

ARKANSAS LEGISLATIVE TASK FORCE ON AUTISM
MEETING MINUTES
OCTOBER 17, 2014

The Arkansas Legislative Task Force on Autism met Friday, October 17, 2014, at 1:00 p.m., in Room 151, State Capitol, Little Rock, Arkansas. Senator Uvalde Lindsey, Senate Co-Chair, presided.

Task Force members present were Senator Uvalde Lindsey, Mr. Jim Brader, Ms. Alice Jones (*for Mr. Jay Bradford*), Ms. Karan Burnette, Dr. Loretta Cochran, Ms. Tina Davis, Ms. Lisa Haley, Mr. Robbie Nix (*for Ms. Glenda Higgs*), Ms. Karen Massey, Mr. Eric Moxley, Dr. Tyra Reid, Ms. Linda Rogers, and Ms. Dianna Varady.

Advisory members present were Representative Randy Alexander, Dr. Charlie Green, and Ms. Veronica Myers.

Senator Lindsey called the meeting to order.

Minutes – September 19, 2014, Meeting [Exhibit C]

The minutes from the September 19, 2014, Arkansas Legislative Task Force on Autism meeting were approved by acclamation.

Waiver Program Update

Ms. Karan Burnette, Associate Director / Arkansas Autism Partnership (AAP) Director, Partners for Inclusive Communities, was recognized. She introduced Partners staff Naomi Armstrong and Vickie Tankersly. Partners is a department in the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, College of Education and Health Professions at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville. Ms. Burnette gave a PowerPoint presentation explaining the Arkansas Autism Partnership's Medicaid waiver program is a project approved in 2012, by the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS), to assist children with autism. Partners contracts through the Department of Human Services (DHS), Division of Developmental Disabilities Services (DDS), as the administrative agency to manage the AAP waiver statewide. The waiver funds a team of professionals and paraprofessionals to provide intensive, evidence-based intervention services 20 to 30 hours per week in homes of children with an autism diagnosis who are between the ages of 18 months and 6 years of age. Parents are also trained and included as part of the team. There are 13 non-profit providers contracted with the AAP program. Partners received 188 waiver applications from parents across the state. The majority of the applications are from parents with children between 4 and 5 years of age. The average monthly cost to diagnose and treat each child in the program is \$809. The program expended \$1.3 million between November 2012 through October 2014. DDS and CMS are in the process of negotiating the renewal contract. Negotiations must be approved by October 1, 2015. Ms. Burnette said Medicaid could provide therapy services for older children with autism by adding it as a new service to the waiver and provided the task force a brochure summarizing the AAP program.

Ms. Burnette stated CMS announced in an Interpretive Memorandum, through the Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment (EPSDT) Medicaid program, autistic individuals

under age 21 requiring medical services, qualify for a Medicaid state plan service with no caps on level of care.

Dr. Cochran said the Medicaid waiver has saved the state \$1.5 million in autism services over the life of the child. She added DHS is holding public hearings regarding the Medicaid State Plan Transformation Amendment. Dr. Cochran encouraged the task force to attend the hearings and express encouraging remarks regarding the Amendment's positive outcomes by allowing children with autism to receive early intervention services from qualified providers at reasonable reimbursement rates.

Senator Lindsey suggested the task force address, at a future meeting, how Education Service Cooperatives can increase capacity to reach school districts they serve.

Access to Mental Health Care for Children on the Autism Spectrum

Dr. Charlie Green, Interim Director, Division of Behavioral Health Services (DBHS), DHS, was recognized. Dr. Green introduced Ms. Paula Stone, Assistant Director, DBHS. Ms. Stone explained DBHS uses the Rehabilitative Services for Persons with Mental Illness (RSPMI) Medicaid program to diagnose and treat children, youth and adults with a mental illness. Ms. Stone said autism is not an allowable diagnosis that RSPMI providers can bill for services. RSPMI providers billing Medicaid cannot treat their clients' autism, instead, they use a secondary diagnosis, such as an anxiety disorder, as the primary diagnosis.

Mr. Robbie Nix, Division of Medical Services, DHS, was recognized. Mr. Nix said Arkansas Medicaid made the decision to exclude autism spectrum disorder from the RSPMI program.

Ms. Varady listed concerns she has received from families of autistic children not able to receive behavioral health services under the RSPMI.

Representative Alexander said the School Choice Act of 2013 will be introduced in the next legislative session with an amendment to exempt students with an IEP from the 3% cap of the number of students transferring between private schools.

Discussion of Modes of Disseminating Information to Stakeholders

Ms. Estella Smith, Administrator, Bureau of Legislative Research, was recognized to give a demonstration of the Arkansas Legislative Task Force on Autism web page. Ms. Smith said the web page has been updated to include all minutes of the Task Force as well as current reports, events, and other information of interest to stakeholders. Task Force staff will maintain the web page and add requested documents, including links to related sources.

The meeting adjourned at 2:50 p.m.