

**Subcommittee on Mental Health of House Committee on Health and Welfare**

Minutes of Meeting  
2023 Interim  
August 24, 2023

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

Representative Laurie Schlegel, chairman of the Subcommittee on Mental Health of House Committee on Health and Welfare, called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m. in Room 5, in the state capitol in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

**II. ROLL CALL**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Representative Laurie Schlegel, chairman  
Representative Roy Daryl Adams  
Representative Michael Charles Echols  
Representative Jason Hughes  
Representative Ed Larvadain, III  
Representative Wayne McMahan  
Representative Larry Selders  
Representative Christopher Turner, vice chairman

**MEMBERS ABSENT:**

Representative Joseph A. Stagni

**STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Kristy Neubrandner, committee administrative assistant  
Meah Johnson, attorney  
Taylor Chrisman, attorney

**ADDITIONAL ATTENDEES PRESENT:**

Nevonda Reed, division director  
Faye Talbot, sergeant at arms

### **III. BUSINESS**

#### **Discussion on the organizational structure of the Subcommittee on Mental Health**

Representative Schlegel explained that this subcommittee was created in response to a resolution she authored in the 2023 Regular Session, House Resolution No. 71. She stated that Louisiana is in a mental health crisis, and we are suffering from a lack of both resources and healthcare professionals to properly address it. She added that the committee's goal is to learn from the experts so that the legislature can use that knowledge to come up with ideas for better policies and legislation to help Louisiana citizens.

Representative Hughes thanked Representative Schlegel for creating this committee, and he thanked his colleagues for their willingness to serve.

Representative Larvadain also thanked Representative Schlegel and his fellow committee members for their service. He stated that he looks forward to having the committee spend time exploring mental health problems among the incarcerated population. He emphasized that incarcerated people, and those who are released from incarceration, are suffering from mental and behavioral health issues and are not receiving the treatment they need and deserve.

Charlotte Claiborne, The Bridge Center for Hope, 728 North Boulevard, Baton Rouge, LA 70810, (225) 308-1032, spoke for information only. She discussed the center's goal of serving as a resource for addressing the immediate needs of individuals in the state of mental or behavioral health crises.

#### **Presentation on mental health from the Louisiana Department of Health, Human Service Districts, and other governmental entities**

Karen Stubbs, Louisiana Department of Health (LDH), 628 North Fourth Street, Baton Rouge, LA 70802, (225) 342-9509, spoke for information only and presented a slideshow, Exhibit A, that gave a broad overview of the Louisiana Department of Health's office of behavioral health. The slideshow is included in the committee records on the House Legislative Services "S: drive" (see House Legis Services/Committee Docs/2023/Special Committees/Subcommittee on Mental Health/082423/ Slideshow Presentation).

Representative Echols provided Ms. Stubbs with an overview of questions and requested that she can return to a committee meeting at a later date with answers. His questions focused on the dynamics of the relationship between LDH and the Human Services Districts, particularly regarding oversight, accountability, compliance, and funding.

Representative Echols asked Ms. Stubbs for her opinion of Magellan of Louisiana. Ms. Stubbs replied that it is a highly functioning program.

Tanya McGee, Imperial Calcasieu Human Services Authority, 4105 Kirkman Street, Lake Charles, LA 70607, (337) 475-3100, spoke for information only and provided a handout, Exhibit B, which is included in the committee records. Ms. McGee stated that her organization's biggest accomplishment was becoming a primary care provider in 2014 and discussed how her organization uses grant funding.

Kristin Bonner, South Central Louisiana Human Services Authority, 158 Regal Row, Houma, LA 70360, (985) 876-8886, spoke for information only and provided a handout, Exhibit C, which is included in the committee records. Ms. Bonner stated that her agency's biggest concern is a shortage of counseling staff and that her agency's greatest achievement has been the development of their integrated health team, which includes a family medicine physician who is in the process of becoming an addictionologist, family practitioners, nurse practitioners, nurses, and case managers. Ms. Bonner also talked about her agency's community partnerships, especially with her region's police departments, adding that her agency trains officers on how to help an individual who is experiencing a mental health crisis.

Rosanna DiChiro, Jefferson Parish Human Services Authority, 3616 South I-10 Service Road, Metairie, LA (504) 235-1122, spoke for information only and provided a handout, Exhibit D, which is included in the committee records. Ms. DiChiro emphasized the problem of homelessness in Jefferson Parish and informed the committee that the number of homeless people is rising, and it is a major issue. She concluded by stating she is interested in replicating the crisis receiving center that The Bridge Center for Hope uses.

Jan Laughinghouse, Capital Area Human Services, 7389 Florida Boulevard, Suite 100A, Baton Rouge, LA 70806, (225) 922-2700, spoke for information only and provided a handout, Exhibit E, which is included in the committee records.

Representative Selders asked Dr. Laughinghouse if she has trouble finding doctors to diagnose children with autism. Dr. Laughinghouse replied that she does not have any issues because the doctor who works for the ASCEND program is qualified to diagnose a child who has autism.

Brad Farmer, Acadiana Area Human Services District, 302 Dulles Drive, Lafayette, LA 70506, (337) 262-4190, spoke for information only and provided a handout, Exhibit F, which is included in the committee records. Mr. Farmer stated that the Human Services Districts represented at the meeting all have contracts and accountability plans with LDH. He informed the committee that they are each subject to review at any time, and that they are licensed, credentialed, and accredited.

Representative Echols asked Mr. Farmer to name one identifiable target in his region that he would improve if he had an unlimited amount of money. Mr. Farmer answered that transportation to services would be a priority. He then clarified that he would want meaningful access to transportation for the patients.

Cheri Johnson, Woman's Hospital, 100 Woman's Way, Baton Rouge, LA 70817, (225) 329-5983, spoke for information only. Ms. Johnson said she wanted to remind the committee about depression, anxiety, and substance abuse in pregnant women. She said that pregnant women are often the last group of people to seek care for behavioral health issues. She said that Woman's Hospital runs a program called GRACE (Guiding Recovery and Creating Empowerment) that has seen positive outcomes for pregnant women who are struggling with substance abuse during pregnancy.

Will Hall, Louisiana Baptist Office of Public Policy, 1250 MacArthur Drive, Alexandria, LA 71303, (615) 308-3436, spoke for information only. Mr. Hall addressed the problems with RS 28:53 that allows a person who has been involuntarily admitted to a behavioral health facility to be released after a seventy-two hour hold. He urged the lawmakers to revisit this statute. He acknowledged that disallowing individuals to sign themselves out of a facility is in conflict with his congregation's stance on the protection of individual rights and asked lawmakers to help find a balanced solution.

Representative Larvadain agreed with Mr. Hall that the statute is a problem. He informed the committee that allowing individuals who are experiencing behavioral health crises to sign themselves out of treatment facilities creates problems for their families, friends, and communities.

Witness cards submitted by individuals who did not speak are as follows: 1 for information only. Witness cards are included in the committee records.

Statements submitted in accordance with House Rule 14.33 in lieu of appearing before the committee are as follows: 2 for information only. Copies of these statements are included in the committee records.

#### **IV. ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Representative Schlegel announced the Subcommittee on Mental Health will hold its next meeting on September 26, 2023.

## **V. ADJOURNMENT**

Representative Hughes offered a motion to adjourn. Without objection, the motion passed by a vote of 8 yeas and 0 nays. Representatives Schlegel, Adams, Echols, Hughes, Larvadain, McMahan, Selders, and Turner voted yea.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:51 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Chairwoman Laurie Schlegel  
Subcommittee on Mental Health of the House Committee on Health and Welfare

Date adopted: March 21, 2024