



## Arkansas Finish Line Coalition Meeting Minutes Wednesday, January 21, 2009 at 8:00 AM Arkansas Children's Hospital

**Attendees:** Rebekah Dixon, Taylor Kent, Rosi Smith, Leta Carreira, Rhonda Sanders, Nancy Holder, Mandy Farr, Paula Smith, Lauren French, Drew Ramey, Scott Gordon, Dr. Dick Nugent, Dr. Eddie Ochoa, Aimee Berry, Rev. Steve Copley, Joni Jones, Linda Greer, Candice Smith, Laura Kellams, Tara Manthey, Elisabeth Wright Burak

**Teleconference Participants:** Cheryl Goad

### **Finish Line Coalition Goals:**

- *Reduce the number of eligible, un-enrolled children from 44,000 to 22,000 during the three-year grant period. The Coalition, including local outreach partners, will identify barriers and develop strategies to reduce or eliminate them.*
- *Expand ARKids Eligibility from 200 to 300 percent of poverty. The Coalition will consider expansion options and educate partners across the state about the importance of children's access to health insurance.*
- *Develop a buy in program for families at and above 300 percent of the poverty line. The Coalition will work with state officials to consider strategies allowing families to buy into either the current ARKids First program or a program with similar benefits.*

**Location:** Arkansas Children Hospital – Cress Board Room, 800 Marshall St., Little Rock, AR 72202-3591

### **I. Welcome**

Elisabeth Burak began the meeting shortly after 8:00 AM. She she'd try to avoid having meetings so early because she realizes it's harder on those who drive in from outside Little Rock.

### **II. News on ARKids enrollment procedures**

Elisabeth introduced Joni Jones from the Department of Human Services to discuss technology changes that could have a positive impact on ARKids enrollment procedures.

Jones said DHS historically has done a good job with intake procedures but that in the last three years, the system has been overburdened, particularly in central and northwest Arkansas. Keeping staff in those regions has been difficult, and now there are months-long backlogs in some areas. The system can't keep up. With the economic outlook worsening, more Arkansans are going to need transitional assistance.



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The Department of Human Services is working to expand the capability at Access Arkansas to allow clients to enroll for a variety of services electronically:

1. *On the Internet.* The department still will need case workers to deal with the more difficult cases, but it is hoped that many enrollees can submit electronic applications from home or from other partner sites where advocates can help clients if they aren't technology-savvy.
2. *By telephone.* Clients will be able to answer questions from a trained worker at a call center who will then key in the information. This might even be offered 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
3. *DHS office.* A kiosk would be available in the waiting room, and the client could still request an appointment with a case worker, if necessary.

The key to this is document-imaging and electronic case files, Jones said. That allows a much more effective and efficient process. The changes to Access Arkansas will start with ARKids, hopefully beginning March 1. Then DHS will roll out more programs, perhaps starting in June. The bugs aren't all worked out, but the staff is trying to be aggressive with the start schedule. The program will start with new applicants, but the goal is for renewals eventually to be done this way, as well.

- Dr. Eddie Ochoa asked whether there would be any bilingual support. Jones said that type of help will chiefly be offered through the call centers, with clients choosing English or Spanish at the beginning of the call.
- Tara Manthey with AACF asked how DHS would publicize this, and Jones said her staff will work with Julie Munsell at DHS to get the word out.
- Rhonda Sanders with Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance asked whether the Benefit Bank would be involved. Jones said the Benefit Bank was the first foray into having trained counselors assist people at non-DHS sites, but she said participation has not been what department officials had hoped for. They've learned a lot from the experience and now hope they can take that to help make the Access Arkansas project more successful.
- Rhonda said the electronic signature has always been a hurdle. How will that be addressed? Jones said there will be a screen at which the client will check a box acknowledging their understanding of the application process. Linda Greer with DHS said applicants will probably be asked to retype their names on that screen, in addition to checking a box.



