

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

Thursday, March 5, 2026
10:00 a.m.

AGENDA

Call to Order	Charles Wilkinson, Chair
Prayer	Beverly Floyd, Chief Information Officer
Verification of Quorum	Karen Freeman
Verification of Open Meeting Act Notice	Charles Wilkinson
Approval of Agenda	Charles Wilkinson
Approval of Minutes for the Dec. 4, 2025	Charles Wilkinson
New Business:	Charles Wilkinson
Alabama Ethics Commission 2025 Statement of Economic Interests https://www.ethics.alabama.gov	Charles Wilkinson Ashley Hamlett, General Counsel
Litigation Update	Ashley Hamlett
Division Reports 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 2026:	
• Thursday, June 25, 2026 – 10:00 a.m., ADRS Montgomery/State Office • Thursday, Sept. 3, 2026 – 10:00 a.m., ADRS Montgomery/State Office • Thursday, Dec. 3, 2026 – 10:00 a.m., ADRS Montgomery/State Office	
Board Business/Discussion	Charles Wilkinson
Adjourn	Charles Wilkinson

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Minutes

Thursday, March 5, 2026

Call to Order:

Board Vice-Chair, Mr. Kevin Kidd, called the meeting to order at 10:01 a.m., in the absence of Board Chair, Mr. Charles Wilkinson, who was delayed. Mr. Wilkinson arrived and thereafter presided over the remainder of the board meeting.

Prayer:

Ms. Beverly Floyd, Chief Information Officer, opened the board meeting with prayer.

Verification of Quorum:

Board members present: 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 absent: Ms. Michelle 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, March 5, 2026, meeting, was posted on the Alabama Secretary of State's website on Wednesday, February 18, 2026, at 1:51 p.m. The final revision being made on Wednesday, February 18, 2026 at 2:28 p.m., to include a preliminary agenda for the meeting. The meeting announcement was posted on the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services' public website on Thursday, February 19, 2026, and made available at the following link:

<https://rehab.alabama.gov/about/board-of-directors>.

Approval of Agenda:

The board meeting agenda was distributed to members by mail and electronically prior to the meeting. Mr. Kidd asked for a motion to approve the agenda. The motion to approve the agenda was made by Mrs. Norma Lemley and seconded by Ms. Kimberlin Love. Mr. Kidd stated there were no changes and/or additions to the agenda and it was approved by unanimous consent.

Approval of Minutes for December 4, 2025, Quarterly Meeting:

The quarterly board meeting minutes were mailed prior to the meeting. Mr. Kidd asked for a motion to approve the minutes as presented, for the Dec. 4, 2025, board meeting. The motion to approve the minutes was made by Ms. Love and seconded by Mr. Williams. The minutes were approved unanimously.

New Business:

Alabama Ethics Commission, 2025 Statement of Economic Interests

Mrs. Ashley Hamlett, General Counsel, reported the Statement of Economic Interests can be completed and filed with the Alabama Ethics Commission no later than April 30, 2026, for calendar year 2025. The Statement of Economic Interests form could be completed by visiting the website, <https://www.ethics.alabama.gov>. Specific instructions for completing the form are available on the website, if needed. If you have any questions, please contact Mrs. Hamlett at Ashley.Hamlett@rehab.alabama.gov.

Litigation Update: Randolph-Sheppard Act

Mrs. Hamlett, Commissioner Burdeshaw, and Mr. Ashley Townsend, Assistant Commissioner, Blind and Deaf Program, reported two distinct Randolph-Sheppard issues being discussed nationally.

1. Federal challenge to the Secretary of Education's "limitation" (described as a waiver)

The most significant federal development is a lawsuit challenging a decision by Secretary of Education, Linda McMahon, that approved a limitation on Randolph-Sheppard priority rights for certain U.S. Army dining facility contracts. According to the complaint filed by the National Federation of the Blind, and blind entrepreneurs, the U.S. Department of Education approved a December 2025 request that effectively removed Randolph-Sheppard priority from Army dining facility procurements nationwide. Plaintiffs argue the Secretary lacked statutory authority to grant such a broad exemption and that the action violates the Administrative Procedure Act.

The litigation was filed in federal court in January 2026 and seeks to set aside the Secretary's action. The challengers contend that the Randolph-Sheppard Act permits limitations only in specific facility situations, not an agency-wide exemption affecting an entire category of contracts.

