



Commission focuses on Alabama families

By Lt. Gov. Jim Folsom, Guest Columnist
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The family resource center model has proven to be one of the most successful social service models available to communities and families across the country. This model is an effective means by which Alabama families access and utilize social services to address diverse local issues. During my tenure as Governor, we led the charge to implement the Family Resource Center model in Alabama and also sought federal Family Preservation and Support Services funding for this project.

Family Resource Centers are community based non-profit social service agencies which provide a wide variety of prevention and intervention services.

In 1994, Alabama launched its first Family Resource Center in the Dothan area. Since that time, a network of Family Resource Centers has been established to serve communities across the state. In May 2000, the Alabama Legislature standardized membership into the Alabama Network of Family Resource Centers (ANFRC). This move preserved the integrity of Alabama's family resource center model, while also ensuring that any center receiving state funding met the highest standards of excellence and accountability. There are currently 12 centers that are on par with these qualifications, while 18 other centers are in various stages of development.

The Alabama Network of Family Resource Centers provides a diverse assortment of services designed to strengthen and effectively address the needs of Alabama families. According to the ANFRC, the primary purpose of the Alabama Network is to support the development, growth and continuation of family resource centers by providing technical assistance, training, advocacy, resources and networking opportunities. Each year, thousands of Alabama families receive intensive services, such as case management, counseling, home visitation, parenting, health, employment readiness and emergency services. Currently, ANFRC centers operate in Dothan, Anniston, Birmingham, Bay Minette, Phenix City, Talladega, Valley, Brewton, Montgomery, Decatur, Sylacauga, and Tuscaloosa.

These centers provide critical services to their communities and have made a substantial difference in the lives of Alabama families by reducing individuals' and families' needs for more costly state and federal services. These centers have played an integral role in creating and instituting strong networks in communities around the state and in quickly reacting to key local issues. With any program of this magnitude, regular staff training, and periodic evaluation are essential to ensuring that quality services are being rendered.

During the 2008 regular legislative session, a House Joint Resolution was responsible for giving life to the Services for Alabama Families Study Commission. The purpose of this commission is to study the work of Family Resource Centers in Alabama and make recommendations for their support, expansion and sustainability.

The commission will compile its findings and make recommendations to the 2009 Legislature regarding the services, location, operation and funding of the Family Resource Centers. The 17-member commission is composed of a bi-partisan group of members of the House and Senate, representatives of state agencies serving children and families, the family court system and child advocates. The commission consists of three subcommittees that will address the key duties outlined in HJR 460: Funding and Funding Limitations, Accountability and Quality Measures and Interaction and Collaboration. The subcommittees will report their findings at the next meeting of the full Commission this fall.

Members of the Commission are:

Representative Tammy Irons, chairman

Alfred Saliba, vice chairman

Representative Barbara Boyd, secretary

Kathy Vincent, office of the state health officer

Walter wood, director of youth services

Kim Mashego, Office of the DHR commissioner

Chris McInnish, commissioner of children's affairs

Marian Loftin, director of the Children's Trust Fund

Dr. Joe Morton, state superintendent of education

Linda Cater, office of the chancellor of postsecondary education

Judge Laura Phillips, representing Chief Justice Sue Bell Cobb

Linda Tilly, director, Voices for Alabama's Children

Margaret Morton, Sylacauga Family Resource Center

The implementation of the family resource model has afforded Alabama numerous benefits since its inception. Our state has been nationally recognized for setting the bar for accountability standards for family resource centers and is paving the way for Alabama to exceed federal expectations and standards. Our families deserve the respect and dignity to receive the highest quality service that can be offered. It is essential that we maintain this level of excellence in all of our family resource programs and continue to ensure a vision of promise and hope for Alabama families.

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