



Virginia Commission on Youth

September 20, 2010

10:00 a.m.

House Room C

MINUTES

Attending:

Senators Yvonne Miller, Harry Blevins, Edward Houck
Delegates Mamy BaCote, Robert Brink, Christopher Peace and Beverly Sherwood
Citizen member Gary Close

Not Attending:

Delegates Mark Cole and Anne Crockett-Stark
Citizen members Anthony Dale and Joy Myers

Staff Attending:

Amy M. Atkinson, Leah Hamaker, Joyce Garner

I. Call to Order and Opening Remarks

Senator Yvonne B. Miller, Chair

Senator Miller called the meeting to order at 10:00 and welcomed everyone to the third meeting of the Commission's 2010 study year. She extended a special welcome to Gary Close, new gubernatorial appointee who returns to the Commission after having served from 1996 to 2000.

In recognition of Marvin Wagner's service as a citizen member of the Commission from 2002-2010, Senator Miller extended the appreciation of the Board for his many contributions. On being asked to speak, Mr. Wagner expressed his appreciation for the opportunity to serve and thanks to staff for their assistance to him during his terms of office. He acknowledged the Commissioners' achievements as advocates for youth and their families, without regard to any partisan affiliation outside the meetings.

II. Bullying Prevention

Caitlin Uze, Miss Virginia 2010

Ms. Uze followed Senator Miller's formal introduction with an informal overview of her own personal struggle as a child and adolescent. Citing a speech impediment, bad eyesight, and issues with overweight, she recalled years of teasing and bullying which made school, for her, a less than safe place to learn. She described her work promoting positive self-image for youth and the bullying prevention efforts of her Virginia ABC-sponsored tour throughout Virginia. 5,000 students have been reached thus far. She described the cycle of low self-esteem to vulnerability to bullying to low self-esteem in her and other students' early lives. In her conversations with students, she urges them to see themselves as "uniquely you" and to help break the cycle by sharing personal experiences to shatter illusions of perfection. She cited statistics of the high rate of bullying in school and the

direct link between bullying and truancy and/or suicide. "Stop Bullying Now" is a Virginia Department of Health program. Ms. Uze cited bills introduced in past Sessions which addressed bullying behavior in the Department of Education's Code of Student Conduct. In her own life, she credits her new self-confidence with her successes in pageants and believes that, in fact, she was crowned Miss Virginia because of the contents of her character.

Delegate Peace, who described the impact of her work with students in Hanover Schools, indicated an interest in the Commission on Youth's considering bullying prevention as a study in 2011.

Senator Miller asked Ms. Uze for a copy of her remarks and thanked her for a strong personal testimony supported by data on the issue of bullying in schools.

III. Preview of Commission on Youth Website

Amy M. Atkinson, Executive Director

*Robert Lenkowitz, Business Research Analyst
Division of Legislative Automated Systems*

Ms. Atkinson and Mr. Lenkowitz provided a brief history of the Commission on Youth website and the advances in both technology and trends for members, organizations and citizens to look to Internet as a key source for information. Under Director Jay Landis, the Division has put new focus on staffing for guidance and technical assistance to legislative entities in order to give the General Assembly a strong graphic and user-friendly format.

Mr. Lenkowitz led members through a brief guided tour of the redesigned Commission website and its features for members, legislative staff and others seeking ready access to information about the work of the Commission. The website is designed to allow for easy revisions and reformatting as needed.

Delegate Peace raised two questions: Would it be appropriate to show on the website the history of legislative successes enjoyed by the Commission, as well as the bills and budget amendments introduced as part of Commission studies. Also, would the Commission at some point want to consider having the website interact with Twitter and Facebook.

Mr. Close commented that, because he had reviewed the previous website in anticipation of joining the Commission, he can appreciate now the ease of navigating on the new site.

Senator Miller noted that the existing site did not list past chairs and others who had helped move the Commission forward and suggested that that be investigated. On behalf of all member, Senator Miller extended her compliments and appreciation to Mr. Lenkowitz and DLAS.

