

**Alabama Interagency Autism Coordinating Council**  
**Wednesday, July 22, 2009**  
**Alabama State House**  
**Room 123**

The Alabama Interagency Autism Coordinating Council met on Wednesday July 22, 2009 in room 123 of the Alabama State House. The meeting was called to order by the Chairman, Representative Cam Ward. The Autism Council members in attendance are as follows: Representative Cam Ward, Sue Berry, Commissioner John Houston, Sandy Powell, Commissioner Cary Boswell, Dr. Fred Biasini, Melanie Jones, Phillip Young, Myriam Peralta, Linda Bachus, Jerimie W. Goike, Dennis Griffith, Dr. Bama Hager, and Kathy Welch.

The minutes from the previous meeting were approved with a motion by Commissioner Houston and a second by Commissioner Boswell.

Representative Ward announced previously the Council voted to designate the Department of Mental Health the lead agency for the AIACC and the Governor has approved this. Commissioner Houston stated that his Department will embrace that role. Representative Ward explained that the AIACC was created by House Bill 41. The idea came from the work of the Autism Task Force over the last two years. The purpose was to create an umbrella council that could coordinate all the various agencies that are offering some sort of services for individuals with Autism. The idea is to have the AIACC to continue on from the report from the Autism Task Force. House Bill 41 explains how each member was to be appointed to the AIACC.

Representative Ward stated the recent Legislative Session was over-all a very good session. We all knew that money would continue to be a problem in Alabama in regards to any new services. However, we wanted to make sure the ground-work was there to establish a program and then coming back and asking for funding. House Bill 615 is the Regional Autism Centers Act. This is another issue that came about as a direct result of the Autism Task Force. It was modeled primarily after Florida but also after Pennsylvania, which is to provide support services for those on the spectrum and for those who lack training. Representative Ward stated that the major step will take state appropriations to make this a reality but getting it in place will make the next step a whole lot easier.

Representative Ward stated that he does not currently have any update on the National Autism collaborative work. He has been participating with individuals from other states. In April of this year Representative Ward traveled to Washington DC and had an opportunity to meet with Linda Bachus and some other state leaders from Pennsylvania to hear what they are doing. It was also a great opportunity to address Congressional staffers and find out how the Federal Government and the State Government could do a better job collaborating together on their efforts.

Commissioner Houston stated that being designated the Lead Agency is not to run away from or distance yourself from others. It is to work with all. One agency can not do this alone and they will strive to be respectful. This is not the best time to build a program, but

it is an opportunity to lay the foundation for it. As the circumstances improve, we need to be poised and ready to move.

Commissioner Houston made everyone aware of the name change of his department. It is now the Department of Mental Health. They also renamed its Division of Mental Retardation Services to the Division of Intellectual Disability Services. The second item he made note of is that many of the individuals they serve not only have an intellectual disability but also have autism, but the rate structure and services do not recognize that. They are in the early stages of taking a new look at the entire rate structure. Finally, he went on to discuss the Autism Coordinator. He felt they needed someone who is securely dedicated to this and had no other distractions. He went to the Developmental Disabilities Council for their assistance. There were 30+ applicants and 12 of those were interviewed by a panel. There were 5 that were in the 2<sup>nd</sup> round of interviews. Everyone had the same conclusion and believed the best person for this task was Caroline Gomez. Commissioner Houston introduced Ms. Gomez and asked her to address the Council. She stated that she is ready to begin this journey and effort together.

Representative Ward asked if anyone had any questions relating to the Regional Centers Act. There were no questions. He then asked Steve Lafreniere to give the report from the Bylaws Committee. Steve asked that if anyone had any comments or questions to the draft of bylaws that they get them to him by end of August. They will then reconvene the committee to incorporate and add comments, so they will be ready with a final version at the next meeting of the Council.

Representative Ward acknowledged Tawanna McGee who is with Alabama Disabilities Advocacy Program (ADAP). She passed out a handout on “Seclusion and Restraint in Alabama Schools”. Congress and the US Federal Government are taking a real close look at seclusion and restraint in the Nation because it is happening in an overwhelming rate. Unfortunately, this is also occurring in Alabama. She knows of six cases currently. The handout mentions some of these cases. Alabama is one of 19 states that have no policy or anything in writing about this. Representative Ward asked that Ms. McGee get some model legislation from other states so that the Council could look it over, approve it and have something to introduce during the next legislative session.

Representative Ward along with Alice Widgeon presented Jennifer Muller with a Resolution for her outstanding service to the State of Alabama with her work for Autism. Ms. Muller thanked everyone for a joint effort from everyone who has been involved.

Representative Ward stated that at the next meeting he would like a motion to create a Legislative Ad Hoc Committee. He feels it will work like the Autism Task Force did with breaking things down into committees. He also noted that Commissioner Houston made note to the budget. The Education Budget has been cut by 9%. He asked that the Council be prepared at the next meeting to discuss how the Council could be an effective lobbying organization to make sure that the cuts do not occur in “special needs” or “disabilities”.

Representative Ward asked if any member of the Council had anything they would like to bring before the body. It was asked who would be taking on Ms. Muller’s position in her absence. Ms. Muller stated that the position will be split into an Executive Director’s position and a Managing Director’s position. Myriam Peralta stated that the Pediatrician

Annual Conference will be on September 18<sup>th</sup> in Birmingham at the Wynfrey Hotel. The purpose of this is to have an open dialogue among the pediatricians.

Representative Ward thanked everyone in attendance and for the presentation by ADAP.

The meeting was adjourned.

Tracey Battaglia 353-0995