

ARKANSAS LEGISLATIVE TASK FORCE ON AUTISM
MEETING MINUTES
JANUARY 19, 2018

The Arkansas Legislative Task Force on Autism met Friday, January 19, 2018, at 1:00 p.m., in Room 171, State Capitol, in Little Rock, Arkansas.

Task Force members present were: Senator Uvalde Lindsey, co-chair; Senator Keith Ingram, and Representative Justin Boyd, co-chair; Ms. Karan Burnette, Ms. Tami Harlan, Ms. Jennifer Hennessey, Ms. Diane Holitik, Dr. Randal Hundley, Ms. Linda Rogers, Dr. Tyra Reid, Ms. Sheila Smith, Ms. Elizabeth Pitman (*for Melissa Stone*), Ms. Lisa Tyler, Ms. Dianna Varady, and Ms. Nancy Wells.

Representative Boyd called the meeting to order.

Adoption of Minutes from December 15, 2017 [Exhibit C]

The minutes from December 15, 2017, were approved by acclamation.

Discussion of Encouraging in State Universities to offer Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) Coursework

Dr. Maria Markham, Director, Arkansas Department of Higher Education, was recognized and explained how universities implement a new program. Once the institution makes a request and the program is approved, the curriculum can be available the following semester. She said the ABA coursework is simple to implement because it builds off existing degrees and certificates.

Dr. Peggy Schaefer-Whitby, Associate Professor, College of Education & Health Professions, University of Arkansas Fayetteville, was recognized via conference call. Dr. Whitby explained how the ABA program offered at the University of Arkansas is an online graduate certificate program and requires 750 practicum hours. College students interested in the ABA program must have a master's degree in Psychology, Applied Behavior Analysis, or Education. Students who wish to take the practicum outside the U of A must take 1250 supervised hours. She explained that many college students taking the coursework find the program time consuming and too rigorous to complete. Lack of funding is also an issue because of federal guidelines on credit limits. Students with a bachelor's degree who want to become behavior analysts can take the Board Certified assistant Behavior Analyst (BCaBA) course work as a minor. Currently, there are forty certified BCBA's in the state.

Mr. Shane Broadway, Vice President for University Relations, Arkansas State University (ASU), was recognized and stated it is difficult to hire BCBA faculty to teach the ABA program because they are in high demand and make higher salaries working in the private sector. Currently, ASU has two fully credential faculty members and are searching for another ABA credential teacher.

Dr. Bruce Smith, Associate Dean, College of Education & Health Professions, UALR, was recognized and explained that it is difficult to get administrative approval to start a new program if the enrollment numbers are low. He feels coordinating efforts between UAM and other in-state Universities will better maximize student enrollment and expand qualified faculty needed to teach and oversee the ABA practicum.

Ms. Renee Holmes, Arkansas Autism Partnership (AAP) Coordinator, Partners for Inclusive Communities, was recognized and briefly explained because there are not enough of BCBA's in the state children with autism, who live in rural areas, are continuing to wait for months before receiving

ABA services. She said it is difficult to get BCBA's that work in border line areas to provide ABA therapy to children living in different border line areas of the state.

Ms. Tami Harlan, Deputy Director, Division of Medicaid Services, (DMS) Arkansas Department of Human Services, was recognized and said children who live close to bordering states can receive ABA services from an out-of-state provider who is enrolled in Arkansas Medicaid. Ms. Harlan suggested legislation to provide a tax incentive to entice out-of-state BCBA's to set up their practice in the state. Ms. Harlan will verify if out-of-state consultants must have a BCBA license to bill Medicaid for ABA services and whether it falls under federal or Arkansas Medicaid rule.

Ms. Karan Burnette, Associate Director, AAP, Partners for Inclusive Communities, was recognized and explained BCBA's who have full caseloads will not drive long distances to see patients because they will not receive reimbursement for travel. Also, families who have private insurance that includes ABA therapy must utilize all their ABA coverage first before they can access Medicaid EPSDT. ABA is covered under EPSDT. Families who live in rural areas and have children who qualify for EPSDT cannot find a BCBA in their area to administer the ABA therapy.

Dr. Myla explained several issues BCBA's are struggling with regarding Medicaid billing. Dr. Myla, Ms. Elizabeth Pitman, and Ms. Harlan will meet to identify those issues and report back to the task force.

Dr. Angela Scott, Director, UAMS Kids First Program; Mr. Dusty Maxwell, Director, Pathfinder; and Ms. Tami Harlan, Deputy Director, DMS; will meet to discuss ideas on how to implement telemedicine as a tool to connect kids to services, and report back to the task force.

The meeting adjourned at 2:30 p.m.