IV. Update on Residential Facility Licensing

Matt Cobb, Deputy Secretary, Health and Human Resources

Mr. Cobb thanked Commission members for the opportunity to address their concerns about the Pines Residential Treatment Center. The Center, which offers 400 beds, has three campuses. It is the Crawford Campus at which the problems in question have occurred.

In late 2008 and in 2009, these problems came to the attention of the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS). In 2009, the agency required Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the Pines. Mr. Cobb described the Department's initial findings in problems related to the infirmity model, poorly-trained staff, multiple charts for each child, thus limiting coordination.

The Pines license had been scheduled to expire in November 2009, with a 6-month allowance before expiration. The later date was February 2010. The Department has the options of issuing a triennial, annual or provisional license.

The Department worked with The Pines and, in February 2010, determined its eligibility for annual licensing beginning March 2010, with a retroactive provisional license to cover the December 2009 through February 2010 period.

While The Pines' problems were being addressed, Department staff spent a total 350 hours working with Pines' staff to correct those problems. The Department now makes monthly visits to the Center for inspections.

Senator Houck indicated that he had carefully read all available materials about the problems previously identified and found it jarring when serious allegations surfaced. The Department, which is mandated to insure safe environment for youth in the care of a residential treatment center, must take its licensing responsibilities seriously and ensure compliance by all facilities. He asked Mr. Cobb whether he was satisfied that youth are now safe at The Pines.

In response, Mr. Cobb answered affirmatively and that the monthly visits to the Pines should ensure that safety remains a priority.

Senator Houck noted that the confidence of parents and the public has been adversely affected by reports of unsafe treatment and that must be restored. He expressed concern for parents who have children in treatment at facilities which might pose risks. The Department must go further to rebuild confidence and should consider having the Inspector General look into various agencies to affirm that corrections have been made and that no other problems exist.

Senator Miller voiced support for Senator Houck's remarks and reiterated the need for core people in government to listen to parents. The Department must support continuous monitoring to ensure compliance.

Senator Houck requested that there be updates provided to members at subsequent Commission meetings.

V. Kinship Care

*Jennifer Miller, Partner
ChildFocus, Rhode Island*

Senator Miller introduced Ms. Miller, consultant for Annie E. Casey Foundation and special guest invited by the Commission as a national expert on initiatives for kinship care.

Ms. Miller guided the Commission through a PowerPoint presentation outlining the reach of family members as caregivers, what states were doing to support children being cared for by persons other than family members, Fostering Connections - the national network of kinship providers and support staff, and alternatives to foster care placement.

The 2008 federal Act has been an impetus for states to take action and develop strategies. The four provisions of the Act (in PowerPoint) were outlined. GAF is the kinship guardianship assistance fund. Almost ½ states have approved state plans for GAP or are awaiting approval. Sibling connections is 3 of 4 in ACT best practices.

Delegate Peace asked that she address how Virginia is doing with provisions for written notice and other aspects of the Act.

Rita Katzman from DSS came forward to speak to the question: Virginia is doing notices for diligent search. Policy went out too recently to quantify, but the Department will in future. Ms. Miller complimented the Department's family team meetings component.

Mr. Close asked how "family" is defined, to which Ms. Miller answered "blood relative, although fictive kin can be by marriage where there is a family-like relationship.

Delegate Peace asked Advisory Group members to address issues specific to urban versus rural kinship care needs.

Senator Miller noted the impact of the economic downturn and its effect on caregivers, both parents and grandparents.

Ms. Miller will speak informally with the Advisory Group for Barriers to Kinship Care in Virginia study at their afternoon meeting.

Senator Miller recalled her long-standing interest in kinship care support and expressed her appreciation to Ms. Miller for providing new information on the subject to the Commission.

VI. Adjourn

Prior to Adjournment, Senator Miller offered an opportunity for Susan Lawrence to give public comment. Ms. Lawrence described her son's care at The Pines Residential Treatment Center and briefly outlined her concerns. She endorsed the Commission's request to have the Inspector General look at the existing situation there and report his findings.

The meeting adjourned at noon.

Public comment will not be received at this meeting.

This is an electronic meeting with the following meeting site:

Wytheville

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