

**SENATE INTERIM COMMITTEE ON CITY, COUNTY, & LOCAL AFFAIRS
HOUSE INTERIM COMMITTEE ON CITY, COUNTY, & LOCAL AFFAIRS**

MEETING JOINTLY

**AUGUST 21, 2013
MINUTES**

Senate and House Interim Committees on City, County, and Local Affairs met Wednesday, August 21, 2013 at 3:30 p.m. in Hot Springs, Arkansas. The meeting was held during the 2013 Annual Conference of the Association of Arkansas Counties.

Committee members present were Senators Missy Irvin, Senate Chair, and Stephanie Flowers; also Representatives David Fielding, House Chair, Eddie Armstrong, Scott Baltz, Bruce Cozart, Kim Hammer, Fonda Hawthorne, David Hillman, Monte Hodges, Mike Holcomb, Douglas House, Joe Jett, Andy Mayberry, George McGill, Mary Lou Slinkard, David Whitaker, and Richard Womack.

Other members present were Senators Alan Clark, Bruce Maloch, and Eddie Joe Williams; also Representatives Denny Altes, Duncan Baird, Harold Copenhaver, Mary "Prissy" Hickerson, Debra Hobbs, John Hutchison, Andrea Lea, Homer Lenderman, Frederick Love, and Nate Steel.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – June 26, 2013 [Exhibit B]

A motion to approve the minutes of the June 26, 2013 committee meeting was made by Representative Baltz and seconded by Representative Cozart. The minutes were adopted unanimously.

OPENING REMARKS – Representative Fielding and Senator Irvin, Committee Chairs

Representative Fielding thanked the Association of Arkansas Counties (AAC) for hosting the committee meetings during the annual conference. Senator Irvin thanked the legislators for attending.

Welcome by Chris Villines, Executive Director, Association of Arkansas Counties

Representative Fielding recognized Mr. Chris Villines, Executive Director, Association of Arkansas Counties (AAC). Mr. Villines introduced Mr. Jeff Sikes, AAC Legislative Director, who also attended the meeting. Mr. Villines told legislators healthcare is a major focus of the conference because counties are struggling with changes made by the federal government, which will impact 15,000 county employees statewide, plus the prison population housed in county jails. Mr. Villines said another important topic during the conference is the cost of 911 funding. The annual cost to counties collectively is \$10 million. He believes the 911 Blue Ribbon Committee created during the 2013 legislative Session will give counties an opportunity to review the 911 systems for the possibility of consolidating resources and adding cost savings.

Mr. Jeff Sikes was recognized for comments. Mr. Sikes told legislators the AAC plans to host regional meetings with state, county, and local officials to discuss the needs of their communities. AAC staff will invite legislators to participate in meetings held in their district.

Update on ISP 2013-161 (HB1191) “An Act to Provide Additional Methods for Collecting Delinquent Rural Fire Department Dues and Fees” [Exhibit E]

Representative Fielding recognized Representative Hammer, sponsor of the ISP, for comments. Representative Hammer discussed research he found which shows the positive effect a reduction in the Public Protection Classification ratings would have on rural fire departments. He learned that a reduction in the classification ratings from a 9 rating down to a 6 rating will produce an \$84 million savings to taxpayers in insurance premiums. He said research also shows there is \$8.6 million in uncollected dues owed to rural fire departments statewide. Representative Hammer is currently working with the Central Arkansas Land Development Office on a plan which would allow rural fire departments to apply for funding through grants. Funding obtained from grants could be used by a rural fire department to obtain consulting services to process documents and work toward lower classification ratings. Legislators discussed their concerns and support of alternative methods for the collection of rural fire department dues.

