



Capitol Network News

Today's news from Oklahoma's best government information resource

Daily Edition, Thursday, October 10, 1996

MENTAL ILLNESS INSURANCE PARITY TASK FORCE EXAMINES OTHER STATES

By Shawn Ashley
Staff Writer

■(GIT) Other states' laws related to mental illness insurance parity were the focus Thursday of the Task Force on Mental Illness Insurance Coverage.

The task force, chaired by Sen. Angela Monson, D-Tulsa, briefly examined four states' laws designed to promote parity of coverage between medical/surgical insurance and mental illness insurance. The goal of the task force is to make legislative recommendations designed to bring mental illness insurance coverage on par with other forms of insurance coverage, particularly medical and surgical insurance coverage.

House staffer Claudia Durrell told the panel that the states — Maine, Maryland, New Hampshire and Minnesota — vary in their approaches to the definition of mental illness and the amount of parity required by their laws.

Maine and New Hampshire, Durrell explained, limit their required coverage to only "biologically based mental illnesses," while Maryland and Minnesota also have provisions related to emotional disorders and substance abuse or chemical dependency.

The costs of the required coverage also varies from state-to-state, the House staffer noted.

In addition, a mental illness parity pro-

vision recently enacted by Congress was addressed. That provision, part of HR3666, prohibits group health insurance plans that already have mental illness components from having financial differentials between that coverage and the other forms of coverage, particularly medical and surgical, included in the plan.

Some panel members, as well as Monson, were critical of the federal law, noting that it applies only to group plans and that it has an opt-out provision tied to costs.

The task force will focus its attention next on the concerns of those in the business community, the psychiatric community and the insurance industry related to mental illness

insurance parity. Monson said it is her hope that the meeting, which will include testimony from representatives of the different groups, will help lay the groundwork for the panel's legislative recommendations. That meeting will be held on the morning of Oct. 31 at a site to be announced.

Two additional meetings are also planned — Nov. 14 and Dec. 16. During the November meeting, Monson said she will ask the panel to put together its final recommendations for legislative action. The Dec. 16 meeting will be dedicated to completing that effort and preparing the recommendations for submission to the legislature by the panel's legislatively-imposed Jan. 2 deadline.

ADOPTION REFORM COMMITTEE SETS LEGISLATIVE GOALS

By Gerry Cherry
Staff Writer

■(GIT) In their 12th meeting Thursday, the Adoption Law Reform Committee, appointed by the legislature in 1995, set time constraints for recommendations to the 46th legislature and discussed the impact of public hearings on member opinions.

Public hearings were held in Oklahoma City and Tulsa to enable committee members to hear suggestions from adoptees, adoptive parents and others involved with the adoption process. Several committee members are adoptive parents, although none are adopted.

The overwhelming opinion expressed at both meetings, Rep. Russ Roach, D-Tulsa said, is adopted adults want access to adoption records held by the state. In some cases, adoption records of many years ago are incomplete, preventing adopted people from gaining knowledge of their own medical and/or social history. In other cases, adopted adults want to make contact with their birth parents. "We have the issue of absolute, open adoption records," Roach said, "and on the other hand, the people who want to preserve their privacy."

Adopted adults who search for their birth parents are sometimes disappointed when they find them, the committee learned from

testimony at the public hearings.

"An adoptee who does the research on his own and makes contact anyway has no assurance he'll get any emotional satisfaction from the contact," Roach said. One committee member mentioned an adoptee who wanted to make contact with a birth parent, but the birth parent was not interested in meeting the adoptee. Testimony of this nature indicated a qualified, confidential intermediary might be helpful, both to the birth parent and the adopted adult.

Other ideas that came out of the public hearings included counseling for birth parents, before and after the adoption takes place; making all adoption records open to the adoptee at age 18 and allowing adoption agencies to have access to Department of Human Services records concerning the child to be adopted.

Concerning opening the records, member Jack Petty, an attorney, said, "this is obviously an area we need to deal with, but I approach it with fear and trepidation." Attorney John O'Connor said if adoptive parents knew from the start that records would be open to adoptees at age 18, it might make it easier for everybody.

"We cannot solve with statutes everyone's
See Adoption Reform, page 2

What's Inside

Keating Defends Political Activities	2
Roberts' Record Keeping in Spotlight	2
Treasurer's Investment Earnings Top Quarterly Estimate	3
Food Stamp Immigrant Restrictions Delayed ..	3
Oklahoma, Texas Governors Put Barbecue On the Line	3
DOE to Sell Elk Hills Oil Field in Segments ..	4
States to Receive More Than \$185 Million in Interim National Forest Payments	4
Prairie Grass to Yield New Power	4
Grants Promote Women in Nontraditional Occupations	5
Reduction in SIDS Deaths Helps Bring Low Infant Mortality	5
Another City Added to Clean Cities Program ..	5
Calendar	6