

**Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services**

**Easterseals of West Alabama  
1400 James I. Harrison Jr., Parkway East  
Tuscaloosa, Alabama**

**Thursday, September 14, 2023  
10:00 a.m.**

**AGENDA**

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Welcome	Donny Jones Chief Operating Officer, Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama Executive Director, West Alabama Works
	Dusty Wilder Executive Assistant Easterseals of West Alabama

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Call to Order	Charles Wilkinson, Chair
Prayer	
Verification of Quorum	Karen Freeman
Verification of Open Meeting Act Notice	Charles Wilkinson
Approval of Agenda	Charles Wilkinson
Approval of Minutes for the June 22, 2023 meeting	Charles Wilkinson

**New Business:**

Board Member Recognition	Charles Wilkinson
• Mr. William 'Mitch' Strickland Congressional District 7	Jane Elizabeth Burdeshaw, Commissioner
Swearing-in Ceremony – New Board Member	Ashley Hamlett, General Counsel
• Ms. Norma M. Lemley Congressional District 7	

ADRS Operations Plan FY 2023 – 2024

Shay Cannon, Chief  
Financial Officer

ADRS Personnel Staffing Plan FY 2023 – 2024

Tracy Bird, Human Resource  
Development Director

- Approval - ADRS Operations Plan FY 2023 – 2024
- Approval – ADRS Personnel Staffing Plan FY 2023 – 2024

Charles Wilkinson

Charles Wilkinson

Division Updates

Executive Leadership Team

Commissioner's Comments

Jane Elizabeth Burdeshaw

**Announcements:**

Charles Wilkinson

Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services meeting dates for **2023:**

- **Thursday, December 7, 2023 – 10:00 a.m.**, Montgomery/State Office

Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services **proposed** meeting dates for **2024:**

- **Thursday, March 7, 2024** - 10:00 a.m., Montgomery/State Office
- **Thursday, June 20, 2024** – 10:00 a.m., Montgomery/State Office
- **Thursday, September 12, 2024** – 10:00 a.m., Montgomery/State Office
- **Thursday, December 5, 2024** – 10:00 a.m., Montgomery/State Office

Board Business/Discussion

Charles Wilkinson

Adjourn

Charles Wilkinson

- *Reception Honoring Mr. Mitch Strickland*
- *Tour of the Building*

## ***Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services***

*Easterseals of West Alabama  
1400 James I. Harrison Jr., Parkway East  
Tuscaloosa, Alabama  
2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Multi-Purpose Room  
Minutes  
Thursday, September 14, 2023*

### **Welcome:**

Mr. Donny Jones, Chief Operating Officer, for the Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama and Executive Director of the West Alabama Works, Region 3 Workforce Development Council, welcomed the Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services to the Tuscaloosa area. Mr. Jones expressed his appreciation to Commissioner Burdeshaw, the Board, the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services Executive Leadership Team and staff, and Easterseals of West Alabama staff for the long-standing partnerships in providing services to children and adults with disabilities in the Tuscaloosa area.

Due to a scheduling conflict, Ms. Ottia Phillips, Executive Director of Easterseals of West Alabama, was not available to provide today's welcome. Ms. Dusty Wilder, Executive Assistant to Ms. Phillips, welcomed everyone to the Tuscaloosa area. At the conclusion of the meeting, Ms. Phillips will provide a guided tour of the building for those interested.

### **Call to Order:**

Mr. Charles Wilkinson, Board Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:17 a.m.

### **Prayer:**

Dr. Graham Sisson, Jr., Executive Director of the Alabama Governor's Office on Disability (GOOD), opened the board meeting with prayer.

### **Verification of Quorum:**

**Board Members Present (in-person):** Mr. Charles Wilkinson, Board Chair; Mr. Kevin Kidd, Board Vice-Chair; Ms. Kimberlin Love; Mr. Mitch Strickland; and Mr. Eddie Williams. A quorum was declared.

**Board Members Absent:** Ms. Judith Gilliam

**Conference Call Participants:** Ms. Michelle Glaze and Mr. Dave White, Governor's Office, Senior Policy Advisor

**Interpreting Services:** Ms. Angel Dahlgren, Senior Interpreter, Vocational Rehabilitation Service (VRS) Homewood Office; Ms. Susan Gordon, Senior Interpreter, VRS Tuscaloosa Office; and Mr. Ben Putnam, Senior Interpreter, VRS Talladega Office.

