



**HELPING EVERY LIFE AND PARENT TASK FORCE
MEETING MINUTES
SEPT. 26, 2022, 10 A.M.
OKLAHOMA STATE CAPITOL BUILDING
SENATE CONFERENCE ROOM 4S.9
2300 N. LINCOLN BLVD., OKLAHOMA CITY, OK 73105**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Juli Merciez, BSN, RN MPC, Co-Founder and President of The Cottage is a pregnancy center and residential maternity home. Chair; *Governor J. Kevin Stitt appointment*
Dr. Michelle Brunnabend, D.O., licensed OBGYN, owner, and physician at Aspen Women’s Center. *Governor J. Kevin Stitt appointment*
Lori Carter, First Assistant Attorney General, *designee for Attorney General John O’Connor*
Crystal Coon, *designee for Senate Pro Tempore Greg Treat*
Samantha Galloway, interim Director. *Secretary of Human Services Justin Brown designee*
David Lewis, CEO of Go Life Mobile Medical Inc. *Governor J. Kevin Stitt appointment*
Dierdre McCool, Executive Vice-President at Butterfield Memorial Foundation. *Governor J. Kevin Stitt appointment*
Sandra Puebla, Deputy State Medicaid Director. *Secretary of Health and Mental Health Kevin Corbett, designee [Appeared Remotely]*
Jackie Shawnee, Chief of Staff. *Commissioner of Health Keith Reed designee*
Gayla White, Director of Hope Pregnancy Ministries. *Governor J. Kevin Stitt appointment*
Rep. Danny Williams, *designee of House Speaker Charles McCall*

MEMBERS’ ABSENT: None.

GUESTS: Ellen Buettner, OHCA
Cody Smith, LegisOK
Tim Tuck, OMES Legal
David Crall, Senate
Emma Morris, OK Policy Institute
Deborah Smith, OKDHS
Madison Miller, OKDHS
Beverly Hicks, OMES Clerk

1. Welcome [Juli Merciez, Chair]:

Chairwoman Merciez welcomed everyone to the second meeting of the Task Force.

2. **Determination of quorum and call to order [Chair]:**

Chairwoman Juli Merciez called the meeting to order at 10 a.m. A roll call was taken, and a quorum was established.

3. **Introductions [Chair]:**

The members introduced themselves and shared their fields of expertise.

4. **Approval of minutes from the Sept. 13, 2022, Task Force meeting [Chair]:**

Samantha Galloway moved to approve the meeting minutes from September 13. Jackie Shawnee seconded the motion. The motion passed, and the following votes were recorded:

Ms. Merciez, aye; Dr. Brunnabend, aye; Ms. Carter, aye; Ms. Coon, aye; Ms. Galloway, aye; Mr. Lewis, aye; Ms. McCool, aye; Ms. Puebla, aye; Ms. Shawnee, aye; Ms. White, aye; Rep. Williams, aye.

5. **Old Business [Chair]:**

A. Task Assignment Updates:

1. Family Building Services [Deborah Smith, Director of Adult and Family Services]

Ms. Smith with Adult and Family services shared the available services offered to the State of Oklahoma. Ms. Smith spoke about the resources focusing on family formation stability services funded through their Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) federal grant.

Ms. Smith reported on DHS's six program divisions of multiple programs that serve Oklahomans. She focused on mental family services, a division she leads responsible for all mandated safety nets services such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or Food Stamps, TANF, Childcare Subsidies, and Aid to the Aged, Blind, and Disabled.

The brand created for this set of services is Familyhood, highlighting motherhood, fatherhood, and childhood support, all important aspects of family stability services that strengthen the family and community.

Ms. Smith spoke on the first set, TANF Investment Strategies (TANF + TIS), which provides services that are grouped into family stability services. The pandemic motivated this set of services to help support struggling families customized to the community's most significant needs. There have been several different Cohorts released in the group. Cohort One is a set of services they have been providing for about a year with six purposes. They chose to focus on Purpose 4: *Encouraging the formation and maintenance of two-parent families*. She shared on the first set of cohort one partners, where they provided them the funding for a mix of services. These partners either create new services or expand the services that they are currently providing. Some videos were shown displaying some of these services.

2. Abortion Pill Recovery. [Gayla White and Sister Brigid Mary Meek; Guest]

Sister Brigid Mary reported on draft research of the Abortion Pill Reversal conducted by the Director of Pharmacy, David Donald, Saint Francis Health System Research.



Chairwoman Merciez granted the request of Task Force member Sandra Puebla that before any adoption of Sister Meeks' recommendations or the recommendation to move them forward that the Health Care Authority be given some time to research the guidelines provided in the report to discuss those particular accommodations mentioned with their federal partners at Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) to ensure the adoption of those guidelines could even be a possibility and to direct the Task Force members to implement some of those recommendations that affect the Health Care Authority. Ms. Merciez asked for a report at the next meeting on October 11, 2022.

Dr. Brunnabend exited the meeting at 11:06 a.m.

3. Adoption Opportunity. [Lori Carter]

Chairwoman Merciez clarified that adoption opportunity for this body means private adoption opportunity. The Task Force has nothing to do with state adoption laws.

