ALABAMA COMMISSION ON THE EVALUATION OF SERVICES

evidence.alabama.gov

Meeting Minutes

Date and Location

The Alabama Commission on the Evaluation of Services met on March 18, 2025, at 9:30 a.m. in room 825 of the Alabama State House, 11 S. Union Street, Montgomery, AL.

Attendance

Member	Present	Teleconference	Absent
Chairman Orr	☒	☐	☐
Vice-Chair Filmore	☒	☐	☐
Commissioner Albritton	☒	☐	☐
Commissioner Allred	☒	☐	☐
Commissioner Carlton	☒	☐	☐
Commissioner Coleman-Madison	☒	☐	☐
Commissioner Green	☒	☐	☐
Commissioner Gray	☒	☐	☐
Commissioner Sawyer	☒	☐	☐
Commissioner Sells	☒	☐	☐
Commissioner White	☒	☐	☐
Commissioner Whitt	☒	☐	☐
Commissioner Poole, *ex officio (Finance Director)*	☐	☐	☒
Commissioner Fulford, *ex officio (LSA Fiscal Division Deputy Director)*	☒	☐	☐

A lawful quorum of voting members was present to conduct business.

Notice of Meeting:

Sufficient notice of the meeting was posted on February 26, 2025, to the Secretary of State's Open Meeting Act Posting Board.

Approval of Minutes:

Approval of the minutes of the previous meeting on September 16, 2024.

A motion was made by Vice Chair Filmore to adopt the minutes as written. Commissioner Sawyer seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously with all those present voting.

Opening Remarks:

Vice Chair Filmore spoke about the attention the Commission has been receiving lately and that it is significant to point out that the Commission is made up of executive and legislative members as a collaboration. The Commission does methodological work which will continue as we advise the legislature on how to handle appropriations. The executive branch members will remain engaged.

Chairman Orr followed with comments that echoed the Vice Chair. There is a lot more attention focused on the efforts of the Commission and staff. There is more to come in the days ahead. We all want to be an efficient and better run government. We are happy to have the Commission, setup well before the attention. It will mean that in the days ahead we will be busier and doing more work, so the Commission has more to review. Again echoing the Vice Chair, we are deliberative so that we have a data-driven, and that is the way to operate now and in the future.

Reports and Presentation:

Director Morgan provided an update to the commission that included the development of the 2026 work plan, a planned presentation to the House Fiscal Responsibility Committee, a request of the Senate Fiscal Responsibility and Economic Development Committee, and two pieces of legislation that ACES was a part of – HB365 and HJR100. He also spoke about the ongoing work of the Mental Health Crisis Centers, Charter Schools, ACHE appropriations, and the start of background work on Electronic Monitoring.

<u>Crisis Center Update:</u>

Savana Griffin updated the progress on the Mental Health Crisis Center evaluation, highlighting what has been accomplished thus far and what work is left to be completed.

Commissioner White asked if the Alabama Crisis Centers were modeled after Georgia and followed up to ask if the staff has looked at the research behind Georgia's model. Ms. Griffin commented that the staff has reviewed the literature, and Alabama's are slightly different. The staff has reviewed a study linked to capacity and utilization and that we hope to be able to mimic the methodology in Alabama.

Commissioner White asked about the effectiveness of the Georgia model. Ms. Griffin responded that the Georgia study was not scoped to look at effectiveness but mentioned a study out of Texas that has. We are also attempting to follow their methodology in Alabama. The Texas study was concentrated on the served population returning to jail and arrests after receiving care. Alabama's concentrated on lowering jail and hospital days.

Commissioner White asked if the staff has started to talk to police and hospitals regarding diminution in business. Ms. Griffin responded yes and added that the staff is currently speaking with the Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) leader at the Huntsville Police Department and working with other centers as well as CIT program's ability to provide a warm handoff to police. We are hoping to get more data in the future that will allow us to analyze the decline in jail and hospital days related to Mental Health Crisis Center care.

Commissioner Sawyer asked if the appropriation for Crisis Centers had supporting language regarding the evaluation of the jail and hospital days. Ms. Griffin responded, not in the appropriation bill. However, takeaways from conversations with the Alabama Department of Mental Health about the intent of the centers is to reduce the burden of mental illness in jails and hospitals. Commissioner Sawyer said she was just curious if the outcomes were tied back to the legislation.

