

ARKANSAS LEGISLATIVE TASK FORCE ON AUTISM
MEETING MINUTES
OCTOBER 20, 2017

The Arkansas Legislative Task Force on Autism met Friday, October 20, 2017, at 1:00 p.m., in Room 171, State Capitol, in Little Rock, Arkansas.

Task Force members present were: Senator Uvalde Lindsey, Representative Justin Boyd, co-chairs, Ms. Renee Holmes (*for Ms. Karan Burnette*), Ms. Rhonda Saunders (*for Ms. Lisa Haley*), Ms. Tami Harlan, Dr. Randal Hundley, Dr. Tyra Reid, Ms. Karen Craig (*for Ms. Linda Rogers*), Ms. Regina Davenport, (*for Ms. Melissa Stone*), and Ms. Dianna Varady. Ms. Angela Ward (*for Ms. Tonya Williams, Advisory member*), also attended.

Senator Lindsey recognized guest and called the meeting to order.

Adoption of Minutes from November 18, 2016 [Exhibit C]

The minutes from November 18, 2016, were approved by acclamation.

Adoption of Task Force Rules and Procedures [Exhibit D]

Senator Lindsey made the motion to correct an error in the Legislative Task Force on Autism Rules and Procedures under Parliamentary Procedure “*the task force is made up of sixteen (22) members*” to read sixteen (16) members. The Rules and Procedures were adopted as amended.

Consideration of a Motion to Authorize Chairs to Approve Special Expenses Incurred by the Task Force [Exhibit E]

Dr. Reid made the motion to authorize chairs to approve special expenses incurred by the task force; and with a second by Dr. Hundley, the motion carried.

Discussion of Annual Reporting Requirement and Identifying Legislative Priorities [Handout]

Ms. Dianna Varady, Director, Arkansas Autism Resource & Outreach Center (AAROC), gave a brief overview of AAROC and the services they offer to professionals and families of autistic children needing access to behavioral therapy treatments. She gave a brief overview of the Arkansas Autism waiver (AAP). She explained that children with autism are now receiving Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) services through the Arkansas Medicaid Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment (EPSDT).

Ms. Varady explained that under Medicaid EPSDT policy, only a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) can administer ABA and under the state’s Autism waiver a Board Certified Assistant Behavior Analysts (BCaBA) can provide ABA services with BCBA supervision.

Ms. Varady suggested the task force organize a group to explore ideas on developing recruit incentives to increase the number of BCBA’s and BCaBA’s in the state. The task force began a list of legislative priorities:

1. Revise the Medicaid EPSDT program to incorporate BCaBA coverage
2. Collect data on the cost savings of incorporating BCaBA into the EPSDT model
3. Need more Universities in the state to offer BCBA/BCaBA core sequences and curricula
4. Explore ADE program funds and co-ops as an incentive to increase BCBA applicants
5. Develop training sites for Registered Behavior Technicians (RBT)

Ms. Renee Holmes, EPSDT State Coordinator, Partners for Inclusive Communities, said families with private health insurance must first exhaust their benefits before they can access EPSDT services. She said Northwest Arkansas has the largest number of children needing ABA services but do not have a BCBA or BCaBA in their area.

Ms. Tami Harlan, Deputy Director, DHS/Division of Medical Services, gave an update on the negotiations between the Arkansas Division of Developmental Services (DDS) and the Centers for Medicare Medicaid Services (CMS) regarding the AAP waiver. She said CMS requested the waiver include EPSDT services. DDS resubmitted the waiver and once the waiver is approved, DDS will resubmit a request to increase the cap from 100 to 150 slots. Currently there are 47 children on the waiver list waiting to receive services.

Dr. Sheila Barnes, Ph.D., BCBA, Hope 4 Autism, said there are only two BCaBA's in the state and the reason there are not more BCaBA's is because the pay scale is much lower than a BCBA, which is why they go on to get their BCBA credential. She said BCaBA's with a bachelor's degree in ABA can sit for their exam to receive a Master's degree in BCBA.

Dr. Tyra Reid, Developmental-Behavioral Pediatrician, UAMS Dennis Developmental Center, gave an update on UAMS' Extension for Community Health Outcomes (ECHO) autism project. She said ECHO is a telemedicine based, education and case support project designed to expand access to autism treatment services in rural areas. Physician training through web-based platforms start January 2018.

Senator Lindsey requested task force members email their legislative priorities to staff who will disseminate to task force members.

Discussion of Future Agenda Items

Invite Workforce Education representative to speak at a future task force meeting

Invite Dr. Keith Vire, Arkansas Support Network, to speak at a future task force meeting

The next task force meeting will be Friday, December 15, 2017, at 1:00 p.m. in Room 151, at the State Capitol.

There being no further business the meeting adjourned at 2:35 p.m.