Organizations representing blind vendors, including the American Council of the Blind, have publicly criticized the decision, arguing it threatens long-standing entrepreneurial opportunities for blind vendors operating military dining facilities.

2. Alabama's bidding process

The Alabama Business Enterprise Program (BEP), operated by the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS), serves as Alabama's State Licensing Agency (SLA) under the Randolph-Sheppard Act. The program manages vending facilities, cafeterias, military dining contracts, and other food-service operations operated by licensed blind vendors throughout the state.

Commissioner Burdeshaw noted ADRS generates more than \$25 million annually through these operations.

Under the Randolph-Sheppard Act, disputes involving a blind vendor and the Alabama SLA (ADRS), or Alabama SLA and a federal agency are generally handled through the federal arbitration process administered by the U.S. Department of Education's Rehabilitation Services Administration. After arbitration, parties may seek judicial review in federal court.

The major national issue in 2026 is the challenge to the Department of Education's December 2025 action concerning Army dining facility opportunities. If the federal lawsuit succeeds, it could affect military dining facility procurements nationwide, including opportunities administered through Alabama's BEP for blind vendors.

Current Status (Spring 2026)

- The national challenge to the Secretary's December 2025 limitation/waiver decision is active in federal court.
- Advocacy organizations for blind vendors are zealously opposing the decision and are seeking reversal.
- No broad repeal of the Randolph-Sheppard Act has occurred.
- Existing Randolph-Sheppard arbitration procedures remain in place.

Commissioner Burdeshaw, Mrs. Hamlett, and Mr. Townsend expressed their appreciation for the support of Governor Kay Ivey and Attorney General, Steve Marshall, during this national challenge. Mrs. Hamlett and Commissioner Burdeshaw will keep board members abreast of new developments.

Division Updates:

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

Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services 2025 Annual Report

Mrs. Jill West, Governmental Relations Manager and Director of Office of Communications and Information (OCI), presented a hard copy of the 2025 Annual Report.

Mrs. West introduced and welcomed Ms. Dezerae Harris, Communications & Public Relations Specialist, to the board meeting. Ms. Harris is the newest staff member in OCI. She is based in the Montgomery State Office and will be the primary liaison with local offices in need of OCI support. Ms. Harris graduated from Alabama State University with a bachelor's degree in communications-journalism. She has a strong background in news media, previously serving as a news director, photojournalist and videographer for news affiliates from Virginia to Atlanta. Montgomery is her hometown, and she is excited to be back in Alabama with her family and friends.

Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS) and the Traumatic Brain Injury Program

Mrs. Karen Jenkins, Deputy Commissioner, Vocational Rehabilitation Service - General Program, reported on the ribbon-cutting at the University of Alabama campus on Tuesday, March 3, 2026. The event was a fitting celebration for Brain Injury Awareness Month. The ribbon-cutting marked a collaboration between ADRS, the state Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Program, and the University of Alabama. Representatives from ADRS joined Comprehensive Post-Acute Specialty Services (COMPASS) in officially opening a new interdisciplinary brain health education program housed in the J. Frank Barefield, Jr. College of Arts and Science building. COMPASS supports individuals across Alabama who continue to experience behavioral, cognitive, neurological, or functional challenges after a concussion or traumatic brain injury. The COMPASS initiative is a structured, family-centered model. Caregivers are included in the evaluation process to better understand household impacts, communication needs, and long-term functional challenges. Mrs. Jenkins and Commissioner Burdeshaw praised the work of the TBI Care Coordinators as well as the State TBI Program Director, Mrs. April Turner. The TBI Program is recognized by the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine. With this expansion, staffing and implementation efforts are underway to open five TBI Centers across Alabama in the next few months.

For additional information, please contact the State TBI Helpline at 1-888-879-4706.

Second Annual State of Alabama Career Fair

Mr. Kevin Kidd and Mrs. Tracy Bird, Director, Human Resource Development, reported the Second Annual State of Alabama, Career Fair, took place on Thursday, February 19, 2026, from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Event Details & Highlights

- **Location:** The Multiplex at Cramton Bowl, 220 Hall Street, Montgomery, Alabama.
- **Event Organizers:** Hosted by the Alabama Department of Workforce and the State of Alabama Personnel Department.
- **Event Goal:** The job fair brought together numerous state agencies to recruit job seekers for high-demand careers, showcase state benefits, and connect with agencies like the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS) and the Alabama Department of Corrections. This was an all-day event that featured a two-hour session specifically focused on veterans and people with disabilities.
- **Turnout:** The highly successful event drew 1,400 job seekers.

