

**Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services**

**Montgomery, Alabama**

**Thursday, December 7, 2023**

**10:00 a.m. – 12:00 noon**

**AGENDA**

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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 Sept. 14, 2023 meeting	Charles Wilkinson
<b><i>New Business:</i></b>	Charles Wilkinson
ADRS 2023 Annual Report & Consumer Success Story	Jill West, Director, Office of Communications and Information/ Governmental Relations
Approval - ADRS 2023 Annual Report	Charles Wilkinson
Division Updates	Executive Leadership Team
Commissioner's Comments	Jane Elizabeth Burdeshaw, Commissioner
<b><i>Announcements:</i></b>	
Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services <b><u>proposed</u></b> meeting dates for <b>2024:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Thursday, March 7, 2024 – 10:00 a.m.</b>, ADRS Montgomery/State Office</li><li>• <b>Thursday, June 20, 2024 – 10:00 a.m.</b>, ADRS Montgomery/State Office</li><li>• <b>Thursday, Sept. 12, 2024 – 10:00 a.m.</b>, ADRS Montgomery/State Office</li><li>• <b>Thursday, Dec. 5, 2024 – 10:00 a.m.</b>, ADRS Montgomery/State Office</li></ul>	
Board Business/Discussion	Charles Wilkinson
Adjourn	Charles Wilkinson

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

*Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services  
560 South Lawrence Street  
Montgomery, Alabama  
Minutes  
Thursday, December 7, 2023*

### **Call to Order:**

Mr. Charles Wilkinson, Board Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:02 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. Judith Gilliam; Mrs. Norma Lemley; Ms. Kimberlin Love; and Mr. Eddie Williams. A quorum was declared.

**Board members (conference call):** Ms. Michelle Glaze.

Interpreting Services were provided.

### **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 December 7, 2023, was posted on the Alabama Secretary of State's website on Monday, October 23, 2023, at 12:11 p.m.

The meeting announcement and registration information were posted on the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services' public website on Friday, October 27, 2023, and made available at the following link: <https://rehab.alabama.gov/about/meet-our-board> with a registration deadline of Monday, December 4, 2023, at 5:00 p.m. CST. 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, moved that the Board 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 September 14, 2023 Meeting:**

The board minutes were mailed prior to the meeting. Mr. Wilkinson asked for a motion to approve the minutes as is, with no changes presented, for the Sept. 14, 2023, board meeting. The motion was made by Mrs. Lemley and seconded by Mr. Kidd. The minutes were approved by unanimous consent.

### **New Business:**

#### **Alabama's Vocational Rehabilitation Service (VRS) and State of Alabama Independent Living (SAIL) Program, Consumer Success Story: Mr. Ben Abercrombie**

Mrs. Jill West, Governmental Relations Manager and Director of Office of Communications and Information (OCI) presented a Consumer Success Story: Mr. Ben Abercrombie.

#### **Mr. Ben Abercrombie, Shelby County**

When former Hoover High School standout Mr. Ben Abercrombie arrived on Harvard's campus in 2017 as a member of the football team, he was excited to begin his playing career. That ended when a tackle led to a spinal cord injury that caused paralysis from the neck down.

Determined to continue his studies at Harvard, he enlisted the help of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS), and the State of Alabama Independent Living (SAIL) program. The hybrid team from ADRS became part of the new game plan.

Mr. Abercrombie connected with VRS and Assistive Technology Specialist, Pat O'Brien, to help him secure the tools he would need to complete his education independently. Mr. O'Brien helped train him on a computer using Tobii Eye Gaze Technology and Dragon software.

The eye-gaze tech tracks Mr. Abercrombie's eye movements, which move the mouse on a computer screen. He can select items by holding an eye gaze for a specific time, blinking, or clicking an external button. Dragon technology allows him to "type" by speaking into documents, web pages, his email and calendar, and almost every other application.

"The more I got comfortable with it, the more I realized that I could basically do just about everything I used to be able to do with it," he said. "It definitely helps out with school. I have become more efficient as time has gone on."

More than 1,000 miles separate Mr. Abercrombie from his ADRS team including Mr. O'Brien, Ms. Amy Gibbs with SAIL, and VRS Counselor Ms. JeVida Yow. However, they stay in contact and continue to ensure his needs are met.

Mr. Abercrombie is on track to earn his bachelor's degree in finance in 2024.

