

Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services

*Renaissance Riverview Plaza Hotel – Jubilee Suite
64 South Water Street
Mobile, Alabama 36602
Minutes
Thursday, June 26, 2025*

Call to Order:

Mr. Charles Wilkinson, Board Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:04 a.m.

Prayer:

Dr. Graham Sisson, Jr., former Executive Director of the Alabama Governor's Office on Disability (GOOD), opened the board meeting with prayer.

Commissioner Burdeshaw announced Dr. Sisson's recent retirement effective June 1, 2025. The Commissioner and Mr. Wilkinson along with board members thanked Dr. Sisson for his loyal and dedicated service to Alabama's citizens and the disability community for the past 28 years. For 27 of those years, Dr. Sisson served as the Executive Director of GOOD, Deputy Attorney General, Americans with Disability Act (ADA) Coordinator for the state, and Liaison to the State Rehabilitation Council in Alabama and at the national level.

Dr. Sisson expressed his sincere appreciation to Commissioner Burdeshaw and board members for their continued support over the years.

Verification of Quorum:

Board members present: Mr. Charles Wilkinson, Board Chair; Ms. Michelle Glaze; Mrs. Norma Lemley; Ms. Kimberlin Love; and Mr. Eddie Williams. A quorum was declared.

Conference Call: Mr. Kevin Kidd, Board Vice-Chair; and Dr. Graham Sisson, Jr.

Board members absent: Ms. Judith Gilliam.

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, June 26, 2025, meeting, was posted on the Alabama Secretary of State's website on Tuesday, February 11, 2025, at 4:21 p.m. and revised on Thursday, May 8, 2025, at 3:05 p.m. to reference the location change to the Renaissance Riverview Plaza Hotel – Jubilee Suite, 64 S. Water Street, Mobile, Alabama 36602.

The meeting announcement was posted on the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services' public website on Tuesday, February 18, 2025, and revised on Thursday, May 8, 2025, to reference the location change to the Renaissance Riverview Plaza Hotel – Jubilee Suite, 64 S. Water Street, Mobile, Alabama 36602, 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 Mr. Williams seconded the motion. It was approved by unanimous consent.

Approval of Minutes for March 6, 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 March 6, 2025, board meeting as presented. The motion to approve the minutes was made by Ms. Love and seconded by Ms. Glaze. The minutes were approved unanimously.

Welcome:

Mr. Charles Wilkinson, Board Chair, welcomed everyone to the board meeting. Mr. Wilkinson reported the board meeting coincided with the Alabama Association for Persons in Supported Employment (AL-APSE) Conference in Mobile. The Renaissance Riverview Plaza Hotel served as the host site for this year's conference. Board members from the Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services introduced themselves and provided a brief overview of their representation and congressional district. The Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS) Executive Leadership Team members and Field Leadership Team members introduced themselves and provided their program affiliation and title within the agency.

Mr. Wilkinson welcomed and introduced Mr. Byron White, President of AL-APSE. Mr. White welcomed everyone to the AL-APSE Conference and gave a special thanks to Commissioner Burdeshaw, the Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services, and the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services for supporting the conference. Mr. White introduced the current AL-APSE board members including Mrs. Lisa Alford, Treasurer and Mr. Ryan Alford, Member at Large – Tuscaloosa. The AL-APSE, Association for Persons Supporting Employment First is part of a 5,000-member organization with chapters in over 31 states. APSE, The Network on Employment was formed to improve and expand integrated employment opportunities, services, and outcomes for persons experiencing disabilities. AL-APSE strives to encourage the development and expansion of employment with supports through coordination communication, and choice by way of a team effort. Mr. White announced AL-APSE is seeking board members; please refer interested individuals to him.

Commissioner Burdeshaw welcomed and introduced Ms. Susan Klingel, Executive Director, Arc of Madison County, Inc. The Arc of Madison County has been a tremendous partner through the years, serving ADRS consumers in both Alabama's Early Intervention System and Vocational Rehabilitation Services. Ms. Klingel is always looking for ways to partner and meet the needs within the community. The Arc of Madison County, Inc., developed a Physician-Assisted Autism Diagnostic (PAAD) Clinic based on needs within the Early Intervention System. Ms. Klingel approached ADRS about expanding the clinics to other early intervention programs across the state. With additional funding through ADRS' budget, they have expanded the PAAD clinic to ten more programs. The Arc of Madison County provides the initial training and framework model for the clinics and the early intervention programs are reimbursed per evaluation.