Commissioner's Comments:

Legislative and Administrative Updates

Commissioner Burdeshaw reported that the Alabama Legislature had completed half of the regular legislative session. Legislators are anxious to complete the session and return to the campaign trail in their home districts. The impact on state departments is that both budgets, the General Fund and the Education Trust Fund (ETF), are on the fast track and fiscal decisions are being made earlier in the session.

Governor Kay Ivey; Finance Director, Bill Poole; and the Executive Budget Office listened carefully regarding the needs of the Vocational Rehabilitation Service (VRS) program. This information was shared during our December 2025 board meeting, and they are supportive of ADRS's additional funding request.

The Governor's recommendations included an increase in the Rehabilitation Services line item, Alabama House Bill 238 (HB238), of \$5,999,402. \$5,461,088 is specifically for the VRS program, \$252,114 for a cost-of-living increase for state funded employees across ADRS programs, and \$286,200 for an increase in insurance costs. In addition, ADRS was placed in an Education Trust Fund (ETF), Supplemental Spending Bill, Alabama House Bill 245, (HB245) for \$5,461,087. This one-time funding recommendation is also for the VRS program.

Commissioner Burdeshaw's message to Mr. Danny Garrett, Budget Chairman, House Ways and Means Education, and Mr. Arthur Orr, Budget Chairman, Senate Finance and Taxation Education, was clear. She met with both chairmen and followed the in-person meetings with written documentation. She also presented the department's message during Alabama's Child Advocacy Day on Wed., February 4, 2026, and Alabama's Disability Advocacy Day on Wed., February 25, 2026. The Commissioner will continue to meet with additional legislative committee members as the ETF moves through the House and then the Senate. Commissioner Burdeshaw's message was to retain the funding recommendations from Governor Ivey in both the ETF appropriations and the ETF

supplemental spending bills. It is necessary for the state to reach its labor participation goals, and it is critical for ADRS to continue serving all eligible individuals and hopefully remain out of an *Order of Selection* through FY 2028.

Link: [eCFR :: 34 CFR 361.36 -- Ability to serve all eligible individuals; order of selection for services.](#)

The Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services was asked to be included in two (2) Bills.

Alabama Senate Bill 113 (SB113), Relating to the Alabama Sunset Law; to continue the existence and functioning of the Alabama Behavior Analyst Licensing Board operating within the Alabama Department of Mental Health (ADMH) in collaboration with the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services, with certain modifications; to amend Sections 34-5A-1, 34-5A-2, 34-5A-3, 34-5A-4, 34-5A-5, 34-5A-6, and 34-5A-7, Code of Alabama 1975, to rename the board as the Alabama Behavior Analyst Council; to provide the ADMH with regulatory authority over licensed behavior analysts and licensed assistant behavior analysts practicing behavior analysis under the former board; to require the advisory council to advise the department on matters relating to the practice of behavior analysis; to provide for the duties of ADMH and Commissioner relating to the advisory council; to require the department to provide all necessary administrative services for the advisory council; to transfer all property of the advisory council to the department; and to repeal Section 34-5A-8, Code of Alabama 1975, to remove the former board from review by the Sunset Committee. This mention is primarily at the request of Representative Leigh Hulseley and does not create any administrative burden to ADRS.

Currently, the second bill has not yet been filed. It states the Alabama Rare Disease Advisory Council was created within the School of Medicine of the University of Alabama at Birmingham by joint resolution, enacted as Act 2017-109. This Bill would reconstitute and codify the advisory council within the Department of Rehabilitation Services and would provide for the membership, powers, and duties of the advisory council. After research and stakeholder meetings, Commissioner Burdeshaw asked that ADRS be removed from this legislative request and suggested that the Department of Public Health would potentially be a better fit for this council.

Federal Program Update

Commissioner Burdeshaw is currently serving as President of the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR). She has been involved in discussions with federal partners at the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) regarding potential changes resulting from the Administration's push to "Return Education to the States" and eliminate the USDOE. The Commissioner was asked to go to Washington, D.C. to meet with the U.S. Secretary of Education, Ms. Linda McMahon, and U.S. Assistant Secretary, Ms. Kimberly Richey, about proposed Interagency Agreements to transfer the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) to one of two federal agencies. OSERS includes Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA -Part B), Special Education Services, (IDEA - Part C), Early Intervention Services, and the Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA Title IV), and Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS).