You can watch the Annual Report video highlighting Mr. Abercrombie on our ADRS Family YouTube Channel or click this link... <https://youtu.be/uoJLfLKuISM>

## **Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services 2023 Annual Report**

Mrs. West presented the final draft of the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services 2023 Annual Report for Board approval.

Commissioner Burdeshaw expressed her appreciation to the OCI team members, Mrs. West; Mr. Rick Couch, Public Information Specialist; Mr. Paul Dunbar, Audiovisual Specialist; and Mrs. Amanda Gunn, Communication and Public Relations Specialist, for the 2023 Annual Report.

Mr. Wilkinson moved that the Board approve and adopt the 2023 Annual Report submitted and to authorize the staff of the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services' Office of Communications and Information (OCI) to make the necessary minor text and design changes prior to its publication. The motion was seconded by Mr. Williams, and was unanimously approved.

Mr. Wilkinson reported the leadership and staff of the department continue to provide excellent and dedicated service to the individuals they serve. The evidence of this is presented in this year's 2023 Annual Report. Mr. Wilkinson expressed appreciation to Mrs. West and OCI staff for an excellent publication.

### *Division Updates:*

Mrs. Cathy Caldwell, Assistant Commissioner, Children's Rehabilitation Service (CRS), reported with the overall trend in an increased service provision, for future planning CRS Leadership must rely on data regarding children and youth with special healthcare needs not only within the CRS program, but also across the state and nation. CRS welcomed an Epidemiologist to the CRS State Office staff on

Nov. 16, 2023. Mrs. Caldwell introduced, Dr. Carlene Robinson, Epidemiologist. Her expertise and knowledge will be a vital asset for program development, especially as geographical areas in the state continue to change. Dr. Robinson will enable CRS to extrapolate and interpret data for the challenges facing the growing population.

Mrs. Shay Cannon, Chief Financial Officer, Division of Finance and Purchasing, reported the Finance and Purchasing Division is in the process of finalizing payments for Fiscal Year 2023, and most of the federal financial reports have been submitted to federal awarding agencies.

Commissioner's Comments:

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.

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

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Section 2. Financial Affairs: State executive-branch agencies shall scrupulously manage their financial affairs as follows:

...

b. Non-treasury Bank Accounts: To promote the proper use of public funds, it is the policy of the executive branch of state government to maintain all state executive-branch agency public funds in the State Treasury (and not in a so-called "checkbook" account) where they will be subject to oversight by the State Comptroller.

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Commissioner Burdeshaw reported this requires public funds in non-treasury bank accounts be transferred to an account within the State Treasury by October 1, 2023, or the department must request an exemption. As discussed in previous board meetings, ADRS requested an exemption for three types of accounts as follows: the Business Enterprise Program Vendor Account; the Vocational Rehabilitation Service Revolving Fund for consumer purchases; and the Children's Rehabilitation Service Revolving Fund for consumer services.

ADRS was granted an exemption for the Business Enterprise Vendor Account. ADRS was granted a one-year exemption for the other two (2) accounts, but was asked to work with the Alabama Department of Finance - State Comptroller's office to move these accounts into the State Treasury within that year. ADRS Leadership recently met with the State Comptroller's Office and the Treasurer's Office. Both offices are dedicated to helping ADRS find solutions to the need for rapid response, while addressing the need for the funds to be moved.

- Executive Order No. 727: Establishing the Governor's Study Group on Efficiency in State Government

Section 1. Purpose: The purpose of the Study Group is to produce detailed and accurate findings to allow the Legislature to make informed decisions concerning (a) the need for consolidation or elimination of state executive-branch entities and (b) the need for improvements in the way the State recruits, retains, compensates, and supervises its employees.

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Commissioner Burdeshaw reported the Study Group released the final report in mid-November 2023, and it was shared by multiple news outlets. The report is divided into two (2) sections and contains recommendations from the State Employment Subcommittee and the Consolidation and Elimination Subcommittee.

There are sweeping recommendations relating to agencies serving individuals who are elderly or have a disability and to workforce agencies. Commissioner Burdeshaw has encouraged the agency's state office and field leadership staff to read the document, not because it directly impacts ADRS, but because of the potential impacts to services, people, and state government.

Commissioner Burdeshaw attached the Final Report of the Governor's Study Group on Efficiency in State Government to her 2023 December board report for review.

