

Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services

Board Meeting Summary

Virtual Via Zoom

Thursday, Dec. 3, 2020

Call to Order:

Mr. Eddie Williams, Board Chair, called the regularly scheduled open public meeting to order at 10:05 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: Mr. Eddie Williams, Board Chair; Mrs. Penny Foster, Board Vice-Chair; Ms. Michelle Glaze; Mr. Mitch Strickland; Mr. Jimmie Varnado; and Mr. Charles Wilkinson. A quorum was declared.

Verification of the Open Meetings Act Notice:

For the health and safety of the public (including the effectiveness of COVID-19 mitigation strategies), and in accordance with Section III (Open Meetings Act) in the First Supplemental State of Emergency: Coronavirus (COVID-19) Proclamation signed by Gov. Kay Ivey, Governor of the State of Alabama, on March 18, 2020, the Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services regularly scheduled board meeting was conducted virtually via Zoom and was open to the public. Interpreter services were provided via Zoom by Mr. Josh Brewer.

Mrs. Karen Freeman verified that the Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services meeting for Dec. 3, 2020, was initially posted on the Alabama Secretary of State's website on Jan. 14, 2020 with the final revision for the public on Nov. 12, 2020.

Meeting registration information for the public was provided on the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services website at the following link: <https://rehab.alabama.gov/about/meet-our-board> with a deadline of Nov. 25, 2020, at 5:00 p.m. CDST. There were no outside registrants for the board meeting.

At the conclusion of the board meeting, a summary of the meeting was posted on the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services' public website on Dec. 3, 2020 before the close of business. The summary recounted the deliberations conducted during the meeting and the actions taken with specificity to allow the public to understand what happened.

Approval of Agenda:

Mr. Williams asked for a motion to approve the agenda. The motion to approve the agenda was made by Mr. Jimmie Varnado and seconded by Mr. Mitch Strickland. The agenda was approved unanimously.

Approval of Minutes for Sept. 17, 2020 Meeting:

The minutes from the Sept. 17, 2020, meeting were mailed prior to the board meeting. Mr. Williams stated that if there were no corrections, the minutes would stand approved as presented. The minutes were approved by unanimous consent.

New Business:

Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services 2020 Annual Report

Mrs. Jill West, Governmental Relations Manager and Director of Office of Communications and Information presented the final draft of the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services 2020 Annual Report for Board approval.

Mr. Williams moved that the Board approve and adopt the 2020 Annual Report submitted and to authorize the staff of the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services' Office of Communications and Information to make any necessary minor text and design changes prior to its publication. The 2020 Annual Report was approved and adopted by a unanimous consent.

On behalf of the Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services, the board members expressed appreciation to Mrs. Jill West and the Office of Communications and Information staff for the publication.

Alabama's Early Intervention System, Consumer Success Story: The Mills Family

The Mills, who have 2-year-old triplets, were concerned when their daughter Madelyn was not progressing with her siblings. At 16 months, her brother James was walking. Her sister Emma was close behind, but their mother Katie noticed that Madelyn needed a little extra attention. After receiving the referral in Nov. 2019, Service Coordinator Michelle Creekmore began to put a plan in place that continued through about 20 months. Madelyn has made tremendous progress through Early Intervention services. She has thrived with physical therapy and has now expanded her vocabulary through speech therapy. Below is a link to The Mills Family video posted on the ADRS Family YouTube channel: <https://youtu.be/UrXBuN2otwk>

Websites:

Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services Website: <https://www.rehab.alabama.gov/>

Mrs. Jill West reported the first phase of the website redesign is complete, and the site has launched. The Office of Communications and Information is working on adding a blog and other news features and will begin a promotional/social media campaign for the website once these are in place.

Mrs. West reported that the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services' website meets high accessibility standards as the Office of Communications and Information (OCI) and Computer Services (CS) are working closely with an expert on Americans with Disability Act compliance standards in the Vocational Rehabilitation Service-Blind and Deaf Division. Jason Martin, Rehabilitation Technology Specialist/Accessibility Specialist, submitted this statement to share with the Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services: "The Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services' website is the best it has ever been in terms of accessibility. A group consisting of ADRS staff from CS, staff from OCI, and our Accessibility Specialist for the Blind, have been teaming up to ensure that our website is accessible to all individuals with disabilities. The overall goal for our website is to reach the double A standard of Web Content Accessibility Guidelines and this effort should be viewed as an ongoing process as we add more content, webpages, and resources to the site. The Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services have come quite a long way from where we were only a few years ago and continue to work to meet these international standards of accessibility to better serve our consumers."

Alabama Family Central Website:

Commissioner Burdeshaw reported on Sept. 28, 2020, Governor Kay Ivey announced the creation of [Alabama Family Central](#) a comprehensive, easy-to-use web and mobile destination that offers parents and families, guardians, teachers and caregivers a one-stop connection to programs and services in Alabama. The site will highlight resources which are relevant and timely to the needs of children. Alabama Family Central is a collaboration of state agencies and partners supporting Alabama's families with resources, services and more to help raise healthy, happy kids.

Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services Notifications:

Commissioner Burdeshaw reported that Mr. Williams has agreed to serve another term if appointed by Governor Ivey and confirmed by the Alabama Senate. Mr. Williams' current term expires on Sept. 30, 2021. The Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services will seek a new appointment for Mr. Williams, as well as an appointment to replace Mrs. Leah Patterson Lust's position, during the upcoming 2021 legislative session. State law requires the Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services to consist of seven members, one from each U.S. Congressional District, with three of the seven being individuals with a disability. Mrs. Lust's position serves Congressional District 4, and must be filled by an individual with a disability.