### **Verification of the Open Meetings Act Notice:**

Pursuant to the proclamation dated March 3, 2022, the Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services' board meeting was conducted in-person and open to the public. The Open Meetings Act allows for electronic participation except to establish a quorum. The Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services requires four members to attend in-person to establish a quorum, but other members may participate via conference call.

Mrs. Karen Freeman verified that the Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services meeting for September 14, 2023, was posted on the Alabama Secretary of State's website on Monday, July 31, 2023, at 9:53 a.m.

The meeting announcement and registration information were posted on the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services' public website on Tuesday, August 29, 2023, and made available at the following link: <https://rehab.alabama.gov/about/meet-our-board> with a registration deadline of Monday, September 11, 2023, at 5:00 p.m. CDST. Meeting registration was not necessary for in-person participants, but registration was required for those preferring to participate via conference call. A conference call line was established for board members and the public. Upon registration for the conference call, participants received an email with instructions and the telephone number to call.

### **Approval of Agenda:**

The board meeting agenda was mailed prior to the meeting. Mr. Wilkinson, Chair, asked for a motion to approve the agenda. Mr. Wilkinson stated there were no changes and/or additions to the agenda and it was approved by unanimous consent.

### **Approval of Minutes for June 22, 2023 Meeting:**

The board meeting minutes were mailed prior to the meeting. Mr. Wilkinson stated that if there were no corrections, the minutes would stand approved as presented. The board meeting minutes were approved by unanimous consent.

### **New Business:**

#### **Board Member Recognition:**

#### **Special Recognition – Mr. William Mitch Strickland, Seventh Congressional District**

On behalf of the Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services, Mr. Wilkinson presented Mr. Strickland with a Certificate of Appreciation from Gov. Kay Ivey recognizing him for outstanding service on the Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services. Mr. Strickland performed his duties with the utmost expertise and professionalism. Mr. Wilkinson thanked him for his hard work and dedication to the Board. On behalf of Gov. Kay Ivey, Mr. Dave White, Governor's Office, Senior Policy Advisor, expressed his appreciation to Mr. Strickland for his twenty (20) years of dedicated service to the Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services.

On behalf of the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services Commissioner and the Executive Leadership Team, Commissioner Burdeshaw presented Mr. Strickland with a Certificate of Appreciation in recognition and gratitude of twenty (20) years of dedicated service to the Board. He is one of the longest serving board members. Mr. Strickland's personal and civic engagement in the Seventh Congressional District have played an integral part in the success of the Board, and his steadfast advocacy through statewide, national, and international disability advocacy groups contributed to the success of others. In addition to his service on behalf of ADRS, he has worked with business and industry in the design, manufacturing, and marketing of sports and therapeutic equipment for people with disabilities. Mr. Strickland's background, education, and personal achievements in athletics not only enabled him to impact those businesses, but also students with disabilities. Mr. Strickland has faithfully served through three Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services Commissioners and many programmatic changes during his twenty (20) years on the Board, always giving rise to the voice of people with disabilities. Mr. Strickland's participation and presence will be dearly missed.

Mr. Strickland expressed his sincere appreciation to the Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services for their dedicated service to people with disabilities.

There will be a reception honoring Mr. Strickland immediately following the board meeting. Commissioner Burdeshaw and Mr. Wilkinson extended an invitation to everyone attending the meeting to join the celebration honoring Mr. Strickland.

*Swearing-in Ceremony – New Board Member: Mrs. Norma M. Lemley, Seventh Congressional District*

Mr. Wilkinson and Commissioner Burdeshaw welcomed and introduced Mrs. Norma M. Lemley. Mrs. Lemley was appointed by Governor Ivey and received Senate confirmation during the 2023 Alabama Legislative Session. Mrs. Lemley will serve as a representative of the Seventh Congressional District as a parent of a person with a disability. She will serve in the position previously held by Mr. William Mitch Strickland. Mrs. Lemley's appointment will begin on October 1, 2023, and will expire September 30, 2030.

A resident of Tuscaloosa, Mrs. Lemley received her Bachelor of Science degree from Auburn University and graduated magna cum laude from Cumberland School of Law earning her Juris Doctorate. She is now retired but continues to teach for the University of Alabama College of Education, providing her expertise primarily in the area of Higher Education Law for graduate students and adults in Higher Education Administration fields of study. Recently, Mrs. Lemley was appointed to the Alabama Disability: IN Board of Directors.

