

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

Minutes of Meeting  
2023 Interim  
October 17, 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 10:12 a.m. in Room 5, in the state capitol in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

**II. ROLL CALL**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Representative Laurie Schlegel, chairman  
Representative Michael Charles Echols  
Representative Jason Hughes  
Representative Ed Larvadain, III  
Representative Wayne McMahan  
Representative Larry Selders  
Representative Joseph A. Stagni  
Representative Christopher Turner, vice chairman

**MEMBERS ABSENT:**

Representative Roy Daryl Adams

**STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Taylor Chrisman, attorney  
Kristy Neubrandner, committee administrative assistant  
Nevonda S. Reed, division director

**ADDITIONAL ATTENDEES PRESENT:**

Sharell Steven, committee administrative assistant  
Myrtis Jarrell, sergeant at arms

### **III. BUSINESS**

#### **Discussion on accessibility and barriers to accessibility for mental healthcare services by the following invited boards and associations:**

##### **Louisiana Rural Mental Health Alliance**

Lindsey Mercante, Louisiana Rural Mental Health Alliance, (LRMHA), 17596 Ridgewood Drive, Hammond, LA, 70403, spoke for information only and presented a slideshow, Exhibit A, which is included in the committee records.

Katie Corkern, LRMHA, P.O. Box 1048, Amite, LA 70422, spoke for information only and provided a handout, Exhibit B, which is included in the committee records. She discussed the disparity in the availability of mental health rehabilitation clinics compared to the growing number of individuals with insurance resulting from the expansion of Medicaid in Louisiana.

In response to questions from the committee, Ms. Corkern offered insights into the LRMHA, its associated organizations, and the specific demographics they serve.

##### **Louisiana Hospital Association**

Greg Waddell, Louisiana Hospital Association (LHA), 9521 Brookline Avenue, Baton Rouge, LA 70809, spoke for information only. He outlined the topics that the LHA representatives would discuss, focusing on the inadequate provision of services for individuals discharged from hospitals and their need for ongoing treatment.

Melissa Watson, LHA, 9521 Brookline Avenue, Baton Rouge, LA 70809, spoke for information only. She addressed the shortage of services for minors dealing with behavioral health issues. She identified the lack of affordable housing as a primary obstacle to assisting individuals with behavioral and mental health challenges.

In response to questions from the committee, Ms. Watson acknowledged that there is a correlation between the moratorium on Intermediate Care Facilities in Louisiana and the difficulties encountered in assisting individuals in need.

Dustin Thiels, River Place Behavioral Health, 500 Rue de Sante, LaPlace, LA 70068, spoke for information only. He described the bureaucratic inconsistencies among the Managed Care Organizations (MCOs) that impede the delivery of essential services to individuals in need.

Allen McCartney, Oceans Healthcare, 15182 Professional Plaza, Hammond, LA 70403, spoke for information only. He offered insights specifically regarding the treatment and care provided to the senior population in Louisiana.

William Weaver, Brentwood and River Oaks Hospital, 1006 Highland Avenue, Shreveport, LA 71101, spoke for information only. He discussed how zoning laws and the lack of reimbursement has contributed to the shortage of respite services.

Amy Apperson, Vermillion Behavioral Health, 2520 North University Avenue, Lafayette, LA 70507, spoke for information only. She reported the difficulties in placing adolescents in Intensive Outpatient Programs (IOPs).

### **Louisiana Association of Health Plans**

Representative Schlegel announced that the Louisiana Association of Health Plans would not present at the meeting.

### **Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Louisiana**

David Laverne, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Louisiana (BCBSLA), 5525 Reitz Avenue, Baton Rouge, LA 70809, spoke for information only. He clarified that he and Dr. Vincent would represent BCBSLA exclusively in its capacity as a commercial insurer.

Dr. Emily Vincent, BCBSLA, 5525 Reitz Avenue, Baton Rouge, spoke for information only. She discussed the Quality Blue Network and the BlueCare programs that BCBSLA offers its clients.

Representative Hughes spoke about the importance of screening children for trauma in addition to depression. Dr. Vincent agreed that healthcare providers were not conducting sufficient screenings for childhood trauma.

Representative McMahan asked Dr. Vincent for her opinion on telehealth services. Dr. Vincent emphasized the importance of telehealth for individuals residing in underserved areas or those facing challenges in accessing in-person treatment.

### **Medicaid Program within the Louisiana Department of Health**

Karen Stubbs, Louisiana Department of Health, 628 North Fourth Street, Baton Rouge, LA 70802, spoke for information only and presented a slideshow, Exhibit C, which is included in the committee records.

Witness cards submitted by individuals who did not speak are as follows: 2 for information only. Witness cards are included in the committee records.

**Louisiana's Managed Care Associations**

Dr. Stewart Gordon, Louisiana Healthcare Connections, 4171 Essen Lane, Baton Rouge, LA 70809, spoke for information only and presented a slideshow, Exhibit D, which is included in the committee records.

Dr. José Calderón-Abbo, Louisiana Managed Medicaid Association, 3838 North Causeway Boulevard, Suite 2500, Metairie, Louisiana 70002, spoke for information only. He continued with the presentation of the slideshow that Dr. Gordon initiated.

*Representative Turner in the chair.*

Dr. Loretta Sonnier, AmeriHealth Caritas Louisiana, P.O. Box 83580, Baton Rouge, LA 70884, spoke for information only. In response to questions from the committee, she described the process of working with the Center for Evidence-Based Practice at Louisiana State University to review innovations prior to implementation.

Witness cards submitted by individuals who did not speak are as follows: 5 for information only. Witness cards are included in the committee records.

*Representative Schlegel in the chair.*

**Follow-up on the discussion from the subcommittee meeting held on August 24, 2023**

Karen Stubbs, Louisiana Department of Health, 628 North Fourth Street, Baton Rouge, LA 70802, spoke for information only. Ms. Stubbs informed the members that she was receptive to any questions they might have regarding her prior testimony at a previous meeting. The committee members had no inquiries for her.

Representative Schlegel invited those in attendance who wished to provide public testimony unrelated to items on the agenda to address the committee.

Nekyah Gray, 8943 Thelma Street, Baton Rouge, LA 70807, spoke for information only. She shared a personal account of her experience as a college student during a recent mental health crisis.

Corhonda Corley, Louisiana Families of Individuals with Disabilities, 8815 Wilmore Drive, Zachary, LA 70791, spoke for information only. She described her experience as the parent of an autistic child.

Tony Landry, Veterans Action Council, 805 Genevieve Drive, Lafayette, LA 70503, spoke for information only. He advocated for the use of natural plant medicines such as cannabis, ayahuasca,

ibogaine, psilocybin, and other psychedelic plants and fungi to treat addiction, depression, and anxiety.

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**

Chairman Schlegel announced that the next meeting of the Subcommittee on Mental Health will be held on November 9, 2023.

#### **V. ADJOURNMENT**

Representative Larvadain offered a motion to adjourn. Without objection, the motion passed by a vote of 6 yeas and 0 nays. Representatives Schlegel, Echols, Larvadain, Selders, McMahan, and Hughes voted yea.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:36 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Chairman Laurie Schlegel  
Subcommittee on Mental Health of House Committee on Health and Welfare

Date adopted: March 21, 2024