

Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services

*Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services
560 South Lawrence Street
Montgomery, Alabama
Minutes
Thursday, December 5, 2024*

Call to Order:

Mr. Kevin Kidd, Board Vice-Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:06 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. Kevin Kidd, Board Vice-Chair; Ms. Judith Gilliam; Mrs. Norma Lemley; Ms. Kimberlin Love; and Mr. Eddie Williams. A quorum was declared.

Board members absent: 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 announcement and registration information for the Thursday, December 5, 2024, meeting, were posted on the Alabama Secretary of State's website on Thursday, September 11, 2024, at 4:21 p.m.

Registration for the meeting 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.

The meeting announcement was posted on the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services' public website on Wednesday, November 13, 2024, and made available at the following link: <https://rehab.alabama.gov/about/meet-our-board>.

Approval of Agenda:

The board meeting agenda was mailed prior to the meeting. Mr. Kidd, Vice-Chair, moved that the Board approve the agenda and Mr. Williams seconded the motion. Mr. Kidd stated there were no changes and/or additions to the agenda and it was approved by unanimous consent.

Approval of Minutes for September 19, 2024 Meeting:

The board minutes were mailed prior to the meeting. Mr. Kidd asked for a motion to approve the minutes as is, with no changes presented, for the Sept. 19, 2024, board meeting. The motion to approve the minutes was made by Mrs. Lemley and seconded by Mr. Williams. The minutes were approved unanimously.

New Business:

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

Mr. Adryan Gaines, Oneonta, Alabama:

Living independently is a goal that Oneonta High School's (OHS) Mr. Adryan Gaines has worked hard to reach. Mr. Gaines was born with Arthrogryposis causing both arms to be contracted. He always finds a way to participate in school activities. His determination is on display every Friday night when he takes the field with the OHS marching band using an adaptive drum kit. The kit, which is placed on a platform, consists of bass, snare, suspended cymbal, bells, and maracas, which he plays with his feet. He began practicing a year ago and played in his first game during the 2024 season. He stated it was the culmination of many hours of hard work, and he hopes it inspires others to do the same. Mr. Gaines, who initially enrolled in Alabama's Early Intervention System (AEIS), reconnected with ADRS through Children's Rehabilitation Service (CRS) when he started middle school to increase his independence. His mother, Ms. Jessica McCurry, said her son was very involved in establishing his own plan of care with Transition Social Worker, Ms. Holly Edwards. Mr. Gaines also worked with CRS Occupational Therapist, Ms. Dana Grady, at Seating and Evaluation Clinic. Ms. Grady stated it has been a joy to work with him. Mr. Gaines always approaches any ideas or recommendations with a positive attitude. It was awesome to see Mr. Gaines outside of CRS and performing at a recent football game!

The Annual Report video highlighting Mr. Gaines can be found on the ADRS Family YouTube Channel at <https://youtu.be/8ZnwiL8Fk-s>.

Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services 2024 Annual Report:

Mrs. West presented the final draft of the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS) 2024 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 their work compiling the 2024 Annual Report.

Commissioner Burdeshaw reported the ADRS 2024 Annual Report marks another incredible milestone for the Department: the 30th anniversary when Alabama consolidated services for individuals with disabilities into One Department with One Mission. Mrs. Lamona Hall Lucas (1934 – 2024), who served as the department's first Commissioner until her retirement in 1999, led the push that helped pass legislation consolidating state services for Alabama's infants, children, youth, and adults with disabilities into a single department. The legacy that Mrs. Lucas left at ADRS and in the disability community is everlasting. This point in history is worth celebrating today as it was over a century ago when services for this population were first provided to Alabama citizens under the Smith-Fess Act of 1920. Since 1994, ADRS has provided – from a single point of entry – the specialized programs and services individuals with disabilities need to overcome barriers to success. Today, ADRS continues to play a pivotal role with other state and community agencies as we collectively seek to advance the health, independence, skills, educational attainment, and workforce participation of Alabama's citizens. We are grateful for the continued support of Governor Kay Ivey, the Alabama Legislature, the Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services, and many agency and community partners.