Mr. Lemley expressed her willingness and eagerness to commit her time, talents, and energy to the well-being of people in Alabama with disabilities. She is excited to begin the journey with the Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services. As a mother of an adult son diagnosed young with Autism Spectrum Disorder, she has personal experience with the challenges faced by people with disabilities every day. She said that she is "on a mission to be sure that no parent or child (with a disability) has to go through" similar difficulties her family experienced, especially when her son, who had earned his master's degree in aerospace engineering, met with numerous roadblocks to gaining employment. Upon connecting with Vocational Rehabilitation Service, he was placed in a paid work experience program. This vital experience led him to his current career as a Lab Coordinator for the University of Alabama's College of Engineering.

Mrs. Ashley Hamlett, General Counsel, administered the Oath of Office for Mrs. Lemley. Mrs. Lemley expressed her desire to serve the constituents of Alabama to the best of her ability and to ensure that they are well-served.

Mr. Wilkinson and Commissioner Burdeshaw expressed their appreciation to Mrs. Lemley for her willingness to serve and her dedication to the mission of the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services.

Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services Operations & Personnel Staffing Plan FY 2023 – 2024

Mrs. Shay Cannon, Chief Financial Officer, provided an in-dept review of the ADRS Operations Plan for FY 2023 – 2024, Executive Budget Office (EBO) Form 8. Mrs. Cannon introduced and expressed her appreciation to Mr. Matt James, Assistant Chief Financial Officer, and Mr. William Hansen, Budget Accountant for their assistance in preparing the ADRS Operations Plan. Mr. James and Mr. Hansen are both invaluable members of the Budget Team.

Mrs. Tracy Bird, Human Resource Development Director, reviewed the ADRS Personnel Staffing Plan for FY 2023 – 2024, Executive Budget Office (EBO) Form 9.

Mr. Wilkinson moved that the Board approve and adopt the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS) FY 2023 – 2024 Operations Plan (EBO Form 8) at the spending level of \$251,303,868, and the ADRS Staffing Plan (EBO Form 9) at the staffing level of 881.50 full-time equivalent positions, and that the Board give authority to the Commissioner and Chief Financial Officer to revise the Operations Plan within these spending and staffing levels. The motion to approve the ADRS Operations & Personnel Staffing Plan for FY 2023 – 2024 was seconded by Ms. Kimberlin Love, and the motion was approved.

Mr. Wilkinson and Commissioner Burdeshaw expressed appreciation to the Executive Leadership Accounting and Personnel Teams for their commitment in pulling this document together, job well done!

Commissioner Burdeshaw reported that she would begin meeting with the Chief Financial Officer, budget staff, Human Resource Development Director, and program leadership to analyze budget trends and projections to develop strategic plans.

Division Updates:

Karen Jenkins, Deputy Commissioner, Vocational Rehabilitation Service – General program, reported the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services, Social Security Disability Program, Benefits Counseling Services and Program Expansion has recruited six (6) additional Benefit Specialists that began work the end of June 2023.

### Commissioner's Comments:

#### Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (CSAVR)

Commissioner Burdeshaw joined the Summer Executive Session of the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (CSAVR) virtually due to other work engagements. The national leadership has developed strategic priorities meant to positively impact the provision of timely services, the expenditure of federal funding, use of state match, and ultimately an increase in the workforce participation rate of people with disabilities.

The CSAVR Fall Conference will be held in Savannah, Georgia on October 28 – November 1, 2023. The fall conference will focus on the same priorities of state programs that have implemented promising practices, rapid engagement, policy shifts, and innovative spending plans. Commissioner Burdeshaw serves as new Region IV Representative and is looking forward to the opportunity to meet in-person during the conference.

#### National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM)

Observed each October, National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) celebrates the contributions of America's workers with disabilities past and present, and showcases supportive, inclusive employment policies and practices that benefit employers and employees. This year's theme is "Advancing Access and Equity."

Commissioner Burdeshaw reported the Alabama Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities annual awards will be held in-person on Friday, October 13, 2023, at a location to be determined. Additional information will be shared as soon as it is available. Everyone should plan to attend the inspirational awards honoring employees with disabilities and the employers who hire them.

The 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Governor's Job Fair for People with Disabilities will be held Thursday, October 5, 2023, from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at Lawson State Community College's Birmingham campus. The job fair is free to both employers and jobseekers.

