

**MEETING MINUTES OF THE  
GEORGIA VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES BOARD  
October 11, 2023  
1:00 PM – 3:05 PM  
Georgia National Fairgrounds and Agriculture Center  
Perry, Georgia 31069**

**BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:**

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

**BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:**

Johnathan Taylor

**The History of Rehabilitation in Georgia**

Mike Shadix, Historian and Librarian for Roosevelt Warm Springs Institute, presented the “Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency History: A Century of Collaboration, Growth and Change.”

**Proclamation**

John Pilgrim, Public Affairs/Communications Staff Member, read a proclamation by the Governor of the State of Georgia proclaiming October 2023 as Disability Employment Awareness Month in the State of Georgia.

**Special Recognition**

Executive Director Chris Wells recognized the following special guests in celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and as a token of appreciation for their continued support of the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency and service to individuals with disabilities, each was presented with a commemorative plaque.

- Dan Regenstein, Chief of Staff, Georgia Department of Administrative Services
- Ron Wakefield, Director of the Division of Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities, Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities
- Charlotte Densmore, Public Policy Director, Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities
- Superintendent Richard Woods, Georgia Department of Education
- Caitlyn Hyatt, Chief Operations Officer of Association Services Group, and Georgia Association of Training, Employment & Supports Member
- Louis DeBroux, Chief of Staff, Georgia Department of Labor
- Marty Smith, State Property Officer, Georgia Building Authority

# **MEETING MINUTES OF THE GEORGIA VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES BOARD**

**October 11, 2023**

Page 2 of 6

- Commissioner Jason Shaw, Public Service Commission
- Deputy Commissioner Rusty Rodgers, Department of Juvenile Justice
- Emily Hatchett, Deputy Director of Governmental Affairs, Department of Human Services
- Tina Herring, Assistant Director of Existing Industry and Regional Recruitment, Georgia Department of Economic Development
- Tom McCall, Georgia Farm Bureau President & Former State Representative who drafted House Bill 1146 establishing the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency in 2012

Executive Director Wells further welcomed additional special guests:

- Kirk Shook, Executive Director, Georgia Nonpublic Postsecondary Education Commission
- Juliet Hardeman, Georgia State Rehabilitation Council Chairwoman

## **Opening, Welcome, and Invocation**

GVRS Board Chair Tom Wilson welcomed everyone in attendance, and the meeting was called to order at 1:01 p.m. The Chairman asked Mrs. Faye Perdue, Vice Chair, to deliver the invocation.

## **Approval of Agenda**

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

## **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 Completed Strategic Plan

On motion by Vice Chair Perdue, seconded by Mrs. Hill 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:
  - Jason Turner, a supervisor in Disability Adjudication Services (DAS), received the Social Security Administration’s Associate Commissioner’s Honor
  - Thi (Sara) Pham, an employee in the Office of Fiscal Services, was chosen as the July employee of the month.
  - All FY2023 Employees of the Month were recognized with lunch at Rays in the City and Amazon gift cards. Their managers were also invited to attend the luncheon.

## **MEETING MINUTES OF THE GEORGIA VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES BOARD**

**October 11, 2023**

Page 3 of 6

- Executive Director Wells provided recent updates regarding agency news such as:
  - GVRA was awarded a \$10.5 million grant to improve economic self-sufficiency for children and youth with disabilities.
  - GIB in Bainbridge celebrated production milestones and accomplishments.
  - GVRA rolled out the PowerDMS system, a new online platform for policies, standard operating procedures, and associated forms and attachments.
  - GVRA launched a new internal agency homepage giving employees immediate access to news, upcoming events, and quick links to resources.
  - Hecht Burdeshaw Architects, Inc. will design the renovations to RWS Georgia Hall and Quadrangle.
  - BEP is now offering vending on the RWS campus and a Micro Mart at the Department of Public Safety facility.

### **Client Services Updates – Director Jennifer Howell**

- Client Services Director Howell provided an update to the Board of highlights within her area, including the number of cases successfully closed for the federal fiscal year, the current number of vocational rehabilitation clients being served, and the number of PTS cases. Ms. Howell further shared that Client Services is maintaining their exceeding status rates at 97% for Determination of Eligibility and 94.4% for Individualized Plan for Employment completions.
- Client Services has 109 counselors on staff, including 6 interns and 3 part-time counselors. The first hiring fair for GVRA Field Offices was held in College Park for Districts 2 and 3, creating offers to 18 new counselors.
- Client Services continues to partner with Shepherd Center to improve the vocational, health, and financial outcomes for persons with the most severe TBIs, with 12 processed referrals to date.