Mr. Kidd reported the ADRS leadership staff and employees 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 2024 Annual Report. Mr. Kidd expressed appreciation to Mrs. West and OCI staff for an excellent publication.

Mr. Kidd moved that the Board approve and adopt the 2024 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 Ms. Kimberlin Love and was unanimously approved.

Division Updates:

Mrs. Karen Jenkins, Deputy Commissioner, ***Vocational Rehabilitation Service (VRS), General Program***, introduced and welcomed VRS staff who have transitioned into leadership roles within ADRS including the following: Mrs. Tonya Frankum, Rehabilitation Specialist, to assist with Program Evaluation and Quality Assurance; Ms. Pamela Curry, Rehabilitation Specialist, to assist with Supported Employment; Ms. Shannon White, Rehabilitation Specialist, to assist with Supported Employment; and Ms. Donna Bowden, Rehabilitation Specialist, to assist with Program Evaluation.

Mr. Ashley Townsend, Assistant Commissioner, ***Vocational Rehabilitation Service (VRS), Blind and Deaf Program***, reported the Strategic Planning Process for Blind Services will begin with regional Town Hall meetings. Mr. Townsend encouraged board members, ADRS leadership staff and employees, consumers, stakeholders, and partners to participate in the development of a new five-year plan (2025-2030).

The Strategic Planning Process for Blind Services Town Hall meetings are listed below:

- Tues., Dec. 10, 2024, ADRS office, 3000 Johnson Rd., SW, Huntsville, AL 35805
- Wed., Dec. 11, 2024, ADRS office, 5th Floor Conference Rooms D, E, & F, 236 Goodwin Crest Dr., Birmingham, AL 35209 - (Tuscaloosa area stakeholders can join the Birmingham meeting in person or via zoom)
- Thurs., Dec. 12, 2024, E. H. Gentry Facility, Cafetorium, 1105 Fort Lashley Ave., (Highway 21, South), Talladega, AL 35160
- Tues., Jan. 14, 2025, ADRS office, 3101 International Dr., Bldg. 7, Mobile, AL 36606
- Wed., Jan. 15, 2025, Sterling Rotary Hall, 2461 E. Burdeshaw St., Dothan, AL 36303
- Thurs., Jan. 16, 2025, ADRS office, 560 S. Lawrence St., Montgomery, AL 36104

All meetings are scheduled from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon.

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) 2023 Performance Assessment:

Commissioner Burdeshaw commended Mrs. Karen Jenkins and Mr. Ashley Townsend on the staff's dedication and hard work. ADRS exceeded the negotiated rates for the WIOA common performance measures related to Measurable Skills Gains, Credential Attainments, and Employment Rates in the 2nd and 4th quarters after exit, for Program Year 2023. Alabama Vocational Rehabilitation also exceeded the national average on all indicators except median earnings. This indicator is heavily impacted by the average age of individuals receiving services, many who are students, and the use of the federal minimum wage in Alabama.

Commissioner's Comments:

Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services Appointments and Confirmations:

Commissioner Burdeshaw reported Mr. Charles Wilkinson and Mr. Kevin Kidd will require reappointment and Senate confirmation in 2025. Mr. Wilkinson and Mr. Kidd have agreed to continue to serve if reappointed. Mr. Wilkinson is eligible to serve another seven-year term and Mr. Kidd is eligible to serve his first seven-year term after completing the term of a previous board member. Mr. Wilkinson will experience a brief gap in service while awaiting his reappointment and confirmation during the 2025 legislative session.

Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS) Operations Plan 2024-2025:

Commissioner Burdeshaw reported during the September 19, 2024, the Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services approved the ADRS Operations and Personnel Staffing Plan for Fiscal Year 2025 (Oct. 1, 2024 – Sept. 30, 2025). Following the approval, leadership began fiscal forecasting for Fiscal Year 2026 and budget requests will soon be shared with the Executive Budget Office. Budget projections and trends, service-delivery needs, staffing patterns, numbers served, and other factors were discussed with each division to determine specific funding needs and subsequent requests in preparation for the upcoming 2025 Legislative session.