#### 2024 Alabama Combined Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) State Plan

Since the passage of the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA), states are required to submit a four-year plan to the United States Secretary of Labor describing the plan for each of the titles and programs covered under the Act and any additional partners included in the combined state plan submission. As Alabama is preparing to complete the plan, there will be stakeholder meetings held across the state for the citizens to provide input and receive information regarding the plan. The meetings will be held from 5:30 - 7:30 p.m. on the campuses of various community colleges in the state. The Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services vocational rehabilitation staff, including interpreters, will be attending these meetings, and encouraging consumers to attend. Feedback received will be useful in the development of the state plan. The Governor's Office on Workforce and Education Transformation will conduct the following meetings with the assistance of the WIOA partners. Fellow board member, Mr. Kevin Kidd will be involved in these meetings. Commissioner Burdeshaw is planning to attend the Region Four meeting on October 4, 2023, at Lawson State Community College.

Stakeholder meetings are listed below.

- Region One: August 23, 2023, Calhoun Community College Decatur Campus, Health Sciences Building, Room 109 (6250 Hwy 31 North, Tanner, AL 35671)
- Region Two: September 6, 2023, Gadsden State Community College East Broad Campus, Science Building, Auditorium (1001 E Broad St, Gadsden, AL 35903)
- Region Three: September 20, 2023, Shelton State Community College Martin Campus, Main Building, D-Rooms (9500 Old Greensboro Road, Tuscaloosa, AL 35405)
- Region Four: October 4, 2023, Lawson State Community College Birmingham Campus, ACATT Auditorium (3060 Wilson Rd SW, Birmingham, AL 35221)
- Region Five: October 18, 2023, Trenholm State Community College Patterson Campus, Bldg. D Auditorium (3920 Troy Hwy, Montgomery, AL 36116)
- Region Six: November 1, 2023, Enterprise State Community College, Lurleen B. Wallace Student Center, Multipurpose Room (600 Plaza Dr, Enterprise, AL 36330)
- Region Seven: November 15, 2023, Coastal Alabama Community College Bay Minette Campus, Performing Arts Center (1900 US Highway South, Bay Minette, AL 36507)

### Executive Orders Response

Commissioner Burdeshaw reported the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS) continues to respond to deadlines resulting from Governor Ivey's Executive Orders and she is pleased with the department's progress. She expressed appreciation for the work of the Legal and Accounting offices.

- Executive Order No. 726: Promoting the Faithful Execution of the Laws Within the Executive Branch of State Government

ADRS has updated fiscal policies and contract language.

ADRS has either moved accounts held outside the State Treasury into the State Treasury, or requested an exemption from the Governor's office. ADRS is awaiting a response to the exemption requests that relate to timely consumer purchases in the Vocational Rehabilitation Service Program, Children's Rehabilitation Service Program, and Business Enterprise Programs.

- Executive Order No. 728: Promoting Efficiency and Accountability in the Use of State Vehicles

All ADRS motor pool policies have been updated and distributed to staff.



- Executive Order No. 734: Promoting Transparency in State Government Through Enhanced Accessibility to Public Records

The ADRS Administrative Code has been amended to limit fees and response times for production of public records.

- Executive Order No. 735: Reducing “Red Tape” on Citizens and Businesses Through a Moratorium on New Administrative Rules and by Establishing Goals for the Reduction of Existing Regulatory Burdens

The Legal Office has met with each division to discuss the “Reduction of Red Tape” in government services. The Legal Office will document and submit information about all administrative rules that govern ADRS programs, particularly those containing “restrictive” language prior to the deadline.

### Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services Lease/Construction

Commissioner Burdeshaw provided a brief update on each project listed below:

Homewood Twin Towers: Renovation and expansion efforts continue at the Twin Towers. Once the interior is complete, work will shift to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance issues on the external portions of the buildings.

Gadsden Relocation: The City of Gadsden, Gadsden Industrial Development Authority, and Stifel Wealth Management continue to negotiate a bond deal for the construction of an office complex.

Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB) North: The AIDB Board approved additional financing for the proposed construction project that will consolidate two (2) Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS) Decatur office locations and place ADRS on the campus of AIDB North. AIDB and ADRS have also entered conversations with Easterseals Alabama about potential expansion of Children’s Clinic and Therapy Services on the same campus. The potential of this exciting partnership could clear a path for a one-of-a-kind project. The Decatur Daily, the local newspaper, heard about the potential partnership and asked for an interview and story. Commissioner Burdeshaw and other partners met with the reporter. The story has blossomed into a series and/or feature for the paper.

