

## MINUTES

### SENATE COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGING, CHILDREN AND YOUTH, AND LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS Meeting Jointly

Wednesday, February 11, 2026

1:30 PM

Room A, MAC

Little Rock, Arkansas

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Committee members present: Senators Ben Gilmore, Chair; Mark Johnson, and Dave Wallace; Representatives Sonia Eubanks Barker, Chair; Mary Bentley, Vice Chair; Glenn Barnes, Lincoln Barnett, Keith Brooks, Nick Burkes, Paul Childress, Matt Duffield, James Eaton, Diana Gonzales Worthen, Dolly Henley, Rick McClure, Jessie McGruder, Jason Nazarenko, Shad Pearce, and Joy Springer

Other members present: Senators Steve Crowell, Missy Irvin, and Fredrick Love; Representatives Fred Allen, Howard M. Beaty Jr., Stan Berry, Harlan Breaux, Cindy Crawford, Denise Ennett, Jon S. Eubanks, Kenneth B. Ferguson, Steve Hollowell, Tippi McCullough, David Ray, Jay Richardson, Johnny Rye, Tara Shephard, DeAnn Vaught, and Jeff Wardlaw

Senator Gilmore called the meeting to order.

#### **Consideration to Approve December 10, 2025, Meeting Minutes [Exhibit B]**

Senator Gilmore made a motion to approve meeting minutes, seconded by Representative Springer, and the motion carried.

#### **Appointment to the Child Maltreatment Investigations Oversight Committee**

Representative Nazarenko made motion to appoint Representative Mary Bentley to the Child Maltreatment Investigations Oversight Committee, seconded by Representative Barker, and the motion carried.

#### **Arkansas Infant and Child Death Review (ICDR) Program Annual Report [Exhibit D]**

Laura Taylor, Director, ICDR; Kevin Cleghorn, Chair, Arkansas Infant and Child Death Review (ICDR) State Panel; and Sherry Williamson, Member, Arkansas ICDR State Panel; presented an overview of unexpected infant and child deaths across all 11 regions of Arkansas.

#### **Discussion of HCR1010 by Representative Tara Shephard – Requesting the House Committee on Aging, Children and Youth, and Legislative Affairs and the Senate Interim Committee on Children and Youth to Study Ways to Improve the State’s Juvenile Justice System for Youth Committed to the Division of Youth Services of the Department of Human Services [Exhibit E]**

Representative Tara Shephard delivered an opening statement addressing the high costs of housing juvenile offenders. She noted that Arkansas incarcerates more youth than any other state and encouraged the committee to study ways to improve the state’s juvenile justice system.

**Discussion of Compliance, Enforcement, and Implementation Concerning Arkansas Juvenile Code § 9-35-423 [Exhibit F]**

Senator Missy Irvin, District 24, Arkansas Senate; Honorable Troy Braswell, Circuit Judge, 20th Judicial District; Brooke Steen, Juvenile Division Director, Administrative Office of the Courts; and Honorable Kathie Hess, Circuit Judge, 1st Judicial District; provided a presentation on juvenile justice reform, presenting the numbers from the Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth (SAVRY) from 2016 through 2025.

**Division of Youth Services (DYS) [Exhibit G]**

Michael Crump, Director, DYS, provided data on the number of children in DYS custody, as well as the number of children in the Rite of Passage program.

**Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) [Exhibit H]**

Courtney Salas-Ford, Chief of Staff, ADE, and Stacy Smith, Deputy Commissioner, Division of Elementary and Secondary Education, ADE, provided an overview of the number of student attendance and discipline from 2024 to 2025.

**Discussion of Advocates Perspective for Juvenile Justice [Exhibit I]**

Keesa Smith-Brantley, Executive Director, Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families, and Dr. Fitz Hill, Pastor, gave a discussion on reforming the juvenile justice system by first evaluating children who have committed a crime to determine whether they should be placed in the DYS system.

With no other business, the meeting adjourned at 4:15 p.m.