It was clear the ADRS 2026 budget should include a request for additional state funds on behalf of the State of Alabama Independent Living (Homebound and Waiver) division. The Homebound and Waiver Programs serve Alabamians with the most significant disabilities who would be eligible for nursing home care. The goal is to assist with enhanced quality of life by enabling participants to remain in their homes through supportive services that maximize independence, health, and safety.

The information listed below is an excerpt from the budget forms shared with the Alabama Department of Finance's Executive Budget Office.

Background:

Average Cost of Nursing Care in Alabama = \$91,000 - \$97,000 annually

Actual Homebound Participant Cost = \$24,850 annually (Total reflects entire program cost.)

Since **2003**, the program has received a cumulative increase of \$564,821 in state funding. The remaining amount of \$325,000 is passed to the non-profit Independent Living Centers.

Specific Funding Needs:

\$939,375 – To increase the rate of pay for Attendant Care Workers in the Homebound Program, which are significantly lower than similarly situated programs providing Community-Based Services from \$13.00 to \$17.50 per hour. Even at \$17.50, the rate would remain \$0.18 below the next similarly situated program. The program is unable to fill critical positions with the existing hourly rate.

\$225,000 – To increase the monthly allotment of medical supplies for existing participants in the Homebound Program. These prices have increased dramatically since the pandemic.

\$277,638 – To add Homebound participants, many who are currently waiting on referral lists.

\$439,929 – To provide limited home modifications, primarily ramp access for Homebound participants. The program purchases supplies and enlists volunteer labor for construction, using plans drawn by rehabilitation engineers.

\$550,986 – Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP) needed for Medicaid Waiver Program.

Total Request = \$2,432,928.00

Following the submission of the budget request, Commissioner Burdeshaw; Mrs. Shay Cannon, Chief Financial Officer; and Mrs. Jill West, Governmental Relations Manager, attended the annual Budget Hearing with the Finance Director, Executive Budget Officer, and Governor Ivey's staff. Commissioner Burdeshaw was able to provide highlights regarding program growth, fiscal responsibility and improvements, and policy changes and program expansions that directly benefit the families served. She also shared details regarding federal funding sources and the ADRS ties to education as it relates to the Education Trust Fund. Additionally, eligibility requirements for the populations served in the Homebound and Medicaid Waiver programs were provided to place the funding request in context.

The Finance Director and the Executive Budget Office will continue to conduct hearings with state agencies as they assist Governor Ivey in developing her budget proposal. Commissioner Burdeshaw is confident that the budget hearing for ADRS went well and that the needs of the program were communicated. There are a multitude of competing priorities, and ADRS will have to wait to see if the full request makes it into the Governor's budget. Once that is communicated, ADRS will know how much additional education and advocacy is needed with the State Legislature.

Alabama Veteran's Steering Committee:

Commissioner Burdeshaw reported her proxy, Mrs. April Turner, State Head Injury Coordinator, Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Program Director, provided a presentation in relation to the prevalence of TBIs among veterans, as well as its impacts on mental health. Listed below are the Traumatic Brain Injury Recommendations provided to the Veteran's Steering Committee:

Priority Order

1. Expand the current State TBI Navigator/TBI Care Coordinators Program statewide within the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services to include veterans regardless of date of injury. This would also open services to all Alabamians with TBI.

2. Broaden and sustain TBI screening in veteran and mental health settings such as community mental health, substance use programs, 988, Crisis Centers, Veterans Treatment Courts, Pardons and Paroles, Vet Centers, Homeless Programs, VA Providers, and Primary Care.
3. Provide and create statewide TBI Education /Conference for agency partners and community providers.
4. Expand and develop TBI Veteran Support Groups and TBI Peer and Caregiver Education.
5. Cross-collaborate with existing state agencies and collegiate partners to facilitate comprehensive care and TBI Education—TBI Clinic.
6. Expand existing services to Veterans with TBI available from the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services—State Vocational Rehabilitation Program to assist with veteran-specific disability-related services, retraining, seeking employment, and retaining employment.