### Comprehensive Transition and Postsecondary (CTP) Program or “Think College”

The Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 created a new kind of college program specifically for students with intellectual disabilities – the Comprehensive Transition and Postsecondary (CTP) Program. The Act defined the requirements of CTP programs, defined “student with an intellectual disability” for the purposes of these programs, and opened access to federal student aid for students with intellectual disabilities attending an approved CTP program, even if those students do not have a standard high school diploma or are not matriculating towards a degree.

Nationally, these programs were created without active partnership with Vocational Rehabilitation Service (VRS) Programs. This was the case in Alabama as well. Over time, families reached out to VRS Counselors in states across the country for financial assistance and other support services. The resulting patchwork from state-to-state does little to create continuity, much less true support services. Currently, Alabama has four (4) Think College programs located at the following universities: Alabama A&M; University of Alabama; Auburn University; and University of South Alabama.

While Alabama has offered some financial assistance to students attending Comprehensive Transition Programs, Commissioner Burdeshaw and VRS Leadership recently endeavored to change the dynamic and create a true partnership for the benefit of the students. Commissioner Burdeshaw was thrilled to report that the Comprehensive Transition Programs were excited with this opportunity to engage with VRS in innovative ways.

The Plan will go into effect January 1, 2024, and will include the following:

- embedding a job coach, paid for through VRS funding, in each CTP to familiarize themselves with students' strengths and weaknesses and then assist them in obtaining competitive integrated employment in their final year;
- training existing CTP staff in our customized employment training;
- sharing additional information between the two (2) programs;
- increasing referrals for students who do not have an open VR case;
- an increase in financial support from VRS across four (4) semesters;
- removal of the financial needs test/criteria for families to receive student funding; and
- connecting out-of-state referrals back to local VRS programs for employment services.

Commissioner Burdeshaw truly believes this could become a national best practice if the theory works as planned. She expressed her appreciation to Dr. Courtney Dotson, State Office Administrator, and Deputy Commissioner, Mrs. Karen Jenkins, for dreaming big with her.

#### Business Relations Program

Commissioner Burdeshaw reported the Vocational Rehabilitation Service Leadership Team and Mrs. Tracy Bird, Human Resource Development, Director, has continued working to revamp the job responsibilities of the Rehabilitation Employment Specialist (RES) I and II job classifications to align with Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) priorities. In addition, the RES III and IV were added to the existing job series to align the education and experience requirements of front-line staff with State Office Leadership. The process of working with the State Personnel Department took much longer than expected and resulted in a difficult transition for the Program. After a lengthy wait, the job study for the RES IV position is complete and was announced by the State Personnel Department last week. This position will function as the Director of the Business Relations Program. The State Office Specialist (RES III) will soon follow.

### Single Audit

Commissioner Burdeshaw reported a Single Audit of Federal Award Program was performed in accordance with the Single Audit Act Amendments of 1996 (Public Law 104-156) and the audit requirements of Title 2 Code of Federal Regulations Part 200, Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards (Uniform Guidance). Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services had no findings in the single audit.

### Announcements:

*Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services meeting dates for 2023:*

- Thursday, December 7, 2023 – 10:00 a.m., ADRS Montgomery/State Office

*Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services proposed meeting dates for 2024:*

- Thursday, March 7, 2024 – 10:00 a.m., ADRS Montgomery/State Office
- Thursday, June 20, 2024 – 10:00 a.m., ADRS Montgomery/State Office
- Thursday, September 12, 2024 – 10:00 a.m., ADRS Montgomery/State Office
- Thursday, December 5, 2024 – 10:00 a.m., ADRS Montgomery/State Office

Mr. Wilkinson requested the board members review the proposed meeting dates for 2024 and if there are scheduling conflicts, please reach out to Mrs. Karen Freeman at 334-293-7201 or [karen.freeman@rehab.alabama.gov](mailto:karen.freeman@rehab.alabama.gov).

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:40 a.m.

Minutes were taken by Karen Freeman.

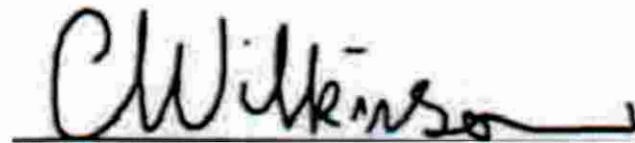
Respectfully submitted:



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Jane E. Burdeshaw, Commissioner

Approved:



Charles E. Wilkinson, Chair