Commissioner Fulford commented that as the person that drafts the budget, doing a deeper dive on topics is great but policymakers will only get back what is asked of the program. If you want more information, policymakers will need something to measure it against; otherwise whoever is evaluating the program will have to guess what the intent and impact on outcomes. Policymakers will need to be intentional about what a program is supposed to accomplish.

Director Morgan followed Commissioner Fulford's comments and added that there have been three crisis centers stood up that have been around the longest. We hope to collect enough data so that we can provide a benchmark for the others. In total there are supposed to be 11. He also mentioned that this evaluation would likely be the most qualitative and quantitative evaluation of the Commission to date. The staff is getting out into the communities, talking with peers and consumers. In addition to the financial piece, which is always important, the ability to develop methodologies like Texas and Georgia are important. If we are unable to follow them that may lead to a recommendation. Ms. Griffin added that the staff has reached out to the researchers in Texas and Georgia. We hope to interview them and find out why effectiveness was or was not an outcome of interest.

Commissioner Whitt asked about the evaluation time frame. Ms. Griffin responded that the size of this evaluation is bigger than most we have completed, but as we get more data from the six centers, and the timeliness of that data is important, we should be able to have the evaluation completed in early fall.

Commissioner Sawyer asked if the Commission had a HIPAA or privacy office, noting the data issues could be related to those topics. Director Morgan responded that the Commission does not currently, but that subject is on the agenda for the Commission today.

Commissioner White asked if the department (Mental Health), was keeping track of outcomes. Ms. Griffin said that there are SAMHSA guidelines that the centers follow that have certain targets. Mental Health and the centers are supposed to collect data on these targets noting that tracking avoided jail and emergency room visits are among them. Other data points are also collected. Commissioner White followed up by asking if avoided jail and emergency room department visits depended on the center or person. Ms. Giffin responded by saying it depended on the center as to what level of data and to what extent they collect information.

<u>Smaller Evaluations that are Ongoing update:</u>

Patrick Dean provided an update on the smaller evaluations the staff was working in addition to the crisis center and charter school evaluations. Primarily he spoke about the update to the Alabama Commission on Higher Education (ACHE) programs (AMSTEP, Re-Engage Alabama, and earmarked programs within their budget).

Commissioner Coleman-Madison commented on the need for teachers in rural and smaller communities that have a smaller supply of teachers to pull from and asked if the state is providing incentive for those areas, like AMSTEP.

Mr. Dean provided a response that included a look back at the teacher evaluations resulting in specific teacher shortages within the state as referenced by Commissioner Coleman-Madison. However, the AMSTEP legislation does not include the areas where shortages have been identified. ACHE could define those areas but has not done so. Mr. Dean also referenced the legislation being opened up by a house representative that would include defining success and tracking the impact.

Commissioner Albritton asked if the staff has looked at the various Colleges of Education's underutilization of resources being provided. What colleges are doing to recruit and is there a good recruiting program or is the smaller teacher labor pool a function of a lack of shortages within the state?

Mr. Dean said the answer is two sided. Some schools were recruiting heavily from their area which has helped, and other schools were focused on recruiting out-of-state students. Overall, Colleges of Education enrollment was declining although some things might have changed since we last evaluated.

Commissioner Albritton referenced some material identifying 60 applicants in the fall of 2022, but the spring of this year only had 32. Is this across all education majors? Mr. Dean replied that he did not know the majors but reminded the commission that these are teachers already in the classroom.

Commissioner Whitt verified the numbers since 2019, noting that the utilization rate for the AMSTEP program was 29% and that millions of dollars that has gone unspent. Mr. Dean agreed and said that we did some quick follow-up analysis and found that most of the new applicants were those earning a master's degree. The recipients appeared to be declining to the 2020 levels. In addition, we forecasted that if current recipients were to be paid in full it would cost around $500k, leaving a substantial remaining fund balance.

Commissioner Coleman-Madison commented and asked how many school systems have vocational programs that are accessible to students in their districts that go to work instead of college. Has there been a survey or study of what is being done for these students or what Alabama offers?

Mr. Dean responded and said the Commissioners question has not been addressed or something the staff has been tasked with. The closest study we have done was looking into the teacher shortages and how that work included dual enrollment and vocational training.

