

Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services

560 S. Lawrence Street

Montgomery, Alabama

Thursday, September 11, 2025

10:00 a.m. – 12:00 noon

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 June 26, 2025 meeting Charles Wilkinson

New Business:

ADRS Operations Plan FY 2025 – 2026 Shay Cannon, Chief Financial Officer

ADRS Personnel Staffing Plan FY 2025 – 2026 Tracy Bird, Human Resource Development Director

- Approval - ADRS Operations Plan FY 2025 – 2026 Charles Wilkinson

- Approval – ADRS Personnel Staffing Plan FY 2025 – 2026 Charles Wilkinson

Board Member Questions and Division Updates Executive Leadership Team

Commissioner’s Comments and Legislative Update Jane Elizabeth Burdeshaw, Commissioner

Announcements: Charles Wilkinson

Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services meeting dates for **2025:**

- **Thursday, December 4, 2025 – 10:00 a.m.**, Montgomery/State Office

Our Mission: to enable Alabama’s children and adults with disabilities to achieve their maximum potential.

Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services **proposed** meeting dates for **2026:**

- **Thursday, March 5, 2026** - 10:00 a.m., Montgomery/State Office
- **Thursday, June 25, 2026** - 10:00 a.m., Montgomery/State Office
- **Thursday, September 10, 2026** - 10:00 a.m., Montgomery/State Office
- **Thursday, December 3, 2026** - 10:00 a.m., Montgomery/State Office

Board Business/Discussion

Charles Wilkinson

Adjourn

Charles Wilkinson

Our Mission: to enable Alabama's children and adults with disabilities to achieve their maximum potential.

Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services

Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services

560 South Lawrence Street

1st Floor, Large Conference Room

Welcome/Call to Order:

Mr. Charles Wilkinson, Board Chair, welcomed Board Members; the Executive Leadership Team members; Mr. Dave White, Governor Ivey's Senior Policy Advisor; and guests to the quarterly board meeting. Mr. Wilkinson called the meeting to order at approximately 10:01 a.m.

Prayer:

Ms. Beverly Floyd, Information Technology Director, opened the board meeting with prayer.

Moment of Silence in Remembrance of 9/11:

A moment of silence was observed in remembrance of the victims and heroes of September 11, 2001.

Verification of Quorum:

Board members present: Mr. Charles E. Wilkinson, Board Chair; Mr. Kevin D. Kidd, Board Vice-Chair; Ms. Judith M. Gilliam; Mrs. Norma M. Lemley; Ms. Kimberlin L. Love; and Mr. Eddie C. Williams. A quorum was declared.

Conference Call: Ms. Michelle K. Glaze

Interpreting services were provided.

Verification of the Open Meetings Act Notice:

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 for the Thursday, September 11, 2025, meeting was posted on the Alabama Secretary of State's website on Tuesday, February 11, 2025, at 4:24 p.m.

The meeting announcement was posted on the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services' public website on Tuesday, February 18, 2025, 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. Wilkinson stated there were no changes and/or additions to the agenda and asked for a motion to approve it as presented. The motion to approve the agenda was made by Mrs. Lemley and seconded by Ms. Love. It was approved by unanimous consent.

Approval of Minutes for June 26, 2025, Quarterly Meeting:

The quarterly board meeting minutes were mailed prior to the meeting. Mr. Wilkinson asked for a motion to approve the minutes for the June 26, 2025, board meeting as presented. The motion to approve the minutes was made by Mr. Williams and seconded by Mrs. Lemley. The minutes were approved unanimously by Board members.

New Business:

Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services Operations & Personnel Staffing Plan FY 2025 – 2026

Mrs. Shay Cannon, Chief Financial Officer, presented and highlighted the main components of the ADRS Operational Plan for FY 2025 - 2026, Executive Budget Office (EBO) Form 8, outlining strategic priorities and key performance objectives for the upcoming period. Commissioner Burdeshaw and Mrs. Cannon implemented a conservative approach while developing the FY 2025 – 2026 ADRS Operations Plan. 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, presented the ADRS Personnel Staffing Plan component of the ADRS Operational Plan, Executive Budget Office (EBO) Form 9, outlining anticipated personnel changes and resource allocations. For the new fiscal year, ADRS is requesting a staffing plan of 907.50 (904 full-time employees and six part-time employees).

