

**MEETING MINUTES OF THE
GEORGIA VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES BOARD
January 10, 2024
1:00 PM – 2:15 PM
200 Piedmont Avenue SE, West Tower, 13th Floor, Atlanta, Georgia 30334**

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

Tom Wilson, Chair	Suzanne Dooley (attended virtually)
Faye Perdue, Vice Chair	Louise Hill (attended virtually)
Sandy Adams, Secretary	Vincent Martin (attended virtually)
Craig Camuso	
Jane McCall	
GVRA Executive Director Chris Wells, Non-Member	

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:

James Defoor	Johnathan Taylor
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Opening, Welcome, and Invocation

GVRS Board Chair Tom Wilson welcomed everyone in attendance, and the meeting was called to order at 1:03 p.m. The Chairman delivered the invocation.

Approval of Agenda

Chairman Wilson performed a roll call and recommended approval of the agenda. On motion of Vice Chair Perdue, seconded by Secretary Adams, and unanimously carried, the Board approved the agenda as presented.

Consent Agenda

The Chairman recommended approval of the Consent Agenda, consisting of the following:

- Approve Board Meeting Minutes from Previous Session
- Approve Budget Report
- Approve Annual Report

On motion by Mr. Camuso, seconded by Vice Chair Perdue, and unanimously carried, the Board approved the Consent Agenda.

GVRA Staff Updates/Reports:

Executive Director Report – Executive Director Chris Wells

- Executive Director Wells recognized the following employees:
 - Moses Little, a counselor specializing in the blind or vision-impaired clients in the Athens VR Office, was chosen as the October employee of the month.
 - Cara Lofton, Administrative Assistant for VR District 8, was chosen as the November employee of the month.

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- Executive Director Wells provided information on current and anticipated bills impacting GVRA Clients.

Anticipated

- Blind and Low Vision Bills
 - Bills would create an independent commission seeking to offer additional independent living services for individuals who are blind and/or have low vision.
 - Bill would remove the Georgia Industries for the Blind (GIB), Older Blind, Business Enterprise, Independent Living, and vocational services for the blind.
- Healthcare
 - Expansion of Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act

Current

- Georgia Pathways to Coverage
 - Offers Medicaid coverage to eligible Georgians ages 19-64 with a household income of up to 100% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), are not otherwise eligible for traditional Medicaid, and meet the qualifying activities threshold.
 - Qualifying activity requirements will only apply to Pathways, not those enrolled in other Georgia Medicaid programs.
 - Enrolling in GVRA services is a qualifying event making our client potentially eligible.

2024 Calendar Year Laws (January 1, 2024)

- SB 20 - Consumer Access To Contracted Healthcare (Catch) Act
 - Ensures consumer access to quality healthcare by setting adequacy standards for network plans offered by insurers and guarantees that everyone with insurance has access to primary and specialty care; mental healthcare; pharmacies and laboratories; and substance abuse treatment programs.
- HB 1013 - Georgia's Mental Health Parity Act
 - Requires that health care insurance plans that provide coverage for mental health treatment of substance use disorders do so in accordance with the federal Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008. Health insurers must also provide an annual comparative analysis report to the insurance commissioner.
- HB 1437 – Income Tax Rates
 - Replaces the current graduated personal income tax with a flat rate of 5.49% effective Jan. 1, 2024, with gradual rate reductions until the flat rate reaches 4.99%. The rate reductions can be delayed by a year for each year if necessary.

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Client Services Updates – Director Jennifer Howell

- Client Services Director Howell provided an update to the Board of highlights and statistics within her area, including the number of cases successfully closed for the federal fiscal year, the current number of vocational rehabilitation clients being served, the number of PTS cases, and the average wage by district.

DAS Program Updates – Director Rita McWhorter

- Director McWhorter reviewed the Disability Claims Process with the Board. Ms. McWhorter further reviewed the State responsibilities versus the Federal responsibilities.
- Director McWhorter offered challenges that the Disability Adjudicator Services face such as:
 - Continuing Resolution due to lack of funding, overtime, and hiring allocation.
 - Retention and recruitment issues due to staff losses to SSA and the VA; basic training requires up to 16 weeks; however, it takes up to two years for an adjudicator to completely learn the job and work independently.
 - Case backlogs, increased processing times, and a lack of providers in rural areas to conduct consultative exams.
- Director McWhorter shared highlights which included:
 - Cases cleared to date this fiscal year
 - A three-month rolling quarter accuracy rate of 98.9%, which is above the regional and national rate of 95.7%
 - Improvements in retention and recruitment due to increased salaries, increased telework opportunities, case assignment breaks, departmental and agency contests and events, and exploring more locations with Vocational Rehabilitation to recruit positions outside metro-Atlanta.

Old Business/New Business

Chairman Wilson reviewed the following items with the Board:

- Reminder to complete the required Annual Financial Disclosure Report with the State Ethics Commission by January 31, 2024
- The 2024 GVRS Board Meeting Dates
- The 2024 GVRS Board Officer Elections Date

Public Comment & Adjournment

Chairman Wilson opened the floor for public comment. As there was no public comment, he called for a motion to adjourn.

On motion of Mrs. McCall, seconded by Mr. Camuso, the board unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting at 2:15 p.m.