**MINUTES**

**SENATE INTERIM COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

**HOUSE INTERIM COMMITTEE ON AGING, CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

**LEGISLATIVE AND MILITARY AFFAIRS**

**Meeting Jointly**

**Wednesday, June 13, 2012, 8:30 a.m.**

**Hardscrabble Country Club, 5211 Cliff Drive, Fort Smith, 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, June 13, 2012, at 8:30 a.m. at the Hardscrabble Country Club, 5211 Cliff Drive, Fort Smith, Arkansas.

Committee members present: Senators Missy Irvin, Chair, Stephanie Flowers, and Eddie Joe Williams; Representatives present: Stephanie Malone, Chair, Gary Deffenbaugh, Hudson Hallum, Kim Hammer, Justin Harris, Loy Mauch, David Meeks, Gary Stubblefield, Tim Summers and Jon Woods.

Other legislators present: Representatives Nate Bell, Jane English, Josh Johnston, Stephen Meeks, Tracy Pennartz, Mary Lou Slinkard, Stephen Meeks, and Terry Rice.

Representative Stephanie Malone called the meeting to order.

Mr. Mike Barr, Chairman of Governmental Affairs, Fort Smith Regional Chamber of Commerce was recognized and welcomed the legislators to Fort Smith.

Presentation: Step Up Speak Out
Mr. Sam T. Sicard, co-chairperson of Step Up Speak Out said the primary goals of Step Up Speak Out is to provide education for the community about child abuse, to promote awareness on the topic of child abuse and to engage the community in the prevention of child abuse.

Goals for Step Up Speak Out:

* Co-ordinate with other committees to prevent overlap
* Outline venues for education such as a seminar format for adults and educational materials
for youth, giving consideration to age/developmental levels.
* Multicultural considerations/translation needs and need for materials to be available in Spanish,
Vietnamese, etc.
* Compilation of a resource book.
* Identification of individuals within the community working with child abuse and to utilize the strengths and knowledge of those entities (e.g., Hamilton House, Crisis Center, Prosecuting Attorney’s Office, Law Enforcement, Therapists, support groups, churches).

Ms. Kelly Underwood, co-chairperson of Step Up Speak Out stressed the need to have mandatory education programs for parents, children, and teachers.

Mr. Tom Minton, Executive Director of United Way, Fort Smith noted that The National Child Protection Training Center on the campus of Northwest Arkansas Community College provides training for mandated reporters.

Senator Irvin asked about the distribution of United Way funds. Mr. Minton stated that services are provided with the money raised in each individual area, therefore the poorer areas suffer the most.

Representative Pennartz said classes on mandated reporting should be taught on a continuing basis and recommended the program for all parents, teachers, organizations and agencies.

Representative Summers asked about the accuracy of data on sexual offenders. Mr. Minton said the National Children’s Alliance has accurate data on offenders. Mr. Minton also said children are given classes on abuse beginning at kindergarten, second grade and fifth grade, and that usually after the training, more cases are reported by those children.

Senator Irvin announced that the Taskforce on Abused and Neglected Children will be meeting on
June 19, 2012 in Arkadelphia and encouraged members to attend.

Representative David Meeks said he is in the process of working on a meeting concerning human trafficking to include child abuse.

Ms. Underwood said statistics show that a large percent of sexually abused children end up as addicts and many also are institutionalized or imprisoned.

Representative Hallum noted that Hospital Emergency Care Trauma Council Injury Prevention funds are available to aid in injury prevention for susceptible children..

Representative Malone introduced Ms. Jackie Hamilton, Executive Director, of Hamilton House. Hamilton House is a home for abused and neglected children to receive services. Ms. Hamilton stated education is the key to prevention. Everyone needs to be made aware of programs such as Veritas within the Catholic Church.

Representative English was recognized to discuss ISP 2011-203.

*REQUESTING THAT THE ARKANSAS LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL REFER TO THE  HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGING, CHILDREN AND YOUTH, LEGISLATIVE &  MILITARY AFFAIRS A STUDY OF THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS, THE STATE'S VETERANS HOMES’  PROCEDURES, SAFETY, FUNDING, AND THE STANDARDS OF CARE, AND  ALTERNATIVES FOR PROVIDING PROPER CARE AND TREATMENT FOR THE STATE’S MILITARY VETERAN*. **[Exhibit D]**

Representative English spoke about the recent problems within the Arkansas Department of Veterans Affairs (VA): lack of funding to operate, administrative issues, and taking money from the veterans to pay for day-to-day operations. Representative English said the decision to be made is whether to find the resources to keep the present veterans home open, which can house 70 veterans or find the resources to build a new home, one that could accommodate more veterans. There are approximately 260,000 veterans in the state. Many of the veterans are not eligible for Medicaid because they have other resources. Since 2009, the federal VA has paid $6,000-$7,000 per month into the veteran’s home fund to take care of qualifying veterans expenses, to include a doctor and medications. She noted that the doctor does not come to the veteran’s home even though he is being paid $30,000 per year for his services.

Senator Flowers asked if the $6,000-$7,000 per month was not enough to pay for the veterans care. Representative English explained that the issue is the funds that continued to be collected after 2009 when the VA was mandated not to collect payments from the veterans in these homes. Senator Flowers said she had often encountered problems with Veterans Affairs and was glad to see there would be a study done on the administration of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Representative English stated that Cissy Rucker, the new Director, understands what is happening and realizes there are problems. Representative English noted the Fiscal Session just ended in March, 2012 yet no one realized there was not enough money in the budget for the veteran’s home. There is no process in place to look at individual programs to make sure they are properly funded. We have gone through 3 to 4 budget cycles with the same false numbers with the same amount of money being appropriated to the home each year.

Representative Hammer said the study will prove to be beneficial. The home is said to be deficient of about $210,000 per year. There is a bed tax being charged on the facility, even though it is not considered a nursing home, which amounts to approximately $200,000. This issue needs to be addressed along with the fact that the home does not have a director. Representative Hammer noted that there was a plan that was actually presented for the possibility of dispersing the residents of the Veterans Home to other appropriate facilities..

Representative Meeks asked if there was a plan to repay the $580,000 to the veterans. Senator Eddie Joe Williams said the Governor will make the money available. **Representative David Meeks asked for reports as to the progress on repayment of the $580,000 to the veterans.**

Representative Hammer requested that the Interim Study include a review and explanation of the VA budget and also examine whether any crimes were committed in the department related to this issue.

Representative David Meeks asked when the last audit was done on the veterans home. Representative English said she did not know. Representative Stephen Meeks said that, according to the newspapers, a recent audit discovered the discrepancies. Representative Hammer said an audit has been requested. Representative Summers said it would be discussed at the next Executive Committee Meeting on June 21, 2012. Senator Flowers said she understood that Legislative Audit will start random audits on agencies that depend solely on Federal funding.

Representative David Meeks made the motion to adopt the ISP as written, to include Representative Hammer’s recommendations, if not currently covered under the ISP as written. The motion was seconded by Representative Hammer. The motion carried.

Varnaria Vickers- Smith explained that the committee adopted the ISP as written, with the stipulation that if necessary, amendments would be made to incorporate Representative Hammer’s concerns. Ms. Vickers-Smith informed the committee that she will consult with legal on this matter.

The meeting was adjourned.