Mr. Wilkinson moved that the Board approve and adopt the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS) FY 2025 – 2026 Operations Plan (EBO Form 8) at the spending level of \$285,056,229, and the ADRS Staffing Plans (EBO Form 9) at the staffing level of 907.50 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 2025 – 2026 was seconded by Mr. Kidd, and the motion was approved unanimously by Board members.

Mr. Wilkinson and the Board acknowledged and commended Commissioner Burdeshaw, Mrs. Cannon, and Mrs. Bird for their collaborative efforts and commitment in producing a comprehensive operational plan.

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.

Board Member Questions and Division Updates:

The Executive Leadership Team was provided an opportunity to offer updates to their written reports on key initiatives, and division/program activities.

Commissioner's Comments:

Legislative and Administrative Update

Alabama Office on Disability (AOD) - Formerly the Governor's Office on Disability (GOOD)

In Commissioner Burdeshaw's previous board report, she discussed Executive Order No. 739 that established the Alabama Office of Disability (AOD) within the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS). ADRS recently hired Mrs. Sylvia Bowen as the new Director for AOD. Mrs. Bowen joined today's board meeting. Commissioner Burdeshaw is excited for everyone to meet her and see the genuine passion she brings to this important role.

Mrs. Bowen's educational background includes a Master of Public Health with a Concentration in Maternal and Child Health Policy and Leadership from the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB), a Juris Doctor (JD) degree from the Birmingham School of Law, an Advanced Certificate in Paralegal Studies from St. Louis Community College, and a Bachelor of Laws from Makerere University (Uganda, East Africa).

Excerpt from the Children's of Alabama website

Ryan and Sylvia Bowen of Pelham, Alabama, were thrilled to learn they were adding a second daughter to their family in 2021. But, 12 weeks into the pregnancy, a routine ultrasound led to further testing that confirmed a diagnosis of Trisomy 18. "We were confused," said Sylvia. "We had never heard of it, but we learned the prognosis was not good."

Trisomy 18, also known as Edward's syndrome, is a rare chromosome disorder that can cause low birth weight, congenital heart defects, severe intellectual disabilities and various physical abnormalities. Symptoms vary greatly among children, but most physicians agree that a diagnosis of Trisomy 18 is incompatible with life. Most babies die in utero or immediately after birth.

The diagnosis led to biweekly visits with Sylvia's OBGYN and countless consultations with other specialists as the couple faced a frightening, uncertain future with steadfast faith. They named their daughter Zoe Victoria – "Zoe" means "life" and "Victoria" reflected the Bowens' belief that she would be victorious in this life.

Zoe was born in May 2021 at 37 weeks, surprising her parents and her care team with a strong heartbeat and achieving unexpected milestones during the weeks she spent in the Children's Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. "She was very strong, was able to take a bottle and definitely had a personality,"

Sylvia said. "She showed us every step of the way that she was determined to live."

Determined to do everything they could to give their baby daughter a full life for whatever time Zoe had, Ryan and Sylvia turned to her care team at Children's for guidance and education. "Our attitude was, 'Let's learn what we need to learn so we could bring her home,'" Ryan said.

Experts from a variety of specialties such as cardiology, pulmonology, orthopedics, neonatology, physical and occupational therapy, Zoe's pediatrician and countless others taught the Bowens how to care for Zoe's unique and complex medical needs. "We learned much more from Zoe, Sylvia and Ryan than we ever taught," Children's of Alabama pulmonologist Tom Harris, M.D., recalled. "They inspired us all!"

Their efforts helped give the family an abundance of happy memories of road trips, giggles and joy that filled Zoe's short life. Most of all, they were at the Bowens' side during Zoe's final days. "We are thankful for the nurses and doctors who taught us, emboldened us and helped us navigate everything," Sylvia said. "We couldn't have cared for Zoe without the team."

Zoe left this world shy of 15 months of age, an astounding achievement for any child with Trisomy 18 but one that speaks of what her parents call a God-given fighting spirit. The Bowens offer reassuring words for those facing the often overwhelming emotional and physical challenges of caring for a child with life-threatening medical needs: "We were given a gift. If you only look at the package and never look inside, you'll never know or enjoy what you have."

