

**Alabama Interagency Autism Coordinating Council**  
**Wednesday, October 29, 2008**  
**Alabama State House**  
**Joint Briefing Room, 8<sup>th</sup> Floor**

The Alabama Interagency Autism Coordinating Council met on Wednesday, October 29, 2008 in the Joint Briefing Room on the 8<sup>th</sup> floor of the Alabama State House. The meeting was called to order by the Chairman, Representative Cam Ward. Representative Ward thanked everyone in attendance for the first ever Interagency Council on Autism. It is very historic for all who are in attendance. This is a second step from all the work the Autism Task Force and its subcommittees have done over the past two years.

Representative Ward asked that each member of the Council introduce themselves. Representative Ward began by stating he is a State Representative from Alabaster. He has been in the Alabama Legislature for seven years, and he has a child with Autism. Jim Mercer lives in Hoover, Alabama and is a proud parent of a son who has had some disabilities. Jerimie Goike works for the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services in Birmingham and has been with them for twelve years. He is a former client of the department because he is visually impaired and diagnosed with Early Childhood Autism at 18 months. He also does motivational speaking (Autism from a Personal Perspective) where he talks about his experiences living and growing up with Autism, and how he overcame Autism through early diagnosis and early intervention. Commissioner Steve Shivers of the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services. Alice Widgeon is with the Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation and is representing the Department in Commissioner Houston's absence. Mary Timmerman is with the Alabama Medicaid Agency. Dr. Bama Folsom Hager has worked with the Autism Task Force, Autism Society and is also a Child Psychologist. She also has an eight year old son with Autism. Dr. Fred Biasini is the Director of the Alabama University Center of Excellence in Development Disabilities. He teaches at UAB, Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology. Kathy Welch is a Speech Pathologist and works at Easter Seals of Alabama. Jennifer Muller is with the Alabama Autism Society. Mabrey Whetstone is the State Director of Special Education with the Alabama Department of Education. Dr. John Langlow is a parent of a 19 year old who is at the Learning Tree, and Dr. Langlow is also a Psychiatrist. Phillip Young is the Chair of the Alabama Council on Developmental Disabilities and a parent of a 21 year old. Dr. Terry Graham is the President of the Alabama Institute for the Deaf and Blind. Tristan Dunn is an adult with ASD. Linda Bachus is the wife of Congressman Spencer Bachus. Susan Sowell is with the Department of Human Resources on behalf of Sue Berry. Ryan Donaldson is with the Department of Insurance and also a member of the Autism Task Force. Dr. Sandra Parker is with Alta Pointe Health Systems. Myriam Peralta is with Alabama Academy of Pediatrics. Sandy Powell is with Department of Public Health.

Representative Ward briefly described House Joint Resolution 3 which was passed in the Special Session in May 2008. It established this Autism Council. It gives a brief explanation of the membership, the charge of the Autism Council and what is expected of the Council. This Council is permanent in nature so therefore no legislation is needed to renew it or to continue work. This will be the permanent organization through which we continue to work with Autism issues and public policies in this State. In this Resolution,

we have tried to ensure that all the stake holders, parties, and everyone that has had some role or involvement with Autism as an organization or an advocacy group in the State has a seat at the table. However, there is a clause in the Resolution, that allows the Council to increase the membership if another group is recognized that needs to be added.

This Council came about from one of the preliminary recommendations from the Alabama Autism Task Force from January 2008. Their final recommendations will be released in February 2009. In the preliminary recommendations, one of the recommendations was that we needed a permanent coordinating council. Sitting in this Council meeting, one of the first goals of the Autism Task Force has been accomplished.

David Atchly, Wal-Mart Market Manager of Montgomery and surrounding areas, presented a \$5,000 grant check to the Autism Society of Alabama. This grant was accepted by Jennifer Muller. Representative Ward thanked Wal-Mart and the Retail Association for their cooperation and partnership.

Chief Alan Martin of the Tuscaloosa Fire Department was introduced. He has an eight year old grandson with Autism. He stated that children with ASD are up to seven times more likely to have a need for emergency response. Tuscaloosa has a very proactive public safety education. He has been working with how to train fire-fighters to work with situations where a child with Autism is involved. All their fire-fighters were given a ninety-minute presentation regarding characteristics they may see and things they may encounter. They were put in contact with Bill Conada from Massachusetts who offers training specific to fire-fighters. They hired him to come to Tuscaloosa. All 230 fire-fighters went through this program. Bill is a fire-fighter, but he also has a 17 year old with Autism. He was able to give the fire-fighters specific scenarios to specific situations that they may encounter when they arrive on the scene. They also had an open house at the fire station and invited the Arts and Autism Group (kids and parents). They were able to get on the fire trucks, have popcorn and get their picture taken. They talked to the parents about getting their address so it could be put in the computer dispatch system and it could be flagged. The pictures would also enable them to have it readily available if a child were to wonder off from the scene. Chief Martin believes the training should be mandatory for every fire-fighter in Alabama. Chief Martin is planning to attend the next Personnel Standards meeting, make this presentation, and ask that they require this training.