### ADRS Highlights of 2023

Commissioner Burdeshaw reported the 2023 fiscal year has come to an end. ADRS is also approaching the end of another calendar year. Listed below are a few of the achievements that made 2023 special.

- Alabama's Early Intervention System (AEIS) completed a public awareness campaign and served 776 additional infants and toddlers. AEIS nears completion of a system-wide rate study and fiscal analysis that will result in the necessary changes for long-term sustainability and effective fiscal forecasting.

- Children’s Rehabilitation Service (CRS) continued to expand comprehensive diagnostic services for children with autism, in partnership with Alabama’s Early Intervention System. CRS also began plans for mobile service delivery, implemented a new comprehensive plan of care, and experienced an increase in the number of children served throughout statewide clinics.
- Vocational Rehabilitation Service (VRS) reached its goal of successful employment outcomes into competitive, integrated employment and once again exceeded national averages in four of the five federal indicators. VRS was among the highest achievers for consumers still employed the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> quarter after exit. In addition, they also developed innovative partnerships with the state’s Comprehensive Transition and Postsecondary (CTP) Program or “Think College” and refreshed the state’s Rehabilitation Employment Specialists/Business Relations job classifications.
- The State of Alabama Independent Living (SAIL) Program continued to increase the number of individuals served through the Medicaid Waiver and significantly increased the number taking advantage of self-directed care through the personal choices option. SAIL also developed the new personal choices navigators and partnered to build more ramps through the state’s Community Supports Program.

Commissioner Burdeshaw reported ADRS has been working with the Alabama Medicaid Agency to resolve reimbursement issues. The first related to the reduced match requirements granted during the Public Health Emergency. ADRS was charged the full amount in state dollars and is working to obtain data to request reimbursement. Also, internal issues with the Electronic Visit Verification (EVV) System caused Gainwell Technologies, the Alabama Medicaid Agency fiscal contractor, to reject personal care claims or pay them at 0 dollars. ADRS will gather data for reconciliation and resubmit the claims for payment once the technical issue is fixed.

### Budget Hearing

Commissioner Burdeshaw presented ADRS’s Budget Request to the Finance Director, the Executive Budget Office staff, and Governor’s Office staff as they begin to craft the Governor’s funding priorities prior to the Legislative Session. It is not only a time to discuss specific needs and respond to questions, but an opportunity to share successes of the past year and demonstrate the effective stewardship of public funds. ADRS requested level funding including the increases from the past year, in addition to a \$250,000 increase on behalf of the Alabama Head and Spinal Cord Injury Trust Fund, of which ADRS is a part. Mrs. Shay Cannon, Chief Financial Officer, and Mrs. Jill West, Governmental Relations Manager, attend these meetings with Commissioner Burdeshaw.

Mr. Dave White, Governor’s Office, Senior Policy Advisor, commended Commissioner Burdeshaw for the strong working relationship she has built with the Finance Director, the Executive Budget Office staff, and the Governor’s Office staff. The Commissioner has built trust and respect with the group in addition to the work of ADRS staff, that has enabled ADRS to achieve funding goals each of the past seven years. Commissioner Burdeshaw expressed her sincere appreciation to Mr. White for his kind words and continued support of ADRS.

### Business Relations Update

Commissioner Burdeshaw provided an update as to the completion of work to revamp the job responsibilities of the Rehabilitation Employment Specialist I and II job classifications. The Rehabilitation Employment Specialist IV, (Business Relations Director), was announced and there were multiple interested candidates. Interviews will be conducted for internal and external candidates with the hope of having a Director by the new year.

Mr. Wilkinson commended Commissioner Burdeshaw and the ADRS Leadership Team for their work to revamp the job responsibilities of the Rehabilitation Employment Specialists job classifications to align with the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) priorities. The Rehabilitation Employment Specialists work closely with the Alabama Disability: IN. Mr. Wilkinson and Mrs. Lemley actively serve on the Alabama Disability: IN Board of Directors.