Mrs. Bowen's life changed course because of her love for her family and for Zoe. She started the master's degree in public health program at UAB and soon joined ADRS as the Children's Rehabilitation Service, State Parent Consultant. When Dr. Graham Sisson, Jr., retired, it became clear to the Commissioner that Mrs. Bowen was a natural fit for the newly formed Alabama Office of Disability.

Mrs. Bowen has hit the ground running. In addition to learning all facets of the work, the AOD will undergo a Legal Compliance Audit with Alabama's Examiners of Public Accounts this month. The results of the audit will be shared with the Board upon completion.

State of Alabama Independent Living (SAIL) Waiver

Commissioner Burdeshaw reported the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS) has continued to assess case flow concerns with the Medicaid Waiver Program. Several coding issues were found and corrected assisting with reimbursements for services rendered. Additionally, the ADRS Accounting Leadership staff realized the Alabama Medicaid Agency's (AMA) reimbursement rate for direct-service case management time has not been changed since the beginning of the program in 1992. The lack of adjustment to the rate structure is not covering the cost to provide the direct service. ADRS has reached out to AMA to discuss the need to revisit the case management reimbursement rate. AMA staff are willing to consider adjustments based on cost analysis performed by ADRS's Accounting division. ADRS is awaiting approval from AMA.

National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM)

Commissioner Burdeshaw reported Governor Ivey is scheduled to sign a proclamation recognizing October as National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) in Alabama.

Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities (GCEPD)

Governor Ivey will honor the Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities (GCEPD) award winners at the awards ceremony on Monday, October 27, 2025, at 2:00 p.m. at the Alabama Department of Archives and History in the Farley/Alabama Power Auditorium, 324 Washington Avenue, in Montgomery. At this ceremony, Gov. Ivey will present the annual GCEPD awards, honoring individuals and employers who have made outstanding contributions in promoting employment opportunities for people with disabilities. The event will be hosted by GCEPD and ADRS.

Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services and the City of Gadsden – Ribbon Cutting and Open House

Commissioner Burdeshaw invited Board members to the Ribbon Cutting and Open House Ceremony on Wednesday, November 12, 2025, at 10:30 a.m. to celebrate the opening of the ADRS office in Gadsden. The new office location will expand ADRS services in Etowah and surrounding counties and make vital programs for people with disabilities more accessible to local families. A formal invitation will be sent out with the additional details.

Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR)

Commissioner Burdeshaw assumed the role of President of the national membership organization, CSAVR, on July 1, 2025. She has spent numerous hours preparing the organization for the retirement of their long-standing Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and developing a selection process for his replacement. A senior staff member was hired as interim CEO through the CSAVR 2025 Fall Conference, Friday, October 31 – Saturday, November 8, 2025.

Commissioner Burdeshaw announced a new CSAVR Marketing Campaign, 100 Stories in 100 Days. This is a timely campaign aimed at Congressional members and staffers who return from the August recess to complete the appropriations process. The goal is to feature all seventy-eight (78) Vocational Rehabilitation programs at least once. Some states or territories will be featured more than once to reach 100. Alabama has been featured twice.

Federal Developments

Commissioner Burdeshaw discussed the "One Big Beautiful Bill" and potential changes to programs for individuals and families impacted by disability. She focused on the separate process of Congressional appropriations. This process began prior to the August recess and will pick up when

Congress returns to Washington, D.C. in September. Just before the break, the Senate Appropriations Committee completed its markup and passed a bipartisan FY 2026 Appropriations Bill that includes statutory language supporting Vocational Rehabilitation. The Senate version provided \$197 billion in discretionary funding for the departments of Labor, Education, and Health and Human Services. The vote was 26-3. In this version, the Department of Education would receive \$79 billion in discretionary funding, which included boosts to K-12 funding. The bill also included language that would prevent the dismantling of the Education Department. The legislation included \$18.5 billion for Title I-A grants, a \$50 million increase over fiscal 2025 enacted amount, \$15.2 billion for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Special Education State grant programs, and a \$50 million increase over fiscal 2025 levels. The legislation would provide \$4 billion for the Employment and Training Administration, up slightly from \$3.9 billion in fiscal year 2025. The bill also included \$2.9 billion in Workforce formula grants.