### **Roosevelt Warm Springs Updates – Residential Director Chip Medders**

- Director Medders shared what Pre-Employment Services (Pre-ETS) are and how they help prepare high school students for future employment.
- Director Medders shared the strategic plan for the newly created District 10, which provides services to Troup, Meriwether, Pike, Upson, Talbot, Heard, and Harris counties. There are 4 liaisons delivering Pre-ETS to students in these counties, serving 46% of all students with disabilities. To date, District 10 has received 189 referrals and realized an average of 15% increase in students served since building relationships with schools in these counties.

**MEETING MINUTES OF THE  
GEORGIA VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES BOARD  
October 11, 2023  
Page 4 of 6**

**Georgia Agribusiness Experience – Mason Dean, AgrAbility Field Coordinator for South Georgia, and Kyle Haney, UGA Rural Health Manager**

- Mason Dean and Kyle Haney shared information regarding the AgrAbility Program, which is housed at the University of Georgia under the College of Agriculture and Environmental Services and the College of Family of Consumer Sciences. AgrAbility was first introduced in the 1990 Farm Bill and in 1991 eight states were funded. Today, there are twenty-one AgrAbility projects across the nation.
- AgrAbility clients are those in production agriculture growing or raising a commodity. Over 1,400 Georgia farm families have participated in project activities, with a significant increase in the number of military veterans seeking services. They partner with GVRA and GFB to secure these services.
- Mr. Dean and Mr. Haney shared case studies of actual clients and the services provided at no cost, such as expertise in disability, agriculture and assistive technologies to recommend appropriate adaptations and production changes; fabricating and installing assistive technology equipment on farms; volunteer days; and coordinate funding and services on behalf of the farmer through foundations and other agencies.

**Old Business/New Business**

There was no old or new business to discuss. To this point, Chairman Wilson recommended that the GVRS Board not schedule any further meetings for 2023 and if something comes up that needs to be brought before the Board, they could schedule a virtual meeting.

On motion by Mr. Camuso, seconded by Mrs. McCall and unanimously carried, the Board approved the Chairman's recommendation.

**Special Recognition**

Executive Director Chris Wells spoke about the McCall family and the legacy of their son, Bud. He then read a poem carried by Mr. Tom McCall since Bud's birth in 1985, "To All Parents" by Edgar Guest.

Chairman Wilson recognized special guests – members of the McCall family and employees of the Georgia Farm Bureau – and read a Proclamation of the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Services Board Recognizing and Commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the National Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Extraordinary Contributions and Dedication of Mr. Tom McCall to the Advancement of Vocational Rehabilitation Services in Our State. The Proclamation acknowledged the inspiration of Tom McCall's son, Bud, and honored the McCall's legacy by renaming the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Scholarship as the "Bud McCall Postsecondary Vocational Rehabilitation Grant."

**MEETING MINUTES OF THE  
GEORGIA VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES BOARD**

**October 11, 2023**

Page 5 of 6

Executive Director Wells announced that beginning January 2024, all financial needs assessments will be removed as a barrier for those seeking post-secondary education. The amount of the previous Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency scholarship will be increased to match funding offered through the Pell Grant. This amount covers \$7,395 for tuition, \$900 for books, and \$9,140 for maintenance (room, board, and meals) and equates to a maximum amount of \$17,435 annually, or \$8,718 per semester.

**Public Comment**

Chairman Wilson opened the floor for public comment.

- Juliet Hardeman, Chairwoman of the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC), reported that there are now 18 members on the SRC. Mrs. Hardeman stated that the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) is underway and asked for support from the GVRS Board and GVRA by taking the survey. Mrs. Hardeman closed by sharing that there are 65,000 students in Georgia eligible for Pre-ETS services and asked that the SRC and GVRS Board strategize on ways to spread the word.
- Board Member Craig Camuso thanked everyone for the momentum he is seeing throughout the Agency.
- Chair Emeritus Jimmy Defoor shared that he is delighted to see what GVRA is doing to move in the right direction.

**Adjournment**

- Chairman Wilson called for a motion to adjourn, On motion of Mrs. Hill, seconded by Mr. Camuso, the board unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:05 p.m.

**MEETING MINUTES OF THE  
GEORGIA VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES BOARD  
October 11, 2023  
Page 6 of 6**

**Official Minutes Statement**

The foregoing Minutes for the October 11, 2023, Regular Meeting of the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Services Board were approved and adopted by the Board at the Board's meeting on \_\_\_\_\_ (TBD) \_\_\_\_\_.

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date