1st Recommendation:

First Assistant Lori Carter reported that the Attorney General's Office gave an extensive overview of the current adoption laws, and one of the suggestions for change would be to raise the reasonable and necessary living expenses that could be reimbursed to a birth mother from the amount of \$1,000 to \$3,500. The 1,000-dollar amount was changed from \$500 to \$1,000 in 2009 and has not increased since then. Ms. Carter asked the members if they wanted the AG's Office to pursue it further and possibly come up with proposed legislation for private adoptions.

2nd Recommendation:

Ms. Carter reported on Continuing Legal Education (CLE) for attorneys. Attorneys are not required to have a specific type of CLE that they get every year other than the ethics two-hour requirement. She suggested that the AG's Office work with Oklahoma Bar Association and require CLEs for specific practice areas in the Bar to have a certain amount of CLEs to be a member of a particular practice group.

3rd Recommendation:

Ms. Carter reported that the third suggestion discussed was addressing out-of-state adoption facilitators coming into the state who want to adopt a child would require them to partner with licensed adoption centers in Oklahoma so there can be some regulation and accountability.

Ms. Carter clarified that the three recommendations would be for further study and not for final adoption by the Task Force but would allow the AG's Office to move forward to present this group with actual legislative ideas or otherwise.

Representative Williams moved to adopt the first two recommendations by Lori Carter, Attorney General's Office, and to continue to discuss the third point and have a greater definition of what that means. Crystal Coon seconded the motion. The motion passed, and the following votes were recorded:

Ms. Merciez, aye; Ms. Carter, aye; Ms. Coon, aye; Mr. Lewis, aye; Ms. McCool, aye; Ms. Puebla, aye; Ms. Shawnee, aye; Ms. White, aye; Rep. Williams, aye.

Ms. Galloway exited the meeting at 12:11 p.m.



4. **Oklahoma Safe Haven Law. [Lori Carter]**

Chairwoman Merciez requested that this item be heard first before item 3.

First Assistant Lori Carter gave a summary of the Safe Haven Law that allows a new mother to drop off her baby 30 days of age or younger with a particular service provider, medical service provider, or a child rescuer defined in the statute. Those types of people are nurses, physician assistants, doctors, police stations, fire stations, child protective services, and agencies and hospitals over medical facilities.

Ms. Carter reported that they looked at a couple of other states to see how they addressed that issue and found those states have up to 45 and 60 days to allow a mother to drop off their child to ensure they are safe. She proposed two suggestions to the Oklahoma Safe Haven Law; one to raise the number of days for relinquishment up to 60 days and the other to include licensed pregnancy centers and licensed child placement agencies as the child's receiver in this type of situation. She asked members to consider whether they wanted to pursue that as a legislative recommendation before they would write up some suggestions to change the law. The Attorney General's Office is happy to come back with some legislative ideas and language to implement that.

Representative Williams moved to explore the additional. Dierdre McCool seconded the motion. The motion passed, and the following votes were recorded:

Ms. Merciez, aye; Ms. Carter, aye; Ms. Coon, aye; Ms. Galloway, aye; Mr. Lewis, aye, Ms. McCool, aye; Ms. Puebla, aye; Ms. Shawnee, aye; Ms. White, aye; Rep. Williams, aye.

Representative Williams motioned to suspend the time limit in this meeting to complete their work. Chairwoman Merciez asked the members by a show of hands who could stay to maintain quorum, and a quorum of the members was established for the meeting to proceed forward.

6. **New Business [Chair]:**

A. Opportunity Discussion:

1. Community Education Opportunities.

Ms. White spoke on the Oklahoma Adoption Coalition, which has existed for 35 years. They are a coalition of all the child-listed agencies in the State of Oklahoma, and their goal is to promote ethical adoption in the state.

Mr. Lewis spoke on the Fatherhood program and suggested rebranding and getting communities/local churches involved. Ms. White suggested doing a series of public service announcements that empower young fathers and give them a voice. Ms. Coon informed on a specific group that partners with churches called *Embrace Grace*. Their mission is to equip churches to support men and women experiencing unplanned pregnancies through mentorship. Representative Williams spoke about mentoring young men on how to treat a woman.

There was talk amongst the members about putting a communications plan together for the Legislature to consider funds allocated for this specific purpose, possibly with ARPA (American Rescue Plan) funds.



Ms. Puebla exited the meeting at 12:59 p.m.

Ms. Carter exited the meeting at 1:02 p.m.

**2. Support Pregnancy Centers in Oklahoma
Oklahoma Pregnancy Care Network (OPCN)**

Chairwoman Merciez would like to see pregnancy centers start receiving state funds and encourages filling out applications where funding opportunities are available. Ms. White informed about a law in Missouri that supports tax incentives and would further like to explore that law to see if it could benefit pregnancy centers in the State. The members further discussed more ways to help support Oklahoma Pregnancy Centers.

3. Educate Oklahomans on the reality of life. [Video]

The members agreed it is about public education and getting the word out.

4. Empower non-profit and faith communities to support families and mothers/fathers before, during, and after childbirth.

The members talked about community models and other ways of supporting families before, during, and after childbirth.

B. Discussion from the floor.

Crystal Coon moved to approve an additional meeting date for October 18. Representative Williams seconded the motion. The motion passed, and the following votes were recorded:

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Ms. Merciez, aye; Ms. Coon, aye; Mr. Lewis, aye; Ms. McCool, aye; Ms. Shawnee, aye; Ms. White, aye; Rep. Williams, aye.

7. Adjournment:

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 1:25 p.m.