“Is Your Community Ready for Development?” An overview of the University of Central Arkansas (UCA) community and economic development programs, plus ideas and questions to take back to local leaders to begin the development effort

Representative Fielding recognized Ms. Kristy Carter, Executive Director, Division of Outreach and Community Engagement, UCA, and Ms. Amy Whitehead, Director, Center for Community and Economic Development, UCA. Ms. Carter thanked the committee for the opportunity to discuss the University of Central Arkansas (UCA) Center for Community and Economic Development Program. She introduced Ms. Amy Whitehead for a presentation. Ms. Whitehead described UCA's program. She said the Community Development Institute is the keystone program for UCA's outreach efforts to connect the campus with communities through training and technical assistance. Weeklong training sessions are provided to community leaders and development professionals. Customized training for communities can also be provided to business and industry leaders. Technical assistance is provided to communities to assist in survey development, asset mapping, planning assistance, and implementation. Ms. Whitehead described community development as a long-term process bringing together business and community leaders who work to improve a community's infrastructure. Leaders join together to assess, to develop a strategic vision, to recruit industry, to grow business through entrepreneurship, and to expand and retain current business. The UCA program offers real-world training for elected officials, city planners, chamber directors, economic development officials, and non-profit leaders. Ms. Whitehead said the program was created in 1987 and

has become nationally recognized. The program has been replicated throughout the U.S.

Discussion of the Arkansas Department of Correction (ADC) Regional Maintenance Program

Senator Irvin introduced Ms. Michelle Williams, Deputy Warden, North Central Unit, Arkansas Department of Correction (ADC), and Mr. Grant Harris, Assistant Director of Institutions, ADC. Ms. Williams described the Regional Maintenance Program at her North Central Unit. The ADC program provides inmate work crews to communities, schools, organizations, cities, counties, state and federal government agencies, and non-profit organizations. Projects the inmate crews have performed include clearing debris from creeks and streams following a natural disaster. Local communities support the program, which has been used by local government agencies in preparation for special events; including county fairs, parades, rodeos, and fire department fundraisers. Inmate work crews can provide maintenance if a client provides the necessary materials and tools. This makes large projects much more cost effective. Ms. Williams said clients often provide meals for the inmates in exchange for services. She discussed a misconception held by the public that inmate labor is a form of punishment. The ADC mission statement for the program is to strengthen the inmates' work ethic by teaching good habits and discipline. Inmates are only eligible to become a member of a Regional Maintenance squad when a high level behavior class rating has been achieved. A program classification committee, consisting of ADC department heads, meets on a weekly basis to determine which inmates fit the criteria. Ms. Williams said inmates who are ineligible are those whose crimes include rape, murder, capitol offense, kidnapping, felony detainer or escape. Inmates must also have less than seven years remaining on their sentence. Strict rules are enforced by the ADC staff. The inmates are closely supervised by armed officers at all times. The inmates are transported to work sites by bus and are accompanied by two sergeants and one lieutenant. The lieutenant follows with a trailer with horses and all necessary equipment. Ms. Williams said the inmates in the Regional Maintenance Program are housed in barracks and kept separate from the general inmate population who are ineligible for the program. The North Central Unit is located in Calico Rock. It serves several surrounding counties, but travel can't exceed a 50-mile radius. The inmate crews provide valuable assistance to surrounding communities with as much as 10,000 man hours a month.

Mr. Grant Harris told legislators there are additional Regional Maintenance programs are located in Mississippi County, the Texarkana Regional Unit, the Wrightsville Unit, Benton, and Pine Bluff. He said for fiscal year 2012, over 600,000 man hours were provided by inmate labor for a cost savings to the state of \$4 million.

Representative Fielding announced upcoming meetings of the committees scheduled for Tuesday, October 1, 2013 in Magnolia, Arkansas and Wednesday, October 2, 2013 in Camden, Arkansas.

Senator Irvin told legislators she is preparing an Interim Study Proposal to develop a program in Arkansas similar to a program already implemented in the state of Pennsylvania. The program is designed to help with problems with rural dirt roads and to mitigate drainage problems in streams and culverts. She invited legislators who are interested in this topic to join her in the study.

Senator Irvin announced the rededication of the Greers Ferry Dam in Heber Springs, which is scheduled for Thursday, October 3, 2013.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 4:45 p.m.