

MINUTES OF THE SENATE PUBLIC HEALTH AND WELFARE COMMITTEE

The meeting was called to order by Vice Chair Senator Vicki Schmidt at 1:30 p.m. on February 10, 2009, in Room 136-N of the Capitol. Chairman Barnett was testifying at another Senate hearing.

All members were present.

Committee staff present:

Nobuko Folmsbee, Office of the Revisor of Statutes
Doug Taylor, Office of the Revisor of Statutes
Kelly Navinsky-Wenzl, Kansas Legislative Research Department
Terri Weber, Kansas Legislative Research Department
Jan Lunn, Committee Assistant

Conferees appearing before the committee:

Dr. Bill Craig, Chairman, Autism Task Force
Michael L. Wasmer, DVM, Appointed Member of Autism Task Force
Louise Heinz, Appointed Member of Autism Task Force and Parent

Others attending:

See attached list.

Senator Schmidt requested Nobuko Folmsbee brief committee members on **SB 83 - Autism task force**. This legislation would re-establish the Kansas Autism Task Force which was created in 2007 and expired on December 31, 2008. Its purpose is to study and conduct hearings relating to the needs and services available for persons with autism.

Senator Julia Lynn was recognized by the chair to introduce the conferees.

Senator Barnett arrived and assumed the chair. He recognized Dr. Bill Craig who spoke regarding the purpose, accomplishment, and the work remaining for members of the Autism Task Force. He indicated the members of the Autism Task Force include representatives and experts from varying fields/industries such as insurance, parents of autistic children, advocacy groups, special educators, regulatory agencies, legislators, etc. The Task Force developed key recommendations that fell into four areas: a handbook for parents with autistic children that details best practices within the field, the development of a scholarship program (through legislation) to include a human services specialist for autism to serve rural/underserved areas, open access to health insurance (through legislation) for autistic individuals, and full funding for individuals on the autism waiver waiting list. Dr. Craig submitted the full report to committee members (Attachment 1).

Senator Schmidt requested that if the task force is renewed, the group work with the State Board of Regents (postsecondary institutions) to develop the definition, role, and certification criteria of an autism specialist or human services specialist. Dr. Craig indicated willingness to move forward with that recommendation should the task force be re-established.

Senators discussed the current status of insurance coverage for autistic individuals, the scope of work included in re-establishing the task force, anticipated costs for renewing the task force, the autism waiver and potential for a sliding fee scale, and on-line resources for consumers, etc.

Dr. Mike Wasmer was introduced to speak in support of **SB 83**. His daughter, Kate (for whom the bill is named) was diagnosed with autism at age 2. Dr. Wasmer related his family's experience. Dr. Wasmer reported that with the appropriate treatment, his daughter has been mainstreamed in public school, requires no special services, and makes straight A's in school. He spoke about the value of early intervention and treatment not only to the autistic child but to the public in the form of dollar savings to the State (Attachment 2). It is projected that savings of approximately 4.4 million dollars in costs of adult services and lost productivity can be realized by utilizing early intervention and recommended treatment modalities

Chairman Barnett recognized Louise Heinz, the mother of an autistic child and appointed member of the Autism Task Force, who provided updated committee members on the current status of autistic children

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Minutes of the Senate Public Health And Welfare Committee at 1:30 p.m. on February 10, 2009, in Room 136-N of the Capitol.

on the waiver waiting list. Ms. Heinz shared information regarding the progress of the Task Force and cited statistics related to the rising numbers of children being diagnosed with autism (Attachment 3). She reported that significant work has been done on the “best practices handbook” which will serve as a resource tool for parents and will provide evidence-based information to enhance decision-making (Attachment 4). The re-establishment of the Task Force will allow members to incorporate outcomes from a national project into “best practices handbook.”

Senator Barnett adjourned the meeting at 2:15pm.

The next meeting is scheduled for February 11, 2009.