In addition to federal placement, they wanted to discuss whether OSERS should remain intact. The Commissioner was joined at this meeting by CSAVR, Chief Executive Officer, Mrs. Maggie Koziol, and the National Council of State Administrators for the Blind, President and Vice-President, Mr. Greg Trapp, and Ms. Darline Graham.

Commissioner Burdeshaw reported the meeting went well, and they were able to gain insight into potential changes and how those changes may impact programs. They also learned more about the viewpoints of partners in Special Education. CSAVR membership discussed federal realignment concerns ahead of the meeting and voted on key principles that they hoped could be protected regardless of any realignment. Those principles presented verbally and in writing included the following:

- The full authority of the State VRS Director should be maintained.
- The non-delegable duties of VRS counselors should be safeguarded and maintained.
- A Presidentially appointed, Senate-confirmed leader (Commissioner or Assistant Secretary) is essential and should be maintained.
- Federal staff that deliver technical assistance and fiscal guidance should have expertise in VRS statutes and operations.
- Grant funding for technical assistance and training should continue to ensure quality and compliance.
- Reduce and/or eliminate regulation complexities that impose unnecessary administrative burdens on State VRS agencies.
- Ensure that the foundational principles embodied in Sections 2–4 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 — affirming disability as a natural part of the human experience — are adhered to so that individuals with disabilities have access to comprehensive and coordinated state-of-the-art programs of vocational rehabilitation services leading to competitive integrated employment and independence.

With the new insights, representatives asked and were granted permission to return to the membership organizations to poll members. Although they were told this move was being fast-tracked, they were given several days to garner feedback. A virtual meeting was called Friday, February 20, 2026, to share information and develop a poll that was distributed following the meeting. Once the poll closed and the data was collected, a written summary was shared with the Secretary and Assistant Secretary.

Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR)

Commissioner Burdeshaw announced that she and a select few ADRS leadership staff members are planning to attend the CSAVR 2026 Spring Conference in Washington, D.C., on March 28 – April 1, 2026. This year's theme is VR Works: Innovation, Access, and Economic Opportunity. Commissioner Burdeshaw and Mr. Ryan Alford, Self Advocate (Mrs. Lisa Alford's son), are scheduled to preside over the CSAVR Hill Educational Briefing on Tuesday, March 31, 2026, from 11:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m., at The Hart Senate Office Building, Rm. 902. The presentation will focus on educating members of Congress

and congressional staff about the Return on Investment of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program. The Business Relations Program Director, Mrs. Bobbi Stephenson, is scheduled to participate in a session, Talent That Works – Elevating the Business Voice in Vocational Rehabilitation, on Monday, March 30, 2026, from 9:45 – 10:30 a.m. Mrs. Stephenson will be joined by Alabama’s Phifer Incorporated Vice-President of Human Resources, Mr. Russell DuBose, and the Onin Group, Key Account Manager Mr. Heath Hendrix.

Alabama’s Early Intervention System (AEIS) Update

Commissioner Burdeshaw reported that the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services continues the transition to a fee-for-service reimbursement model and new case management system, Giving Infants, Families, Toddlers Support (GIFTS II), for AEIS Program. The reimbursement rate for service coordination is the only rate that was challenged by statewide programs. Through a multitude of meetings, the programs were able to provide additional details that enabled ADRS to increase the rate twice and provide backpay for service coordination that took place since the beginning of FY 2026. The rate build now uses the Bureau of Labor Statistics average salary instead of the average salary of the programs in Alabama, in favor of state programs. It also includes additional mark-up for three (3) hours of non-billable time (administrative) per day. While some programs continue to disagree with the final rate, there is not any evidence that the rate does not cover the cost to provide Early Intervention Services.

ADRS knew there was potential for the AEIS to lose programs during this transition. AEIS has lost one (1) program and gained two (2) new programs so far; however, several programs have reduced their footprint through a reduction in the number of counties served. ADRS continues to monitor this situation closely.

Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS) and Health Center South - Ribbon Cutting and Open House

Dothan, Alabama: Commissioner Burdeshaw reported the renovation of the new Children’s Rehabilitation Service and Early Intervention Office is complete, and ADRS had a successful grand opening event at Health Center South on Monday, February 2, 2026. Speakers at the event included Dr. Marnix E. Heersink, Physician – Eye Center South and Partner Health Center South; Mayor Mark Saliba, City of Dothan, Alabama; The Honorable Paul Lee, Majority Leader, Alabama House of Representatives, District 86, Chair, Alabama House Health Committee, and Director of Wiregrass Rehabilitation Center. The Curtis Family attended with testimonials given by Stephanie, Kevin, and Andrew Curtis. Also, in attendance were Congressional staff from Senator Katie Britt’s office, Senator Tommy Tuberville’s office, and Representative Barry Moore’s office. The Center offers a first-class medical office setting for ADRS families. This is a wonderful opportunity for ADRS. Several staffers have reached out to the Commissioner to conduct follow-up conversations about ADRS programs.

Alabama's Examiners of Public Accounts

Commissioner Burdeshaw expressed her appreciation to Mrs. Gilliam, Mr. Kidd, Mrs. Lemley, Ms. Love, and Mr. Williams for their participation in the video conference for the Legal Compliance Exit Conference on Thursday, January 29, 2026. All Board members should have received the electronic final Audit Report. ADRS is working to correct the one finding regarding a written process for the transfer of state property. ADRS will also work to address items not listed as findings in the final report that received comments from the auditors.

The Alabama Office on Disability, formerly the Governor's Office on Disability, had no findings on their recent audit.

The ADRS Single Audit began in February 2026. This audit is typically lengthy, but the Commissioner will update the Board, as needed.

Condolences

Commissioner Burdeshaw noted with sadness the passing of James "Jim" A. Carden on Thursday, February 26, 2026. Board members and ADRS leadership staff members expressed their condolences to his family, friends, and former colleagues and recognized his contributions to ADRS during his years of service.

Mr. Carden and his wife Karen were leaders at ADRS for many years, and Mr. Carden worked in the field of rehabilitation from 1972 until his retirement in 2013.

Prior to ADRS, Mr. Carden's career included Gateway Home for Children, 1972 - 1973; St. Andrews Foundation, 1973 – 1976; and Alabama Institute for the Deaf and Blind, 1977 – 1979.

While employed by ADRS, Mr. Carden served as Rehabilitation Counselor and Employment Development Coordinator, 1979 – 1987; Data Management Specialist and Program Evaluation (liaison between programs and computer services), 1988 – 1996; Project Coordinator (Adult Rehabilitation Information Systems Project), 1997 – 1999; Assistant Commissioner, VRS Deaf and Blind Services, 2000 – 2009; and ADRS Deputy Commissioner, 2010 – 2013.

Mr. Carden will be remembered for his quiet nature, his passion for people with disabilities, his incredible depth of knowledge, his gentle spirit, his quick wit, and his love for his family.

Announcements:

Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services meeting dates for 2026

- Thursday, June 25, 2026 – 10:00 a.m., ADRS Montgomery/State Office

- Thursday, September 3, 2026 – 10:00 a.m., TBD

The Board considered various off-site locations (Huntsville, Gadsden, and Decatur) for the board meeting scheduled for Thursday, September 3, 2026. After a brief discussion, Mr. Kidd recommended the new Decatur office as an option. It is located in the North Alabama region. The Decatur office was made possible by a collaboration effort with the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB). Commissioner Burdeshaw will extend an invitation for Dr. Dennis Gilliam, President of AIDB, to attend the Sept. board meeting. The Decatur office houses the VRS-General, VRS-Blind-Deaf, and SAIL Program, along with the Adaptive Driving Program, Vocational Evaluation Program, the Employment Development Services Program, Business Enterprise Program, and other programs that assist people with disabilities in successfully transitioning from school into careers and becoming self-sufficient. Additional information will be provided once plans for the board meeting in September are finalized.

- Thursday, December 3, 2026 – 10:00 a.m., ADRS Montgomery/State Office

Adjourn:

With no additional business, Mr. Wilkinson moved to adjourn the meeting. This was seconded by Mr. Kidd and approved by unanimous consent. The meeting was adjourned at 11:06 a.m.

Minutes were taken by Mrs. Karen Freeman.

Respectfully submitted:



Jane E. Burdeshaw, Commissioner

Approved:



Charles E. Wilkinson, Chair