The following is a summary of the FY 2026 Appropriations for *Rehabilitation Services* as recommended by the Senate Committee.

Total Funding:

- Administration Request: \$4,533,156,000
- Committee Recommendation: \$4,647,295,000 with the Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA)

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) State Grants:

- Provides an inflationary increase based on the consumer price index, in line with the authorizing statute.

Disability Innovation Fund (DIF):

- Provides DIF Grants for eligible entities partnering with State VR agencies with the goal of increasing competitive integrated employment for youth and adults with disabilities.

Client Assistance State Grants:

- Provides grants to help clients understand VR program benefits, a statutorily mandated program.

Training Program:

- Provides grants for training new VR personnel and upskilling current staff.

Demonstration and Training Programs:

- Provides funding to develop and expand employment services for individuals with disabilities and to fund parent information and training programs.

Protection and Advocacy of Individual Rights:

- Provides funding to protect the rights of individuals with disabilities not covered under other protection and advocacy acts.

Supported Employment State Grants:

- Provides funding for supported employment grants to support individuals with significant disabilities, including youth.

Independent Living Services for Older Individuals Who Are Blind:

- Provides for grants to assist individuals age 55+ who are adjusting to blindness to maintain independence through training, counseling, assistive technology, and screening.

Helen Keller National Center:

- Provides funding to support specialized services for deaf-blind individuals through a central facility, regional offices, and affiliates.

The Senate Committee also proposed \$43.4 million to support the American Printing House for the Blind (APH), which supplies educational materials to legally blind students in elementary and secondary education. The Bill will proceed to the House and Senate floor following the recess. There is a general perception that the House Committee recommendations will be more aligned with the administration's recommendations.

State Updates

Commissioner Burdeshaw reported Mr. Bo Offord was appointed as the new Commissioner of the Alabama Medicaid Agency (AMA). Commissioner Offord was formerly General Counsel and has worked closely with former Commissioner Azar. Commissioner Burdeshaw and members of ADRS Leadership met with Commissioner Offord on Thursday, Sept. 4, 2025, to discuss the ADRS/AMA partnership. Former Commissioner Azar has moved to the State Employees' Insurance Board.

The Alabama Legislature officially begins the new legislative session on Tuesday, January 13, 2026; however, preparation is in progress as committees gear up for Legislative Budget Hearings and Joint Education Committee work. Commissioner Burdeshaw and Mrs. Jill West, Governmental Relations Manager, will pay close attention to the fiscal outlook, legislative priorities, and agency requests.

The Alabama Workforce committees continue efforts to complete the two-year state workforce plan modification. The State Plan sub-committee was asked to meet with the Metrics sub-committee, because their work intersects. Both committees also received modified mission statements from Secretary Greg Reed, Alabama Department of Workforce Agency. Each committee is led by representatives from Alabama Business and Industry.

Announcements:

Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services meeting dates for 2025

- Thursday, December 4, 2025 – 10:00 a.m., ADRS Montgomery/State Office

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- Thursday, March 5, 2026 - 10:00 a.m., ADRS, Montgomery/State Office
- Thursday, June 25, 2026 – 10:00 a.m., ADRS, Montgomery/State-Office
- ~~Thursday, September 10, 2026 – 10:00 a.m., ADRS, Montgomery/State Office~~
- Thursday, December 3, 2026 – 10:00 a.m., ADRS, Montgomery/State Office

The proposed September 10, 2026, board meeting was changed to September 3, 2026, due to a scheduling conflict. Mr. Wilkinson requested the board members review the proposed meeting dates for 2026 and if there are additional scheduling conflicts, please reach out to Mrs. Karen Freeman at 334-293-7201 or karen.freeman@rehab.alabama.gov.

There being no further business, Mr. Wilkinson moved to adjourn the meeting. This was seconded by Mr. Williams and approved by a unanimous consent. The meeting was adjourned at 11:40 a.m.

Minutes were taken by Mrs. Karen Freeman.

Respectfully submitted: 
Jane E. Burdeshaw, Commissioner

Approved: 
Charles E. Wilkinson, Chair

