

**Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services
560 S. Lawrence Street
Montgomery, Alabama**

**Thursday, March 7, 2024
10:00 a.m.**

AGENDA

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 December 7, 2023 meeting	Charles Wilkinson

New Business:

Alabama Ethics Commission 2023 Statement of Economic Interests www.ethics.alabama.gov	Charles Wilkinson Ashley Hamlett, General Counsel
Division Updates	Executive Leadership Team
Commissioner's Comments and Legislative Update	Jane Elizabeth Burdeshaw, Commissioner

Announcements:

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

- **Thursday, June 20, 2024 – 10:00 a.m.**, ADRS, Montgomery/State Office
- **Thursday, Sept. 12, 2024 – 10:00 a.m.**, ADRS, Montgomery/State Office
- **Thursday, Dec. 5, 2024 – 10:00 a.m.**, ADRS, Montgomery/State Office

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, March 7, 2024*

Call to Order:

Mr. Charles Wilkinson, Board Chair, called the 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 (in-person): Mr. Charles Wilkinson, Board Chair; Mr. Kevin Kidd, Board Vice-Chair; Mrs. Norma Lemley; Ms. Kimberlin Love; and Mr. Eddie Williams. A quorum was declared.

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

Board members absent: Mrs. Judith Gilliam.

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 March 7, 2024, was posted on the Alabama Secretary of State's website on Monday, January 22, 2024, at 9:48 a.m.

The meeting announcement and registration information were posted on the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services' public website on Monday, January 22, 2024, and made available at the following link: <https://rehab.alabama.gov/about/meet-our-board> with a registration deadline of Monday, March 4, 2024, 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 by Board members present.

Approval of Minutes for December 7, 2023 Meeting:

The board minutes were mailed prior to the meeting. Mr. Wilkinson asked for a motion to approve the minutes as presented for the Dec. 7, 2023, board meeting. The motion was made by Mr. Kidd and seconded by Mrs. Lemley. The minutes were approved by unanimous consent by Board members present.

New Business:

Alabama Ethics Commission, Statement of Economic Interests

Mrs. Ashley Hamlett, General Counsel, reported the Statement of Economic Interests should be completed and filed with the Alabama Ethics Commission no later than April 30, 2024, for calendar year 2023. The Statement of Economic Interests form may be completed by visiting <https://www.ethics.alabama.gov>. Specific instructions for completing the form are available on the website, if needed.

Division Updates

Vocational Rehabilitation Service/Blind and Deaf Services

On behalf of Mr. Ashley Townsend, Assistant Commissioner, Vocational Rehabilitation Service (VRS), Blind and Deaf Services; Mr. Bedarius Bell, State Office Administrator of Special Programs for the Blind and Deaf Division, reported ADRS is partnering with seven (7) community colleges across the state of Alabama for Transition Events. This year's theme is R.A.C.E. Tracts, which stands for Ready to Acquire Certified Employment. The events are targeted for high school students who have vision and/or hearing loss, their teachers, and their parents. This year's events will focus on Workforce Programs that include: Non-Degree Programs, Short-Term Certificate Programs, Long-Term Certificate Programs, and Associate Degree Programs.

ADRS Blind Services staff will again partner with Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB); Alabama Industrial Development Training (AIDT); and Auburn University for College Quest (CQ). CQ 2024 will be held at Auburn University on June 15 – 28, 2024. Staff members from across the state will teach classes related to Independent Living, Orientation and Mobility, Assistive Technology, and VRS. There will also be staff members who will assist with team building, supplies, and transportation. Twelve students will attend this year's program.

State of Alabama Independent Living (SAIL)

Lisa Alford, Director of the State of Alabama Independent Living (SAIL) program, reported SAIL selected Acumen as the new Fiscal Management Agency for the Personal Choices program. SAIL is facing challenges surrounding the transition from one fiscal management agency to another (i.e., from Morning Sun to Acumen). Efforts are being made to facilitate the transition and ensure prompt payment of personal care workers.

