**MINUTES OF MEETING**

**GEORGIA VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES BOARD**

**August 9, 2023**

**1:00 PM – 2:30 PM**

**Roosevelt Warm Springs Vocational Rehabilitation Residential Campus**

**6135 Roosevelt Highway**

**Warm Springs, Georgia 31830**

**BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Tom Wilson (Chair)

Faye Perdue (Vice Chair)

Sandy Adams (Secretary)

Craig Camuso

Suzanne Dooley (attended virtually)

Louise Hill

Vincent Martin

Jane McCall

Johnathan Taylor (attended 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. The Chairman asked Dr. Bob Patterson, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Warm Springs, to deliver the invocation.

**Approval of Agenda**

Chairman Wilson introduced a motion to approve the agenda, Vice Chair Perdue seconded the motion, and the board unanimously approved the agenda.

**Consent Agenda**

The Fiscal Year 2023 and Fiscal Year 2024 budgets, as well as the minutes from the May 10, 2023, GVRS board meeting were unanimously approved.

**GVRA Staff Updates/Reports:**

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

* Executive Director Wells recognized the following special guests and thanked them for attending: Congressman Drew Ferguson; State Representative Debbie Buckner; Mark Butler, Executive Director of the Three Rivers Regional Commission; and Steve Stanfield, Roosevelt Warm Springs Development Fund.
* Executive Director Wells provided updates regarding the agency’s mission, vision, and values.
* He discussed strategic planning objectives including improved recruitment and retention; continual process improvement; improved service delivery; enhanced partnerships; and investments in infrastructure.
* Executive Director Wells touched on key initiatives, including the Disability Innovation Fund and the Subminimum Wage to Competitive Integrated Employment (SWTCIE). He announced other initiatives, including revamped residential services, which are imminent through a partnership with the Nonpublic Postsecondary Education Commission (GNPEC); a restrictive policy initiative that removes restrictive policies including those that are based on financial need; a partnership with the Shepherd Center to transition clients from Shepherd into VR; and the second year of an initiative that provides a dedicated GVRA counselor to the Georgia Academy for the Blind.
* Executive Director Wells provided updates on other key initiatives, including Georgia Pathways to Coverage, which offers Medicaid coverage to Georgians between the ages of 19 and 64 who have a household income of up to 100% of the federal poverty level, and who are not otherwise eligible for traditional Medicaid.
* Executive Director Wells discussed two educational partnerships, one with the Bobby Dodd Bridge Academy and the other with the Tommy Nobis Center.
* He shared information about prospective initiatives, including the Disability Innovation Fund/Pathways that involved GVRA’s application for a second grant in collaboration with the Centers for Independent Living, Georgia Department of Education, and local school systems to offer pre-vocational rehabilitation services to middle and high school students.
* Executive Director Wells also mentioned other prospective initiatives, including Project Search, which is fully funded by GVRA; and the IPSE Grant, which would increase funding through a federal match with adjustments that align with vocational services requirements.
* He addressed agency challenges, including education and training; balancing pre-vocational rehabilitation services; and balancing local education agency needs.

**Roosevelt Warm Springs Updates – Residential Director, Dennis Medders**

* Director Medders introduced Roosevelt 2.0, an initiative to increase the number of clients served.
* He stated RWS will be a post-secondary option for any qualified student.
* He confirmed that RWS offers industry-recognized certifications.
* Director Medders expanded upon the following educational pathways, offering examples of jobs that graduates may obtain once they complete the pathway: 1) Hospitality, 2) Certified Nursing Assistant, 3) Auto Detailing, 4) CVS/Retail, 5) Logistics/Warehouse, and 6) Low voltage wiring.
* He indicated additional pathways coming to RWS include 1) CVS/Pharmacy Technician, 2) Heavy Equipment Operator, and 3) Landscaping Maintenance and Design.

**GVRA Experience – Sam Armas, Summer Internship Program**

* GVRA summer intern Sam Armas discussed how he learned about GVRA, and how the agency has made an impact on his life.
* Armas was born with Spina bifida; he underwent fetal surgery to limit the severity, but he was still disabled after the surgery.
* He participated in wheelchair basketball for 13 years before attending Auburn University. While at Auburn, he was a starter on the college’s wheelchair basketball team and eventually was named captain.
* Armas has competed internationally in wheelchair basketball as a member of Team USA.
* He recently graduated magna cum laude from Auburn University.
* Armas hopes to return to GVRA as a full-time employee.

**Old Business/New Business**

* Chairman Wilson announced the upcoming GVRS Board Meeting on October 11, 2023. The meeting will be held in Perry at the Georgia National Fairgrounds and Agricenter. GVRA is the presenting sponsor that day, so it is designated “GVRA Day at the Fair.”

**Public Comment**

* Chairman Wilson asked members of the audience to stand and be recognized.
* The following individuals identified themselves: Congressman Drew Ferguson; State Representative Debbie Buckner; Mark Butler, Executive Director of the Three Rivers Regional Commission; Steve Stanfield, Roosevelt Warm Springs Development Fund; Carolyn McKinley, President of the Meriwether County Chamber of Commerce; Kandy Westbrook, Heard County Schools; Kitty Crawford, Troup County; Tamika Brown, Troup County; Dr. Bob Patterson, Pastor of First Baptist Church of Warm Springs; Ruth Nash, Mayor of Gay, Georgia; Greg Teems, Cave Spring Campus; Rhonda Denton, Meriwether County Family Connection; Debron Walker, Eleanor Roosevelt School; Jenna Dunaway, Thomaston-Upson Schools; Laura Gower, Congressman Drew Ferguson’s office; Dawn Woodard, Meriwether County Schools; Robert “Al” Griffin, Superintendent of the Meriwether County Board of Education; Tonya Waller, Meriwether County Schools; and Cathie Wilson, Chairman Wilson’s wife.

**Adjournment**

* Chairman Wilson called for a motion to adjourn, Vice Chair Perdue seconded the motion, and the board unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:30 p.m.

**Official Minutes Statement**

The foregoing Minutes for the May 10, 2023, Regular Meeting of the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Services Board were approved and adopted by the Board at the Board’s meeting on August 9, 2023.

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Tom Wilson, Chair

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Date

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Sandy Adams, Secretary

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Date