

**MINUTES OF THE
WORKFORCE SERVICES INTERIM COMMITTEE**

April 21, 1999 -- 2:00 p.m. -- Room 414 State Capitol

Members Present:

Sen. Robert Muhlestein, Chair
Sen. D. Edgar Allen
Sen. Parley Hellewell
Sen. Lorin V. Jones
Rep. Jeff Alexander
Rep. Sheryl L. Allen
Rep. Ron Bigelow

Rep. Jackie Biskupski
Rep. Ben C. Ferry
Rep. Lloyd W. Frandsen
Rep. Brent H. Goodfellow
Rep. Neil A. Hansen
Rep. Gordon E. Snow
Rep. David L. Zolman

Members Excused:

Rep. Michael R. Styler, Chair
Sen. Pete Suazo

Staff Present:

Arthur L. Hunsaker,
Research Analyst
Keith M Woodwell,
Associate General Counsel
Barbara A. Teuscher,
Legislative Secretary

Members Absent:

Sen. Gene Davis

Note: Names of others present and copies of information distributed at the meeting are on file in the Office of Legislative Research and General Counsel.

1. Call to Order: Approval of November 18, 1998 Minutes -- Chair Muhlestein called the meeting to order at 2:02 p.m.

MOTION: Sen. Allen moved to approve the minutes of November 18, 1998. The motion passed unanimously with Sen. Hellewell and Rep. Biskupski absent for the vote.

2. Annual Report: State Council on Workforce Services -- Louie Connelos, Chair, State Council on Workforce Services, presented the annual report. He gave a brief history of the council's activities and accomplishments over the past year. One of several future initiatives is Utah's implementation of the Workforce Investment Act.

Sen. Jones asked Mr. Connelos for any new welfare caseload reduction numbers since reform was implemented. Mr. Mason Bishop, Director of Public Affairs, Department of Workforce Services, said there has been a 45% drop in cases, but the decline is leveling off. Rep. Goodfellow asked if the state will have to make changes when the Workforce Investment Act takes effect in July. Mr. Bishop indicated that minimal changes will be needed, particularly in the

area of job training, where the new emphasis will be on getting people to work quickly. Rep. Allen asked for a table that compares JTPA provisions with Utah's Workforce Investment Act implementation, including the waivers, and Mr. Bishop said he would provide it. Rep. Goodfellow suggested making federal workforce services-related web addresses available to committee members. Sen. Muhlestein asked staff to provide this information by the next meeting.

3. Final Report: Understanding Families with Multiple Barriers to Self-Sufficiency -- Dr. Amanda Barusch and Dr. Mary Jane Taylor, from the University of Utah's Graduate School of Social Work, made the presentation. Dr. Taylor explained the procedures used to obtain reliable data. Dr. Barusch emphasized that the study focused on those considered "hard to serve," or facing multiple barriers to self-sufficiency. She then reviewed the numerous conditions that create barriers, including mental illness, post traumatic stress disorder, learning disabilities, poor work history, physical disabilities, child behavior problems, and spouse abuse. She summarized the report's recommendations, including the need for rapid and accurate assessment, aggressive and collaborative service delivery, hardship extensions, and long term client plans.

Rep. Allen asked if the proper assessment tools are in place. Mr. Bishop explained that rapid assessment is a challenge because problems don't always manifest themselves in the initial assessment. Bob Gross, Director, Department of Workforce Services, said continuous efforts are being made to improve the process. He also stated the department must fulfill the legislature's intent behind the three year time limit. Rep. Allen clarified Mr. Gross's point that assessments themselves can be a barrier, and their usefulness varies depending on the client.

Rep. Ferry asked about the pros and cons of mandatory drug testing as a condition of receiving assistance. Mr. Bishop said costs would come primarily from TANF dollars. Robin Arnold-Williams, director, Department of Human Services, said once a person on public assistance is referred to treatment, regular drug screenings are conducted.

Mr. Bishop pointed out that if the addiction is known, getting a public assistance client off drugs is part of their employment plan. If a client is resistant to counseling and treatment, and the addiction is a barrier to employment, the client risks losing assistance.

Rep. Frandsen asked Dr. Barusch and Dr. Taylor what public policy they might suggest to address barriers to self-sufficiency. Dr. Taylor suggested that the high incidence of chronic mental health problems should lead to a close working effort between the Department of Workforce Services and public and private mental health providers. Mr. Bishop mentioned the need to improve the meshing of plans between the employment and mental health components. Rep. Frandsen asked the department to respond to the report with recommendations. Rep. Goodfellow expressed concern with the lack of training dollars to help the hard to serve clients with their skills.

4. State Waivers and the Impact of Changes to the Family Employment Program -- Mr. Bishop said that when federal welfare reform passed in 1996, it severed the eligibility link between cash assistance and medicaid. Utah obtained waivers that made medicaid more accessible to people during their transition off cash assistance, but the Department of Health and Human Services has stated that any changes to the potential eligibility for cash assistance will threaten the waivers. Mr. Bishop indicated that in order to implement S.B. 10, Public Assistance Eligibility, and S.B. 51, Family Employment Program Amendments, the department must either 1) do away with some medicaid waivers, which will sever the link between cash assistance and medicaid and reduce support for people transitioning into the workforce; or 2) expand the total family medicaid population eligibility criteria. No funds were appropriated to implement the bills, based on the need for federal approval to implement its provisions.

Rep. Zolman expressed concern with the lack of funds to implement what the legislature passed. Mr. Bishop suggested thorough consideration of the issue by the committee, the Workforce Services, Health, and Human Services departments, and the federal government.

5. Committee Business: Items of Study for 1999 Interim -- Staff distributed a list of potential committee studies for 1999.

Roz McGee, Utah Children, recommended study of multiple barriers to self-sufficiency.

Beverly Cooper, Planned Parenthood of Utah, recommended tracking difficult cases after they go off cash assistance and increasing the availability of mentoring programs.

Cathy Chambliss, Director, Governor's Council on Disabilities, recommended the committee discuss the Choose to Work program.

Johnny Anderson, Utah Private Child Care Association, recommended an audit be performed on the transitional child care program. Mr. Gross said there is a process underway to make the audit request. Rep. Frandsen said a performance audit was more appropriate in this situation, including licensing issues.

Reps. Lockhart, Hansen, Allen, Goodfellow, and Frandsen and Sens. Allen and Jones spoke regarding potential items listed on the handout.

Chair Muhlestein requested that committee members rank their most preferred items and report them to staff by Tuesday, April 27. Committee chairs will take them into consideration.

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6. Adjourn

MOTION: Sen. Allen moved to adjourn the meeting at 3:56 p.m. The motion passed unanimously with Sen. Hellewell and Rep. Biskupski absent for the vote.