Commissioner's Comments and Legislative Update

Commissioner Burdeshaw announced the retirement of Ms. Debbie Bertelsen, effective February 1, 2024, then she welcomed and introduced Ms. Josette Dudle, Administrative Support Assistant. Ms. Dudle's expertise and knowledge will be a vital asset to the Commissioner's Office. The Commissioner, the Board, and the Executive Leadership Team welcomed Ms. Dudle.

Commissioner Burdeshaw explained the inner workings of the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services' budget process and how the Department reaches its overall budget request for state funding. She then provided details about the Department's strategies to achieve the necessary funding and follow-up with final state appropriation details. This is important for board members to understand because the Board has the statutory obligation to approve the Department's annual budget. Links to the fiscal presentations from the Legislative Fiscal Office and the Governor's Finance Director were provided in the Commissioner's March Board Report. These annual presentations assist in educating the legislative body about the overall health of the economy and state spending caps. Inevitably, the total requests far surpass spending caps. The fiscal presentations are provided the day before the start of the Legislative regular session. That evening, the Governor presents the State of the State Address, which highlights the specific budget and legislative priorities. The Governor's budget proposal is then released within the first two (2) days of the regular session. The General Fund and Education Trust Fund budgets must be passed by the close of the Legislative regular session. Commissioner Burdeshaw thought this was an opportune time to share some of these details with the newer board members.

Mrs. Jill West, Governmental Relations Manager, and Commissioner Burdeshaw will work together throughout the process to meet with key leaders in both the Alabama House of Representatives and Senate during the Legislative regular session. They have already conducted meetings with the House Budget Chair, Mr. Danny Garrett, and Senate Budget Chair, Mr. Arthur Orr. In addition to the Education Trust Fund budget, ADRS tracks legislation that might positively benefit the individuals and families that are served by ADRS.

Currently, agency budgets have not made it to the floor. The Governor's Budget includes what ADRS requested. Specifically, ADRS requested \$250,000 for Alabama's Head and Spinal Cord Injury Trust Fund (AHSCITF) to replenish funds lost by diversion of Driving Under the Influence (DUI) fines. A \$100 fine goes to the AHSCITF. For the past four years, ADRS has requested \$250,000 to replenish \$1,000,000 in lost revenue.

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, the Alabama State Legislature, and the Governor's Office staff. Commissioner Burdeshaw expressed her appreciation to Mr. White for his continued support of ADRS.

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

Commissioner Burdeshaw reported information was provided to the Alabama House of Representatives Committee on Workforce Participation. The legislative and executive branches of government are placing emphasis on increasing the labor force participation rate of Alabamians. These efforts are like those found in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) State Plan, of which the ADRS Vocational Rehabilitation Service (VRS) program is a core partner. People with disabilities remain disproportionately unemployed or underemployed, and leaders are looking for answers about how the state might remove barriers and change this statistic.

Since the passage of WIOA, states are required to submit a four-year plan describing the plans for each of the titles and programs covered under the Act and any additional partners included in the Combined State Plan submission. Alabama must submit a new four-year plan by Spring 2024. Commissioner Burdeshaw expressed appreciation to the Vocational Rehabilitation Service (VRS) Leadership Team and the State Rehabilitation Council for completing the VRS portion of the Plan for submission to the Governor's Office and the Alabama State Workforce Development Board. In addition to the required state plan objectives, five strategic goals were drafted based on the most recent comprehensive needs assessment that are not only measurable and achievable, but should improve the labor force participation rate of Alabamians with disabilities.

Business Relations Program Update

Commissioner Burdeshaw welcomed and introduced Ms. Bobbi Stephenson, Director, Business Relations program. Ms. Stephenson has worked in the Business Relations program for twelve (12) years and is eager to assist the team and become an even more integral part of the consumer's rehabilitation team of professionals. One of Ms. Stephenson's first goals will be to fill critical vacancies in the program, including the vacant State Office Specialist position. The Commissioner, the Board, and the Executive Leadership Team welcomed Ms. Stephenson to her new role.

Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS) and the Alabama Community College System

Commissioner Burdeshaw reported ADRS, and the Alabama Community College System held a joint news conference on Wednesday, Feb. 21, 2024, at the Alabama State House, spotlighting the partnership to build Alabama's workforce. The purpose of the new conference was to encourage students with disabilities to continue their education and training and pursue in-demand careers, as well as, to inform those students and the public about funding opportunities for eligible individuals with disabilities to attend any of the state's public community colleges at little to no cost. It was the Alabama Legislature and Senator Arthur Orr's, Chair of the Senate Finance and Taxation Education Committee, leadership that made it possible for ADRS to assist more individuals with disabilities to attend college through investments (starting in 2023) of \$1.7 million in the Rehabilitation Service line item. This important investment allows the Vocational Rehabilitation Service (VRS) program to draw down an additional \$6.3 million in federal funds, which is being used in part to assist more students in the VRS program with training and education. Commissioner Burdeshaw expressed her appreciation to Senator Orr for his leadership to include all Alabamians in the efforts to build a strong workforce and to Mrs. West for her assistance in coordinating the event.

Alabama House Joint Resolution (AL HJR) 85

Commissioner Burdeshaw reported the Alabama legislature is encouraging state agencies “to hire and advanced individuals with disabilities” with the passage of Alabama House Joint Resolution (AL HJR) 85, sponsored by Rep. Ben Robbins, District 33, Sylacauga, Alabama. The resolution points out that Alabama is home to more than 800,000 working-age Alabamians with disabilities and employment provides opportunities for individuals with disabilities to be financially independent, demonstrate their skills and abilities, and access the full benefits of our community. Dr. Graham Sisson, Jr., Executive Director for the Governor’s Office on Disability (GOOD), reported employing individuals with disabilities sends a strong message to businesses as they struggle to find employees to meet their growing needs. Commissioner Burdeshaw is excited to see the Legislature taking note of this underutilized resource.

Alabama House Bill (AL HB 51)

Commissioner Burdeshaw reported HB 51, sponsored by Rep. Margie Wilcox, would exempt hearing instruments from the state sales tax of 4%. The bill passed the House and now goes to the Senate.

Alabama House Bill (AL HB 126)

Commissioner Burdeshaw reported HB 126, Abram Colin Act, sponsored by Rep. Leigh Hulse, would require fire-protection personnel, certified volunteer firefighters, and emergency medical services personnel to undergo regular training related to interacting with individuals with sensory needs or invisible disabilities. The bill passed the House and now goes to the Senate.

State Representative Penni McClammy & Minority Caucus

Commissioner Burdeshaw expressed her appreciation to Ms. Kimberlin Love for connecting her with Rep. McClammy and the minority caucus.

Ohio’s Vocational Apprenticeship Program – Learning Exchange

Commissioner Burdeshaw reported that she is interested in learning more about the [Ohio Vocational Apprenticeship Program](#) (OVAP) and Ohio Governor Mike DeWine’s Executive Order No. 2019-03D, which established Ohio as a Disability Inclusion State and a Model Employer of Individuals with Disabilities. Commissioner Burdeshaw reached out to request a meeting in January 2024 that would include the following: Mrs. Karen Jenkins, Deputy Commissioner, Vocational Rehabilitation Service - General Program; Mr. Ashley Townsend, Assistant Commissioner, Vocational Rehabilitation Service – Blind-Deaf Program; Dr. Graham Sisson, Jr., Executive Director for the Governor’s Office on Disability (GOOD); Alabama House of Representative, Rep. Ben Robbins; and Ms. Laury Morgan, Director, State of Alabama Personnel Department.