Commissioner Carlton asked about the Higher Education Earmarks that the staff has been reviewing. Specifically, she asked if Mr. Dean was aware of any other agencies that charge an administrative fee for pass-through funding.

Mr. Dean said that the staff has not found another agency that charges administrative fees but knew of some that did not. Commissioner Carlton asked that the review of ACHE administrative fees for pass-through funding could determine which of the programs are directly related to higher education and which are placed there out of convenience. Mr. Dean replied, certainly.

Old Business:

None

New Business:

Exploration of a Privacy Board

Mr. Dean provided some background information regarding the ability of the Commission staff to explore the creation of a Privacy Board within the Commission. This would be like an Institutional Review Board (IRB) within a college or university.

Commissioner Coleman-Madison asked a clarifying question regarding the privacy board and the staff's ability to obtain personally identifiable health information for the benefit of research. Mr. Dean provided the clarification referencing the Commissions Privacy Board would authorize a waiver to pursue the information and further clarified that the covered entity that would provide the information would still have the ability to deny the request.

Commissioner Coleman-Madison asked for an example of this type of request for which Mr. Dean provided one. The Commissioner then stated that she wanted to make sure that the rights of the patient were not being violated. Mr. Dean replied that those concerns are what we are trying to address within HIPAA and FERPA. We want to be in compliance with those laws.

Chairman Orr asked about the memo and if it was pointing out an issue with data. This pointed to conversations with the Director that the staff would conduct the research around a privacy board for the Commission and then come back with recommendations at which time the Commission would discuss the details. Again, once all the lawyers, etc. have had time to review and comment. Therefore, the staff is not seeking authorization today to create the privacy board but to explore the opportunity.

Mr. Dean replied, correct. Chairman Orr further clarified that this is just the first step of a couple that would come down the road.

Commissioner Sawyer posed no objection to a privacy board and thought it would be prudent that the Commission would want to examine. The primary concern, from her experience, proper disclosure and reporting can be a nightmare referencing health information. Although citing that this was not her area within the Department of Mental Health, the Commission would want protections and to better understand the associated liabilities. She also expressed the need to explore what other states have done and what models have been used. Chairman Orr also commented and said it was a serious issue.

Commissioner White said he presumed researchers at UAB, USA have experience with this and to ask them for best practices. Mr. Dean responded and said we are looking into what other states are doing and wanted to be transparent

while still being compliant. There are only some instances when the staff would need to match this information with information from other datasets in order to make scientific statements on what is happening within a program.

Prior to adjournment, Commissioner Whitt wanted to thank Governor Ivey, her administration and Chairman Orr for standing the Commission up over five years ago. The Commission was established before the popularity started. What we are doing is important and good work. Reports are valuable to the Commission members, but it is also valuable information for the entire legislature. There is good work that has been done and should be shared.

Chairman Orr asked if the reports went out to the members of the legislature. Director Morgan said no but the information is posted on our website once the report has been presented during a Commission meeting. We did not want to appear biased from the legislative side of the Commission and not know who else would need the information on the executive side.

Chairman Orr stated that going forward we would need to look at the funding for the Commission if we were to expand the scope of work, further noting that the exploration of ACHE earmarks would need to be done within the State General Fund.

Chairman Orr made a general statement to the Commission that referenced starting during COVID and he has appreciated working with Vice Chair Filmore from the inception of ACES. Continuing the statement, the Vice Chair has been helpful in moving things along if there has ever been a delay. The administration has been very cooperative.

Vice Chair Filmore commented that she does not know if we have ever had an issue with cooperation of a state agency and that the administration is an open book. Transparency is a number one focus as the governor has said. Evaluating these programs but also need to be mindful as we set earmarks – what are those upcoming budgets that we will face and the need to set deliverables. All of this is part of the process, but the executive branch remains engaged.

Commissioner Fulford reiterated an early comment that said if you want a specific outcome then that will need to be established from the start. That is what will be required for a good evaluation. New legislation will need to define what those deliverables are so that when we do evaluate it, whoever has evaluated it will be able to provide information that speaks to the accomplishments. We have to have that piece to get there.

Adjournment:

There being no further business, at 10:23 a.m. Chairman Orr moved the meeting be adjourned.