Nomination/Election of Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services Chair:

Mr. Williams opened nominations for potential candidates for board chair. Mr. Jimmie Varnado re-nominated Mr. Williams for a two-year term as Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services Chair. The motion was seconded by Mr. Mitch Strickland, and by a unanimous consent Mr. Williams was approved.

Nomination/Election of Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services Vice-Chair:

Mr. Williams opened nominations for potential candidates for board vice-chair. Mr. Mitch Strickland re-nominated Mrs. Penny Foster for a two-year term as Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services Vice-Chair. The motion was seconded by Mr. Jimmie Varnado, and by a unanimous consent Mrs. Foster was approved.

Board Member Questions and Division Updates:

The Executive Leadership Team members were provided an opportunity to answer any questions and give updates to their written reports.

Commissioner's Comments:

Executive Leadership Changes:

Mr. Williams and Commissioner Burdeshaw welcomed Ms. Amy Blakeney to the Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services quarterly meeting. Commissioner Burdeshaw reported that Ms. Blakeney was selected to lead Alabama's Early Intervention System (AEIS), replacing the position held by Mrs. Betsy Prince. Ms. Blakeney served as AEIS Assistant Director for many years. Ms. Blakeney's experience will be invaluable as we continue to work through capacity/funding issues within the Early Intervention Program. Ms. Blakeney introduced Ms. Felicia Carswell, AEIS Assistant Director. Ms. Carswell will be working closely with Ms. Blakeney in the Early Intervention Program.

Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS) Budget Request for FY 2022:

Commissioner Burdeshaw will continue to meet with Shay Cannon, Chief Financial Officer, key staff, and partners to determine how to sustain this entitlement program long-term by mapping out a plan for financial solvency.

The Disability Employment Summit:

Commissioner Burdeshaw reported that she is proud of the many Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS) staff and Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Service Board member Charles Wilkinson of Disability: IN Alabama, who came together for the Disability Employment Summit. The ADRS TV channel was host to its first online conference livestreamed to a statewide audience: The Disability Employment Summit. Recordings from this event are available to view on ADRS TV.

On October 28, 2020, the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services and Disability: IN Alabama hosted a virtual 2020 Disability Employment Summit. 2020 marks the passing of three very important anniversaries relating to the employment of individuals with disabilities. The Summit highlighted the 30-year anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the 75-year anniversary of National Disability Employment Awareness Month (October), and the 100-year anniversary of public vocational rehabilitation programs.

The Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS) was excited to have nationally recognized speaker, Dr. Richard Pimentel, who highlighted his involvement in the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and his subsequent development and implementation of training programs for employers hiring individuals with disabilities. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission discussed the ADA over the past 30 years and what the future holds for ADA and the employment of individuals with disabilities. Mr. Mark Schultz, Commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration at the U.S. Department of Education, delegated the duties of Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. Mr. Schultz represented the national Vocational Rehabilitation Program and provided a look at the program over the past 100 years and shared what the future of vocational Rehabilitation holds for individuals with disabilities and the employers who hire them.

In addition to national speakers, the 2020 Disability Employment Summit announced the Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities' statewide award winners and featured presentations from programs within the State of Alabama that offer resources, services, and information to individuals with disabilities and Alabama's employers. Two of those resources were Secretary Washington with the Department of Labor and Deputy Secretary Castile with the Department of Commerce.

COVID-19 – Impact on Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS) Operations:

Commissioner Burdeshaw reported the primary goal of ADRS has been continuity of services for Alabama’s adults and children with disabilities and to minimize the risk for ADRS staff and the families that are served. Out of an abundance of caution, the Muscle Shoals Children’s Rehabilitation Service office was closed from Nov. 25 through Dec. 4, 2020. The Decatur Vocational Rehabilitation Service/ State of Alabama Independent Living office was closed from Oct. 12 through Oct. 18, 2020. These offices appear to be a hot spot for the virus. This was a step necessary to safeguard staff and the individuals we serve. The telephones have been forwarded so that children and families continue to receive necessary services. COVID-19 is a continuous on-going risk with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations being followed with the office closures.

Alabama Department of Mental Health Commissioner:

Commissioner Burdeshaw reported that Ms. Lynn Beshear will retire as Commissioner of the Alabama Department of Mental Health (ADMH) effective December 16, 2020. Governor Kay Ivey appointed Mrs. Kim Boswell to be the new Commissioner effective Dec. 16, 2020. Mrs. Boswell has experience working with individuals with mental illness, substance abuse disorders and developmental disabilities. During her career, she has worked as a planner to improve human service delivery systems, a Program Evaluator, a School-to-Work Transition Coordinator, and has also served as the State Office Administrator for the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services. The Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services and Commissioner Burdeshaw wish Mrs. Boswell the best in her next chapter.

Announcements:

Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services meetings dates for **2021:**

- **Thursday, March 4, 2021 – 10:00 a.m., Montgomery/State Office, Large Conf. Room**
- **Thursday, June 17, 2021 – 10:00 a.m., Off-Site Location: TBD**
- **Thursday, Sept. 16, 2021 – 10:00 a.m., Montgomery/State Office, Large Conf. Room**
- **Thursday, Dec. 2, 2021 – 10:00 a.m., Montgomery/State Office, Large Conf. Room**

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:58 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted:

Karen Freeman

Commissioner’s Executive Assistant