New Business:

Commissioner Burdeshaw's Annual Performance Appraisal

Mr. Wilkinson reported that the Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services reviewed and appraised Commissioner Burdeshaw's performance for last year. On behalf of the Board, Mr. Wilkinson expressed appreciation to Commissioner Burdeshaw for her excellent leadership and provided a consistently exceeds standards overall performance review.

Mr. Wilkinson moved that the Board, having reviewed and appraised Commissioner Burdeshaw's performance for last year, to increase the Commissioner's annual salary by 5% (five percent), adjusted to the nearest dollar amount divisible by 24, effective July 1, 2025, to be reflected in the August 1, 2025, paycheck. Mrs. Lemley seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

The board members expressed their individual approval of Commissioner Burdeshaw's performance review and noted the Commissioner is very deserving. Commissioner Burdeshaw expressed her sincere appreciation to the Board, the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services Executive Leadership Team, Field Leadership Team, and her Executive Assistant for their continued involvement and support.

Board Member Questions and Division Updates:

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

Commissioner's Comments:

Legislative and Administrative Update

Commissioner Burdeshaw reported the Legislative Session for FY 2026 ended successfully for ADRS. ADRS was able to secure the additional appropriations requested, as well as maintaining the existing funding. The increases are in the State of Alabama Independent Living (SAIL) Program and the Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Program. Commissioner Burdeshaw expressed appreciation to Governor Ivey; Finance Director, Bill Poole; and the staff in the Executive Budget Office; for supporting the department's budget request. The support ADRS has received from the Governor's office and the State Legislature would not be possible without key relationships built over time. Unfortunately, life changes and political opportunities are resulting in the loss of some of those key relationships in key roles.

- Senator Arthur Orr continues to be an impeccable leader overseeing the Senate Finance and Taxation Committee and his knowledge of ADRS's programs and support for those services are an asset. Senator Orr will not be the new Ambassador to Nepal.
- Mr. Nick Moore formerly served as the Director of the Governor's Office on Education and Workforce Transformation (GOEWT) under the leadership of Governor Ivey. In April 2025, Mr. Moore assumed the role of Deputy Secretary, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education at the U.S. Department of Education. Mr. Moore's advocacy for career pathways and interagency collaboration were key in the State's workforce transformation after the implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.
- Governor Ivey's Office issued a press release announcing Republican member of the Alabama House of Representatives for District 63-Tuscaloosa, Rep. Cynthia Almond, will serve as President of the Alabama Public Service Commission. As President, she will lead a three-person board responsible for regulating utilities in Alabama.
- Republican member of the Alabama House of Representatives for District 38-Valley, Rep. Debbie Wood, will resign at the end of July 2025. She is moving near the Florida panhandle due to her husband taking a job in Pensacola.
- Governor Ivey issued a press release announcing the Department of Early Childhood Education Acting Secretary, Dr. Jan Hume, will serve as a Professor of Practice in Public Administration with Auburn University. Gov. Ivey has appointed Ms. Ami Brooks to serve as Secretary effective June 16, 2025.

The Alabama State House - Ability Day 2025

Commissioner Burdeshaw was pleased to speak and participate in “Ability Day” at the Alabama State House on March 19, 2025. The event is organized by various disability advocacy groups bringing together advocates to meet with legislators on issues affecting people with disabilities. Speakers included Mr. Tim Cooper, Executive Director, Arc of Alabama; Ms. Kim Spangler, Family Outreach Coordinator, Arc of Alabama; Commissioner Kim Boswell, Alabama Department of Mental Health; Representative Cynthia Almond; and Mr. Hank Poore, Hank Poore Foundation, ADRS Grant Employee and new Children’s Rehabilitation Service Youth Consultant.

Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR)

Commissioner Burdeshaw expressed her previous concerns about the removal of the annual cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for the second year from the Vocational Rehabilitation Program that caused states to jump into action with the assistance of the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) and the Ridge Policy Group, a leading government relations firm with a strong presence in Washington, D.C. CSAVR asked Commissioner Burdeshaw to visit each Congressional Delegation from Alabama while in Washington, D.C. for the CSAVR Spring Conference, April 5 – 9, 2025. Mrs. Karen Jenkins, Deputy Commissioner, Vocational Rehabilitation Service-General Program and Mr. Ashley Townsend, Assistant Commissioner, Vocational Rehabilitation Service-Blind/Deaf Program, and a member of the Ridge Policy Group accompanied her to make numerous visits to Capitol Hill over a two-day period.

Section 504 Update

Commissioner Burdeshaw reported that in April 2025, the Texas v. Kennedy parties filed another Joint Status Report with the court. The report makes a change to the states’ claim about Section 504. It says:

Plaintiffs further clarify that they have no intention to seek relief from the Court on Count 3 (Section 504 is Unconstitutional) of their Complaint [or] their Demand for Relief at d-e [declare Section 504 unconstitutional and block U.S. Department of Health and Human Services from enforcing Section 504]. And nothing in Plaintiffs’ Complaint seeks to...prevent the Federal Government from allocating spending or applying the provisions of the Rehabilitation Act to any recipients of such funds.

This means the 17 states have abandoned their constitutional challenge to Section 504. It also means that the district court in Texas will not rule on whether Section 504 is constitutional. The question of whether Section 504 is constitutional will not go to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals or the U.S. Supreme Court. This update was wonderful news and is in no small part the direct result of the advocacy efforts of the disability community nationwide.

The Governor’s Office on Disability

Commissioner Burdeshaw reported the Governor’s Office on Disability, recently managed by Dr. Graham Sisson, Jr., was established as a separate state agency by Executive Order following passage of the American Disabilities Act (ADA), a federal civil rights law in 1990, that prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in employment, public accommodations,

transportation, and other aspects of public life. The ADA ensures equal opportunity, access, and independence for people with disabilities, like other civil rights laws.

When Dr. Sission announced his plans for retirement this year, they discussed how the important work of the Governor's Office on Disability might continue. They quickly agreed to propose a merger of the Governor's Office on Disability with the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS). They believed the mission and vision for the future of ADRS could be streamlined and strengthened through such a consolidation. This proposal would need approval from the Governor and her staff. After multiple meetings, telephone conversations, and email correspondence, Governor Ivey's office agreed to the consolidation. Mrs. Ashley Hamlett, ADRS General Counsel, worked with the Governor's Legal Office to draft a revised Executive Order placing the new Alabama Office of Disability (AOD) within ADRS and transferring the funds from the Governor's Office on Disability to ADRS. Executive Order No. 739 establishing the Alabama Office on Disability within ADRS is currently posted on Alabama Governor's Office website effective May 30, 2025. Please click the link below for more details. <https://governor.alabama.gov/newsroom/category/executive-orders/>. Commissioner Burdeshaw is seeking a successor for the executive director position. Additional information will be provided at the September board meeting.

Announcements:

Mr. Wilkinson opened the floor for any discussion, feedback, or new business. Mr. Ryan Alford, AL-APSE board member, expressed his sincere appreciation to Commissioner Burdeshaw, ADRS staff, and the Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services for all they do to enable Alabamians with disabilities to achieve their maximum potential. Mr. Wilkinson, Commissioner Burdeshaw, staff, and board members thanked Mr. Alford for attending the board meeting noting his time and valuable input are appreciated.

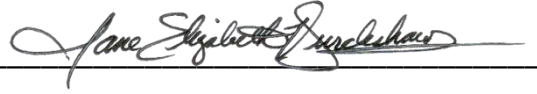
Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services meeting dates for 2025

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

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:13 a.m.

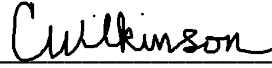
Minutes were taken by Mrs. Karen Freeman.

Respectfully submitted:

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jane Elizabeth Burdeshaw", written over a horizontal line.

Jane E. Burdeshaw, Commissioner

Approved:

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "C. Wilkinson", written over a horizontal line.

Charles E. Wilkinson, Chair