Representative Ward asked what the Council could do to help. Chief Martin said he has spoken with Allan Rice, Executive Director of the Alabama Fire College. Allan Rice has agreed to pay for the course development and training the trainer. However, Chief Martin believes they will need help in the costs of video tapes, projectors, laptops, etc. for their presentations. Representative Ward asked that Chief Martin have figures to share with the Council at the next meeting.

Representative Ward stated there are requirements that must be addressed at the first meeting of this Council. The first being a Chairman must be designated by the Governor, which is Representative Ward. The second requirement is to designate a lead agency. This is crucial so that the Council can have a home base. After some meetings with department heads and Representative Ward, they have come to the conclusion that it is best to recommend the Department of Mental Health be the lead agency. Representative Ward asked that Alice state her thoughts on this. Alice stated that Commissioner Houston has always been a very strong advocate for persons with disability and works closely with the

other agencies. He has the confidence of the Governor and the members of this Council. She believes they will work to carry out the recommendations of the Task Force and this Council in achieving the vision that has been brought forth.

Jennifer Muller stated that a concern of the Autism population in general is the individuals that have Autism but do not have the MR diagnosis. Alice stated they are aware that their funding streams are limited and the Council needs to make sure if we do develop a waiver that it is inclusive even beyond Autism.

Representative Ward stated that his vision is, "We will take the work from the Autism Task Force which will be completed in January 2009. The recommendations will be presented to the Governor and the Alabama Legislature. These recommendations will be the blue print for all our work as we move forward with this Council."

Several comments were made regarding Commissioner Houston and they feel he would do a great job with being the lead agency of this Council.

Representative Ward asked for a motion to designate Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation to be the lead agency of this Council. Commissioner Steve Shivers made the motion and it was second by Dr. John Langlow.

Representative Ward went on to discuss the job description for the position of State Coordinator. A preliminary recommendation from the Autism Task Force last year was to create a state position for a State Coordinator. This person would coordinate between the various agencies in Alabama who provide services. This is a permanent position and they would be based here in Montgomery. The job description was developed by a subcommittee of the Autism Task Force. Commissioner Houston worked hard to help find funding and resources to make available to create this position. This is going to be the first person to be hired whose sole focus is on Autism in Alabama. This person will be hired and coordinated by the Council. Representative Ward asked if anyone had any further questions regarding this.

Representative Ward asked for a motion to move forward with hiring of an Autism Coordinator. Jennifer Muller made the motion and it was second by Phillip Young.

Representative Ward went on to discuss the visit to Alabama by Dr. Berkman to discuss how they are currently coordinating regional autism centers in Florida. The presentation will be made to the Council and the Autism Task Force. The date has not been set at this time. Representative Ward stated that we need to pay for the travel expenses to and from Alabama for Dr. Berkman. The idea of using it as continuing education for Speech Pathologist, Occupational Therapist, etc. and registration fees could cover the cost for Dr. Berkman's travel expenses. Representative Ward stated that since everyone agrees on the presentation, he will set the date and send a notification to everyone stating the date. It will be far enough in advance so that you could coordinate the continuing education mechanism.

Representative Ward wanted to make everyone aware that after the meeting there would be a press conference with himself, Lt. Governor Folsom, and Dr. Mabry Whetstone regarding another recommendation from the Autism Task Force. They have been working in coordination with the Department of Education and their Distance Learning Program.

In Alabama, the State has already funded that by August of 2009 every school system in the State will be equipped with distance technology. The purpose of the technology is actually to help children get AP courses in high school. After talking with university officials and a wide range of experts, it was discovered that we could use the same technology to help train the teachers and educational professionals in working with children with developmental disabilities and Autism in their schools. The training could be done without the expense of having a teacher or educational professional drive to a distant location. This will be a huge success for the Autism community and a creative success. We are the second state in the United States to try this program.

Representative Ward stated that all future meetings will be every 3 months and for a couple of hours each. The next meeting we will break into committees to study recommendations that come forth. The next meeting will be after the first of the year in January. The main agenda item will be the Autism Task Force Recommendations.

The meeting was adjourned.

Tracey Battaglia 353-0995  
Dated 11-7-08