

**MINUTES OF MEETING**  
**GEORGIA VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES BOARD**  
**March 8, 2023**  
**1:00 PM – 2:25 PM**  
**200 Piedmont Avenue Suite 1300**  
**Atlanta, Georgia 30334**  
**+1 470-579-3674**  
**Conference ID: 175 643 660#**

**BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Tom Wilson (Chair)  
Faye Perdue (Vice Chair)  
Sandy Adams (Secretary)  
Louise Hill  
Vincent Martin (Virtually)  
Jane McCall (Virtually)  
GVRA Executive Director Chris Wells (Non-Member)

**Introduction**

GVRS Board Chair Tom Wilson welcomed everyone in attendance, and the meeting was called to order at 1:00 p.m.

**Approval of Agenda**

The board unanimously approved the agenda for the meeting.

**Approval of Minutes**

The board unanimously approved the January 11, 2023 minutes.

**GVRA Staff Updates/Reports:**

**Executive Director Report – Executive Director Chris Wells**

Executive Director began his report by acknowledging Mleesha Smith as the December 2022 Employee of the Month. Pamela Stewart was recognized as the January Employee of the Month.

**Program Highlights -- Executive Director Chris Wells**

- **Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA)**
  - [Federal Monitoring for 2023](#)
  - Still working with RSA to complete final findings from 2020 monitoring
- **[Comprehensive State Needs Assessment \(CSNA\)](#)**
  - Required every three (3) years to assist with vocational service improvements
- **Strategic Planning**
  - Working with UGA to develop a new strategic plan, campus master plan, and emergency management plan
- **Capital Investments**
  - Working with contractors to procure renovations to multiple facilities

- **Policy and Procedures**
  - Still aligning agency to uniformity in policy and procedures
- **Hiring**
  - Agency has been down counselors and adjudicators since FY 2019; in process of hiring 50 new counselors and employees for other support positions
- **Residential Services**
  - Aligning services for long-term sustainability
  - Deferred Maintenance
- **Georgia Industries for the Blind**
  - Investment and Resources
- **Business Enterprise Program**
  - 2020 and 2023 RSA Monitoring
  - External Review of Policies, Procedures, and Financials
  - Potential unallowable expenses
- **Blind and Low Vision Bills**
  - Bill has been consistently sponsored
- **Disability Adjudication Services**
  - Run by the federal government, but partners with the state
  - Currently a year backlog on claims
  - [Social Security offices critical to disability benefits hit breaking point](#)
- During his report, the Executive Director also touched on agency expenditures, capital projects, and House Bills, including \$7.8 million appropriation for FY 2024 capital investment for Roosevelt Warm Springs.

**Program and Legislative Updates – Deputy Executive Director of Programs, Bethany Whetzel**

Deputy Executive Director of Programs Bethany Whetzel presented legislative updates:

- Through February 10, 2023, DAS processed 31,877 total claims for FFY23
- The DAS three (3) month rolling quarter accuracy rate (November – January) is 94.1%
- DAS continues to hire. FFY-to-Date, DAS has onboarded 16 new hires and four (4) Returning Retirees
- Comparison of Southeast states (cases and average days) showed Georgia with 42,266 cases and average days for determination at 252
- Working to ensure that the BEP process for contracts follows state procurement guidelines and policies
- The solicitation for Ft. Benning was released on 2/15 – GVRA is the incumbent. Over the next few weeks, we will be preparing our bid for submission
- Working on a payroll transition plan for the blind vendors, effective July 1, 2023. There will be no use of federal funds
- Currently working on a new solicitation and job opportunity for full food service at Clay National Guard Army
- Conducting statewide training in February on the VR Process
- Agencywide Supervisor Training will be held in March
- Posting to hire Project Coordinator for SWTCIE grant
- Closed 734 clients since July 1, 2022
- Partnering with Shepherd Center to improve the vocational, health, and financial outcomes of persons with the most severe TBIs. Two (2) referrals have been received; counselors are working to provide rapid engagement and coordinate service delivery with

Shepherd Center

- Posted 50 counselor openings statewide, with interviews beginning February 13, 2023
- **Legislation**
  - [Georgia General Assembly - HR 168 \(ga.gov\)](#)
    - Encourages the Employment First Georgia Council to form a study and sunset 14C Organizations
    - Supplemental Materials Employment [of Workers with Disabilities | U.S. Department of Labor \(dol.gov\)](#)
    - [14\(c\) Certificate Holders | U.S. Department of Labor \(dol.gov\)](#)
    - <https://rsa.ed.gov/sites/default/files/subregulatory/RSA-FAQ-21-05.pdf>
    - <https://rsa.ed.gov/about/programs/disability-innovation-fund-subminimum-wage-to-competitive-integrated-employment>
  - [Senate Bill 8, Senate Bill 274, Georgia General Assembly - HB 399 \(ga.gov\)](#) and [Fiscal Note](#)
    - Blind and Low Vision Bills seeking cradle-to-grave services

### **Georgia Industries for the Blind--Plant Manager Dan West**

Mr. West discussed new developments and equipment. He displayed photos of items produced at the plant.

### **Residential Services – Director, Tamika Wright**

Director Tamika Wright presented an overview of the current state of Roosevelt Warm Springs (RWS) and Cave Spring Center (CSC). During her presentation, Ms. Wright also discussed Transition Services.

- In July 2022, RWS re-opened post COVID and had its largest vocational intake in over a year
- December 2022, graduated over 80 students
- January 2023, took final group of students under the old vocational programs and rolling admissions. These students are projected to graduate March 24, 2023
- New Director started March 1, 2023
- G.R.O.W. is a weeklong program that exposes participants to all five of the required areas under WIOA. Each day will be filled with experiences from one of the five areas; Self-Advocacy, Career Exploration, Work Place Readiness, Counseling on Post-Secondary Opportunities, and Work Based Learning Experiences
- Striving for 100 participants each week at RWS and 40 at CSC. Plan is to utilize this opportunity to showcase new vocational programs, which will potentially increase our enrollment
- Process for referrals to residential programs through vocational services
- Focus after March graduation will be to retrain staff in the following areas:
  - CPR/First Aid
  - Crisis Intervention
  - New Supervisor training
  - Case management training
  - Active shooter training
  - AWARE training
  - RSA 911 data and how it relates to residential services
  - Pre-Employment Transition Services (Leveraging Residential Services to serve more rural areas)

### **Policy Updates – Jeff Allen, Director of Policy and Compliance**

Director of Policy and Compliance Jeff Allen presented the following updates:

- Monitoring will be onsite March 28-30, 2023
- Focus will be to identify root causes for the return of unused federal funds
- Residential expenditures, services, and outcomes
- Two areas of Focus:
  - Performance of the VR and Supported Employment programs
  - Financial Management of VR and Supported Employment program
- Technical Assistance will be provided

**New/Old Business –**

- Next meeting May 10, 2023, 1:00 PM at UGA Tate Student Center

**Public Comment/Adjournment- None**

The meeting was adjourned at 2:30 P.M.

**Official Minutes Statement**

The foregoing Minutes for the March 8, 2023, Regular Meeting of the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Services Board were approved and adopted by the Board at the Board’s meeting on May 10, 2023. The minutes represent a summary of presentations provided by GVRA staff on March 8, 2023.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Tom Wilson, Chair

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Sandy Adams, Secretary

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date