ADRS Lease/Construction Update

Gadsden Relocation

Commissioner Burdeshaw reported after reviewing the financial analysis provided last quarter, the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) would not grant prior approval for the Gadsden Capital Lease Project using either Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) federal funding or state matching funds used to draw down federal funding. It became clear that the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Service (ADRS) would need to seek additional state funding, (not designated as matching). Although ADRS had completed the budget presentation, Commissioner Burdeshaw reached out to the Executive Budget Office for assistance. The required amount was graciously added to the Governor's budget. Time being of the essence, Commissioner Burdeshaw made the strategic decision to press forward with the selling of public bonds and the sub-lease. The bonds have closed, and the sub-lease has been signed by the Governor. This will be a significant project on the fast-track for 12-15 months. For this reason, the Commissioner needed a part-time position with a person who knew all the players to shepherd the Special Project to completion. Dr. Cary F. Boswell, former ADRS Commissioner, has agreed to oversee the ADRS Special Project. Dr. Boswell has accepted a part-time position as an ADRS Retired State Employee working 9-10 hours per week. Commissioner Burdeshaw and Dr. Boswell traveled to Gadsden to complete a site visit and meet with Gadsden Mayor Craig Ford, city staff, and the project's general contractor.

Decatur Relocation

Commissioner Burdeshaw provided an update on the Decatur relocation. ADRS will soon sign a lease with the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB) – North Campus for building a new facility to include the following programs: Vocational Rehabilitation Service (VRS); Lakeshore; State of Alabama Independent Living (SAIL); and Business Enterprise Program (BEP). There is continued discussion about other possibilities of expansion in the Children's Clinic due to the population growth in the northern counties.

Alabama's Early Intervention System Rate Study

Commissioner Burdeshaw reported Alabama's Early Intervention System (AEIS) has completed a yearlong consulting contract reviewing provider rates and the overall fiscal structure of the AEIS program. ADRS received the final report and is processing potential changes to AEIS. ADRS will require early feedback from key stakeholders (i.e., Alabama Medicaid Agency and Alabama Department of Mental Health) to determine how some of the recommendations might be implemented. ADRS acts as lead agency in an overall system of services. The Commissioner is grateful to the AEIS programs, most of which completed the time study necessary to pinpoint the true cost of providing services. She expressed appreciation to the AEIS leadership who have met one to two times per month for a full year with the Public Consulting Group (PCG), LLC.

The Alabama Medicaid Agency is a critical partner across ADRS programs. It not only insures many of the individuals and families served, but enables ADRS to bill for service provision and maximize federal and state funding. ADRS leadership staff recently met with Alabama Medicaid Agency leadership staff to discuss the expansion of the Social Security Administration (SSA), Benefits Counseling Program, and AEIS rate study recommendations. The Medicaid Agency training staff provided guidance to the Benefits Counseling staff and Medicaid leadership opened a discussion regarding how the AEIS rate study might necessitate rate changes for AEIS specific services.

Executive Order Update

Commissioner Burdeshaw provided an update to Executive Order No.726.

- 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:

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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.

...

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 (VRS) Revolving Fund for consumer purchases; and the Children's Rehabilitation Service (CRS) 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.

Mrs. Shay Cannon, Chief Financial Officer, recently met with Dr. Kathleen Baxter, State of Alabama Comptroller, for approval of the continued use of outside accounts, (i.e., revolving funds) for Children’s Rehabilitation Service consumer service purchases. Dr. Baxter approved this request. However, all other purchases will be processed through the Treasury Account that will include the use of a purchasing credit card. This will allow ADRS to continue to provide services while exploring the use of prepaid cards for consumers in the future. ADRS is reviewing the Vocational Rehabilitation Service (VRS) revolving funds. Once the review is complete and approved by ADRS, the VRS solution will be presented to Dr. Baxter for final approval.

Announcements:


Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services meeting dates for 2024:

- 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

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:48 a.m.

Minutes were taken by Karen Freeman.

Respectfully submitted:



Jane E. Burdeshaw, Commissioner

Approved:



Charles E. Wilkinson, Chair