

The Task Force on Abused and Neglected Children

Task Force Summary

The Arkansas Legislative Task Force on Abused and Neglected Children, created by the Eighty-Fifth General Assembly during the Regular Session of 2005, was formed to examine how the State responds to child abuse and neglect. Members of the task force include representatives from government, law enforcement, child advocacy agencies, and medical professionals.

The task force is charged with examining best practices for prevention and intervention identified in national research. Such research resulted in the task force recommendations of more efficient methods of distributing limited public money, obtaining more federal funding, amending legislation, and providing written explanations for such changes. The testimony of local and national experts, practitioners, agency administrators, parents, clients of the child welfare system, and researchers are acknowledged throughout the research of the task force.

In November 2008, the task force submitted findings and recommendations to the House and Senate Public Health Committees; the House Aging, Children and Youth, Legislative and Military Affairs Committee; and the Senate Children and Youth Committee. Findings affirmed that there are twelve Child Advocacy Centers available, eight of the twelve Child Advocacy Centers available have received funding, and the largest gap in Child Advocacy Center availability is in Southeastern Arkansas. Recommendations include: prevention through easy access to education on detecting abuse and sexual exam coursework during medical school, heightened awareness of abuse and neglect in the State of Arkansas, access to mental health services for children that have experienced abuse, and appropriate checklists, screenings and assessments for concerned parents, teachers, and caregivers.

The task force is, and continues to be, highly committed to hearing from the public and working with the greatest degree of transparency possible. Meetings of the task force are open to the public and allow several professionals from a variety of human service agencies the opportunity to serve on the task force. The task force strives to remain knowledgeable about best practices and system failures, while compiling stories and ideas about how the system could be improved.

As of the last meeting, March 30, 2010, the task force has established several goals. These goals include the development of six multi-disciplinary teams, one per county; the development of a seventh advocacy center that provides medical evaluations; the expansion of the number of individuals and/or professionals who are qualified to do sexual abuse exams in a child friendly environment, as opposed to an Emergency Room; and hold meetings with prosecutors, medical board members, and a representative for the judicial system to discuss these issues. However, the main goal of the task force is to develop a data base that allows multi-disciplinary team coordinators to enter gathered information directly as it becomes available.

The objective of upcoming meetings will be to address how school sexual abuse counselors are performing and allow doctors, the medical board, prosecutors, judges and center workers to assist legislators in grasping a deeper understanding of what needs to be done to improve child welfare.

Appointments for this Task Force are still being accepted and membership is subject to change.

Current Task Force membership is as follows:

Governor/designee -

House Public Health, Welfare, & Labor, Chair/designee - Rep. Linda Tyler

Senate Public Health, Welfare, & Labor, Chair/designee - Senator Percy Malone

Senate Children & Youth, Chair/designee - Sen. Missy Irvin

House Aging, Children & Youth, Legislative & Military Affairs, Chair/designee - Rep. Stephanie Malone

DHS Children & Family Services Division (director/designee) - Cecile Blucker

DHS Mental Health Services Division (director/designee) - David Laffoon

DHS Division of Youth Services Division (director/designee) - Ron Angel

DHS Child Care & Early Childhood Education Division (chair/designee) - Tonya Russell

Administrative Office of the Courts (director/designee) - James Gingerich

Arkansas Coalition for Juvenile Justice (chair/designee) - Jerry Walsh, Chair

Arkansas Sheriffs' Association (president/designee) - Chuck Lange

Arkansas State Police (director/designee) - Colonel JR Howard

State Child Abuse & Neglect Prevention Board (chair/designee) - Sherri Jo McLemore

Arkansas Child Abuse/Rape/Domestic Violence Commission (UAMS Chancellor appointee) - Karen Worley

public defender (AR Public Defender Commission director/designee) - Jeff Rosenweig

prosecutor (Prosecutor Coordinator appointee) - Blake Batson

attorney ad litem (Administrative Office of the Courts Director appointee) - Carla Reyes

physician - Dr. Jerry Jones

Arkansas Children's Hospital (Chief of Staff/designee) - Dr. Whit Hall

Senate President Pro Tempore appointees (2) - Donna Malone and Julia Herrod

House Speaker appointees (2) - Teresa L. Kramer, PhD.

Governor appointees (4) - H.G. Foster, Chris Smith, Angie Waliski and Kathy Brownlee

DHS Chief Counsel/designee - Lisa McGee

child advocacy center representative/designee –

Arkansas Bar Association representative -

Appointments are pending from the Governor, Speaker of the House, Arkansas Bar Association, and a child advocacy center.