

**REPORT
OF THE
ARKANSAS LEGISLATIVE TASK FORCE ON AUTISM**

September 19, 2014

Mr. Chairmen:

Pursuant to A.C.A. § 10-3-2603, we are submitting, for your review and consideration, the Annual Report of the Arkansas Legislative Task Force on Autism.

This report includes activities, accomplishments, and future endeavors that occurred during the reporting period of September 1, 2013 through August 31, 2014. The Task Force continues to meet on a regular basis gathering input from parents, state agency representatives, educational entities, and advocacy representatives.

The Task Force has added three subcommittees and several advisory non-voting members with expertise in the research, diagnosis, treatment, and education of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The following lists each subcommittee and its major focus:

- Evidenced-based Classroom Strategies Subcommittee - a regional network structure with sufficient capacity to insure evidenced-based practices during the school day
- Education Outreach to Underserved Minority Subcommittee – outcomes desired by parents and stakeholders for children with autism and special needs and incentives
- Building Statewide Capacity for Delivery of Educational Services Subcommittee – adequate behavioral health professionals competent to treat individuals with developmental disabilities

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Autism Spectrum Disorder report for Arkansas states the number children 8 years old identified with ASD in 2010 was 1 in 65 compared to 1 in 95 in 2008. This reflects a 48% increase in 2010 over 2008. The gender breakdown cites 1 in 40 boys and 1 in 72 girls identified with ASD. This reinforces the importance of screening for autism symptoms in an appropriate and timely manner. The Task Force places high priority on early diagnosis and appropriate treatment as early in life as possible.

The Task Force is pleased to report the following accomplishments:

- implementation of the Arkansas Department of Education's advisory guidelines for the use of student restraints in public schools or educational settings
- under Arkansas's Private Option, children with developmental disabilities may receive medical services under the benefits of private insurance
- Department of Human Services' submission of the state's waiver request to implement the Community First Choice Option (CFCO). This is a very high priority for implementation to eliminate the Home and Community Based waiting list
 - Implementation of the CFCO waiver is a very high priority of and strongly supported by the Task Force. The Task Force encourages all legislators to approve its implementation.

- implementation of a master's level Autism Graduate Certificate at the University of Arkansas for a master's or doctorate degree specializing in Autism Spectrum disorder (ASD)
- additional anti-bullying legislation requiring that school districts provide the Department of Education with the website address at which a copy of their adopted anti-bullying policies may be found

The Task Force is looking forward to the following future endeavors:

- strong support for expansion of the Pre-K program and implementation of professional development for all Pre-K instructors to identify children at risk for autism and other disabilities
- stronger support for the concepts of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) through which to meet the needs of Arkansas's children
- attention to the criteria for placement in the Alternative Learning Environment program
- assessing how to better serve youth in the Department of Children and Family Services programs
- advocate for higher education to provide courses of study for Board Certified Behavior Analysts
- strongly advocate for functional skills development and community living for families that suffer from autism
- infrastructure for a main autism center and satellite centers with highly trained autism professionals to connect resources to rural and underserved populations

We applaud the dedication and commitment of the Task Force and look forward to its continued efforts on behalf of developmental disabled children and their families.

Respectfully submitted,

Senator Uvalde Lindsey, Co-Chair

Representative Henry Wilkins, IV, Co-Chair