

# Governor Bentley Chairs First Alabama Children's Cabinet Meeting



Alabama Gov. Robert Bentley leads the inaugural meeting of the Children's Cabinet in his office at the Capitol in Montgomery, Monday, June 13, 2016. State Rep. David Faulkner was elected vice chair the committee, which brings together leaders to better serve the state's children by streamlining services to Alabama's more than 1 million children. (Governor's Office, Jamie Martin)

By Press Release: AL Gov. Robert Bentley | Posted: Tue 11:00 AM, Jun 14, 2016

**MONTGOMERY, AL (WTVY)** Formed in April 2016 by Governor Robert Bentley, the Alabama Children's Cabinet met for the first time Monday to address several themes on how the group could work to best help children. The group explored ways to better communicate to people information about services provided by state agencies, such as those overseeing Medicaid, human resources, and mental health.

"We need to help reach the people of the state so they'll know we have services available," said Governor Bentley, who chairs the 12-member group. Another theme was to coordinate programs among agencies, avoiding duplication and identifying service gaps, and then working to fill those gaps. "A unified approach not only helps with communication among the agencies, but it also identifies the needs of the children, which is one of the main goals of this task force," said state Rep. David Faulkner, R-Mountain Brook who was chosen as vice chair of the Children's Cabinet.

Other members talked about helping children with health, learning or behavioral problems or other issues sooner rather than later, to help them likely reduce the need for services later in life. "It costs less money down the road to help a child early on," said Department of Human Resources Commissioner Nancy Buckner.

Others talked about wrapping services around the families of children in need. Governor Bentley asked that each Children's Cabinet member report back at the group's next meeting to suggest one objective the group and the agencies it represents could do to "move this effort forward so that we may better serve our children."

The Governor on April 12 signed an executive order creating the Children's Cabinet, to collaborate and coordinate on issues relating to Alabama's children, to connect and align systems of children's programs and services. The group's specific duties include maximizing efficiency, reducing duplication, ensuring sustainability of successful programs, and developing accountability measures.

Besides Governor Bentley, Rep. Faulkner, and Commissioner Buckner, the members are: Stephanie Azar, commissioner, Alabama Medicaid Agency; Cary Boswell, commissioner, Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services; Philip Cleveland, interim superintendent, Alabama State Department of Education; Steven Lafreniere, executive director, Alabama Department of Youth Services; Sallye Longshore, executive director, Alabama Department of Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention; Tom Miller, State Health Officer, Alabama Department of Public Health; Nichelle Nix, director, Governor's Office of Minority Affairs; Jim Perdue, commissioner, Alabama Department of Mental Health; and Jeana Ross, secretary, Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education.

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