Commissioner Burdeshaw stated there is also the potential for additional funding for program expansion in Traumatic Brain Injury Services for veterans. This would result from ADRS's involvement in a Legislative Steering Committee designed specifically to expand services and supports to Alabama's veteran population. While this potential funding may be added to the ADRS budget, it would be a request from the Steering Committee, and not a request delineated in the ADRS budget submission to the Finance Department. ADRS will work closely with the Chairman of the Steering Committee, Commissioner Kimberly Boswell at the Alabama Department of Mental Health.

Commissioner Burdeshaw will provide the Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services a detailed submission of the TBI Recommendations, that was provided to the Veteran's Steering Committee. She will also update the Board as she receives updates regarding additional appropriations.

The National Disability Employment Awareness Month and The Governor's Committee on the Employment of People with Disabilities Award Ceremony:

Commissioner Burdeshaw reported Alabama's economy is stronger when every Alabamian can pursue meaningful work and communities are stronger when everyone can thrive and reach their full potential. During October 2024, National Disability Employment Awareness Month, ADRS recognized the important contributions of Alabamians with disabilities who have successfully achieved their training and employment goals. We hope that through this recognition others will see the possibilities and pathways to pursuing their dreams.

Governor Ivey signed a proclamation declaring October 2024 as National Disability Employment Awareness Month and the Governor's Committee on the Employment of People with Disabilities presented statewide awards for:

Employee of the Year – Small Business
Employee of the Year – Large Business
Employer of the Year – Small Business
Employer of the Year – Large Business

Student of the Year
Outstanding Public Service
Partner of the Year

Commissioner Burdeshaw expressed her appreciation to the Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services, Governor Ivey, and the Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities for their participation in this year's event.

Alabama's Early Intervention System (AEIS) Rate Study Update:

Commissioner Burdeshaw reported the Alabama Medicaid Agency has approved most of the rate changes. ADRS is awaiting approval for a telehealth modifier on six existing procedure codes. In addition, the objectives have always included a reduction to the administrative burden by taking Medicaid and third-party billing in-house and enhancing the AEIS software case management system to accommodate electronic records. This change would also increase data collection capabilities. While the Accounting and Information Technology divisions have worked diligently to achieve the January 2025 roll-out of all components, there is not enough time to complete the tasks, test the software, and train staff. As a result, AEIS will postpone the roll-out until March 2025. Everyone is confident that timelines can be met with this extension.

Hearview Subtitle Glasses:

Ms. Judith Gilliam shared information in relation to Hearview Subtitle Glasses. These glasses are specifically designed for deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals, offering real-time voice-to-text transcription. The glasses pick up spoken language through the microphone on your smartphone, processing it via advanced AI algorithms into live captions. The resulting captioning shows right on the lenses so one can read along with conversation as it happens. If you need additional information, please reach out to Ms. Gilliam.

Announcements:

Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services proposed meeting dates for 2025:

- Thursday, March 6, 2025 – 10:00 a.m., ADRS Montgomery/State Office
- Thursday, June 26, 2025 – 10:00 a.m., ADRS Montgomery/State Office
- Thursday, September 11, 2025 – 10:00 a.m., ADRS Montgomery/State Office
- Thursday, December 4, 2025 – 10:00 a.m., ADRS Montgomery/State Office

Mr. Kidd requested the board members review the proposed meeting dates for 2025 and if there are scheduling conflicts, please reach out to Mrs. Karen Freeman at 334-293-7201 or karen.freeman@rehab.alabama.gov. At this time, there are no scheduling conflicts noted for upcoming board meetings.

Executive Session:

Following the regular scheduled board meeting, Mr. Kidd moved for the Board to go into Executive Session to discuss the general reputation, character, and physical condition of an individual. The Board did not reconvene after the Executive Session, Mrs. Lemley seconded, and the motion carried unanimously.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:55 a.m.

Minutes were taken by Mrs. Karen Freeman.

Respectfully submitted:



Jane E. Burdeshaw, Commissioner

Approved:



Kevin Kidd, Vice-Chair