the \$16,000,000 that was approved for the Arkansas Department Health to supplement the remaining \$3,000,000 of the initial Arkansas Department Health – Northwest Arkansas Council request.**

Co-Chair Wardlaw recognized Senator Jim Hendren to speak against the substitute motion. Co-Chair Wardlaw recognized Senator Alan Clark to speak for the substitute motion.

Co-Chair Wardlaw recognized Senator Linda Chesterfield for a motion.

**Senator Chesterfield made a motion for immediate consideration. The motion was seconded and passed by voice vote.**

**Co-Chair Wardlaw moved on to the voting of the substitute motion made by Representative Dotson. The substitute motion was seconded but failed by voice vote.**

Co-Chair Wardlaw recognized Senator Stephanie Flowers for a motion.

**Senator Flowers made a motion for immediate consideration. The motion was seconded and passed by voice vote.**

**Co-Chair Wardlaw moved on to the voting of the original motion made by Senator Linda Chesterfield. The motion was seconded and passed by voice vote.**

A roll call was initiated on the motion to approve \$7,000,000 for the Arkansas Department of Health – Northwest Arkansas Council.

**Upon a showing of three hands, a roll call, by division, was initiated, starting with House members. The House roll call resulted in a twenty-three (23) to four (4) vote for the motion; The Senate roll call resulted in a twelve (12) to nine (9) vote for the motion; therefore the motion passed.**

Co-Chair Wardlaw recognized Senator Missy Irvin for a Point of Privilege. Senator Irvin gave information to members about an Emergency Solutions Grant Program. She stated the program is designed for issues like what had been discussed in the meeting. It is additional federal money that is available for food, shelter, and other issues. She further stated there are also Community Block Program grants available. This would maximize the use of federal dollars.

### **Adjournment**

At 11:51a.m., the meeting was adjourned as there was no further business to come before the Legislative Council.

Respectfully submitted,

ATTEST:

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Representative Jeff Wardlaw  
Co-Chair, Representatives

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Marty Garrity  
Executive Secretary