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- Paula Smith, the state school nurse consultant, said school nurses will do anything they can to help coordinate the process. Elisabeth Burak said the Finish Line sites and coalition members will want to help, as well, even in the testing phases. Jones said she appreciated the offers, particularly with help in the testing phase.
- Dr. Dick Nugent with the Department of Health asked about citizenship requirements. Jones said DHS will use databases to confirm birth information for those who were born in Arkansas. If not, DHS will have to follow-up by asking for an out-of-state birth certificate.
- Nugent said Health Department staff work with clients through Connect Care to get them a primary care physician and that having access to the DHS's online information online would help.

Elisabeth asked Jones to keep the coalition informed of the progress and that she thinks the changes are positive developments for children who are eligible for ARKids.

### **III. 2009 Legislative Session**

Elisabeth reported that Gov. Mike Beebe's health care proposal included expansion of ARKids eligibility to children in families with incomes up to 250 percent of poverty. Beebe's proposals would be funded with a 56-cent tax on cigarettes and changes in the way smokeless tobacco is taxed. Proceeds from the new tax also would help pay for community health centers, coordinated school health, substance abuse and a trauma system, among other programs. Elisabeth said she was pleased that Gov. Beebe mentioned ARKids expansion first in a list of health programs outlined in his State of the State speech.

Elisabeth said it's important that we get our networks mobilized. She passed out a legislative brief and said the Step Up Coalition would provide help drafting letters to the editor.

Rosi Smith with Arkansas Children's Hospital said the tobacco tax is the key. We need to get the grass roots in touch with House members immediately, she said. Elisabeth said if any coalition members' hands are tied on organizing such calls or letters, please let us know, and we might be able to help.

Elisabeth said if the tax passes and families with incomes up to 250 percent of poverty are eligible, that will make outreach and enrollment that much more important for our coalition.

### **IV. Federal update**



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Elisabeth introduced Candice Smith, AACF's federal policy director. Candice reported that legislation extending the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) was moving along nicely at the congressional level, with the House having already passed it and the Senate Finance Committee considering its own version. The House bill was much like SCHIP legislation in 2007 that President Bush vetoed.

The House version called for a 61-cent increase in the federal tobacco tax. It would eliminate the five-year ban on legal immigrant children's eligibility. That would allow states to use federal funds to choose to cover legal immigrant children. That component is now at the center of some controversy on the Senate side. As it moves forward, Candice said she may need coalition members to make calls to senators, particularly U.S. Sen. Mark Pryor. Pryor could make a difference on the immigrant children's issue, she said.

Elisabeth said the Finish Line Coalition's goal is to cover all children regardless of immigration status. If the five-year ban is lifted, that will be an important first step, she said.

Elisabeth added that if anyone hears criticism of the state pushing for a 56-cent tax on top of the proposed federal increase of 61 cents, we have talking points to address that.

### **V. Finish Line Rally**

Tara Manthey reported on the Finish Line rally at the state Capitol, planned for Feb. 5.

- The coalition members need to show up at 9 a.m. with the rally beginning at 9:30 a.m.
- Elisabeth and one or two lawmakers will make brief comments, and hopefully we'll hear from a family affected directly.
- Then the group will move down to the lawn to watch a children's footrace, with spectators holding orange and yellow Finish Line pennants. It will be a great visual, but we need some kids for it. If you know of groups of kids or individuals who could take part during the school day, please let Tara know.
- Elisabeth will also release the children's health insurance report on that day, which is also AACF's "Kids Count Day" at the Capitol.
- We have 1,000 copies of the new Finish Line brochures.



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Elisabeth said we're still seeking stories for the Story Bank of uninsured, insured, and underinsured families throughout the state. If a family is interested, it is preferred that the families contact the students at [storybank@aradvocates.org](mailto:storybank@aradvocates.org) or (501) 371-9678 Ext. 107.

**Next meeting: May 7, 2009 at 1 PM – Arkansas Children's Hospital in Cress Board Room**