### Unlocking Pathways Summit

Commissioner Burdeshaw and Mr. Kevin Kidd, ADRS Board Vice-Chair, as well as Program Services Manager, Alabama Career Center System for the Alabama Department of Labor, attended the Unlocking Pathways Summit on Tuesday, September 12, 2023, in Biloxi, Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College. The Summit was co-hosted by the U.S. Department of Education, the U.S. Department of Labor, and Jobs for the Future, and brought together approximately 200 state-team participants, prominent speakers, and partners who are positioned to assist state teams in carrying the work forward. Ms. Glenna Wright-Gallo, Assistant Secretary, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, provided the keynote address. Commissioner Burdeshaw served on the Regional Exemplar Panel for the Alabama Talent Triad: Transforming Alabama's Education and Workforce System; and Mr. Nick Moore, Director, Governor Ivey's Office of Education and Workforce Transformation, was the Moderator.

### Combined Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) State Plan Community Engagement

Commissioner Burdeshaw reported since the passage of the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA), states are required to submit four-year plans to the U.S. Secretary of Labor describing the specific goals of each of the titles and programs covered under the Act and any additional partners included in the Combined State Plan submission. As a part of the planning process, each state must gather information for citizens prior to submitting a new four-year plan.

The Governor's Office on Workforce and Education Transformation wrapped up the seven (7) community meetings with the assistance of the WIOA partners. ADRS Vocational Rehabilitation Service staff were present at each meeting, as well as ADRS Interpreters. The new four-year plan is due in the spring of 2024. The partners will submit the plan prior to the federal deadline.

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

Commissioner Burdeshaw reported the CSAVR Fall 2023 Conference was held in Savannah, Georgia and continued to address the three (3) strategic priorities of the membership. In addition to the multi-day conference, the Commissioner participated in the Director and Leadership Forums held prior to the Conference, as well as presenting during the Leadership Forum.

Former ADRS Consumer and current ADRS Service Provider, Mr. Lorenzo Brown, of the Is-Able Center was a featured Keynote Speaker. Mr. Brown highlighted the SAIL/VRS partnership that was key to his transition to independent living and employment. Mr. Brown's tenacity despite obstacles enables him to use his experience to help others. Mr. Brown has not only been asked to return to present for Congressional staffers, but also several state programs. Commissioner Burdeshaw expressed her appreciation to Dr. Graham Sisson, Jr., Executive Director of the Alabama Governor's Office on Disability (GOOD), for facilitating Mr. Brown's participation.

### East Alabama Rural Innovation & Training Hub (EARTH) Celebration

Commissioner Burdeshaw reported that she attended the East Alabama Rural Innovation & Training Hub (EARTH) event in Sylacauga celebrating the program's progress and strides in support throughout 2023. Through the revitalization of what was formerly Avondale Mills, EARTH will train young and not so young alike to obtain jobs in the new and emerging industries as well as existing industries. The core mission of EARTH is to provide East Alabama a workforce development system that is responsive to the needs of individuals and businesses as well as future economic development initiatives.

### ADRS Lease/Construction Update

Commissioner Burdeshaw provided an update on the Gadsden relocation. The Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) must grant prior approval for capital projects before any Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) federal funding or state matching funds can be expended for capital projects. RSA initially denied the approval request and recommended a market analysis. The Alabama Department of Finance, Real Property Management Division of Construction, was able to provide an analysis and recommendation. After receiving the analysis, RSA requested a conference call with stakeholders to discuss the matter further. RSA will not grant prior approval for the project. Commissioner Burdeshaw will seek additional state resources related to the VR portion of the Gadsden relocation.

Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB) Update

Dr. Dennis Gilliam was named the eighteenth President of the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB) on August 14, 2023, and assumed the role on September 1, 2023. A long-time employee of AIDB, Dr. Gilliam will bring a tremendous amount of knowledge and insight to the role. A veteran educator with over 30 years of classroom and administrative experience in special education programs, Dr. Gilliam has served in multiple roles at AIDB over the last three decades, including Vice-President of Instructional Programs. Mr. Wilkinson and Commissioner Burdeshaw expressed their heartfelt congratulations to Dr. Gilliam on his recent achievement.

**Announcements:**

***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). At this time, there are no scheduling conflicts noted for upcoming board meetings.

Mr. Kidd enjoyed visiting/touring the ADRS Tuscaloosa office during the September 14, 2023, Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services meeting. Mr. Kidd suggested having an off-site board meeting in 2024 to allow networking opportunities for board members and staff members in the local area.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:57 a.m.

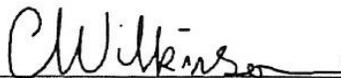
Minutes were taken by Karen Freeman.

Respectfully submitted:



Jane E. Burdeshaw, Commissioner

Approved:



Charles E. Wilkinson, Chair