



ALABAMA COMMISSION ON THE EVALUATION OF SERVICES

Meeting Minutes

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Date and Location

The Alabama Commission on the Evaluation of Services met on September 4th, at 1:00 p.m. in room 825 of the Alabama State House, 11 S. Union Street, Montgomery, AL.

Attendance

Member	Present	Teleconference	Absent
Chairman Orr	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Vice-Chair Filmore	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Commissioner Albritton	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Commissioner Allred	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Commissioner Carlton	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Commissioner Coleman-Madison	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Commissioner Green	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Commissioner Gray	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Commissioner Sawyer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Commissioner Sells	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Commissioner White	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Commissioner Whitt	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Commissioner Poole, ex officio (Finance Director)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Commissioner Fulford, ex officio (LSA Fiscal Division Deputy Director)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



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

Notice of Meeting:

Sufficient notice of the meeting was posted on July 3rd, 2025, to the Secretary of State's Open Meeting Act Posting Board.

Approval of Minutes:

Approval of the minutes of the previous meeting on March 18th, 2025.

A motion was made by Commissioner Allred to adopt the minutes as written. Commissioner Albritton seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously with all those present voting.

Reports and Presentation:

Savana Griffin, Policy Lead for the Commission, delivered a presentation on the Preliminary Evaluation of Mental Health Crisis Centers. Q&A followed the presentation.

Q&A Crisis Center Evaluation

Commissioner Whitt praised the job of the Commission's staff and compared the work to what would be done for a new business getting up and off the ground. He thanked the staff for the hard work and asked Savana if she thought HIPPA played a role in accessing needed data. Savana responded affirmatively while mentioning that she had to attend multiple meetings with the Department of Mental Health.

Commissioner Sawyer stated that she had previously made the decision to recuse herself, but she would like to make a comment. She stated that she really appreciated the overview in the presentation. It had a broader perspective when compared to the report. I got a much more positive tone from hearing the presentation versus reading the report. She continued to address the Commission and noted the great intentions of the evaluations, but the real value is the predicted outcomes from the outset so that the agency being evaluated knows what is satisfactory and what they expect two or three years down the line. This should be considered for anyone being evaluated or put through this process.

Savana Griffin addressed Commissioner Sawyers comments, noting part of the ACES process is to have a stakeholder workgroup meeting once the draft report has been compiled. As a result of this meeting, modifications were made to the report and are included in the final report. We noted the program is largely operating to fidelity but there are things that can be done to improve. We provided objectives to the agency and we follow-up.

Commissioner Sawyer asked if a consensus was gained from the stakeholder workgroup meeting. Director Morgan provided additional context and said there were disagreements on some of the findings, and we agreed to disagree during the stakeholder workgroup meeting. He added that the goal of the ACES staff is to focus on continuous improvement. We want to position ourselves and the programs in the best position to measure long-term outcomes.

Vice-Chair Filmore mentioned the report being preliminary and that there was a recent change that some might not have had time to recognize. Commissioner Sawyer acknowledged not having seen that change but appreciated it and pointed to the need to measure metrics like avoided jail and emergency departments. Director Morgan responded to the comments and said the ACES staff is onboard with continuing the work if this is something the Commission wishes to do. Director Morgan also mentioned the ability to get avoidance data is difficult and takes time but it can be done. The ACES staff is willing to pursue this information.

Commissioner Whitt added to the conversation and said there is not one of us that does not want to do better whether that be ourselves or mental healthcare in the state of Alabama. Crisis Centers are an important part of that moving



forward. We have six currently but want eleven. The Commission should address the offerings of improvement and encourage it.

Commissioner Fulford mentioned the importance of data. He reflected on previous evaluations and the need for data. The agency needs to provide the data, and there are ways that the budget chairs could address this issue through budgeting language. Commissioner Fulford noted that if you do not tell the agency what to report, they will not do it. Commissioner Fulford also mentioned the equal funding model finding from the evaluation. This should be questioned because the current model does not consider local funding that the Crisis Centers may be getting. Commissioner Fulford enjoyed the report as it outlined some interesting points. Commissioner Calton said while she does not always agree with Commissioner Fulford, his statement is 100% correct in this case. We need to give the agencies what we expect at the beginning and write this into legislation because it is not fair to punish an agency when expectations are not clear from the beginning.

Commissioner White said we need good data. We need outcomes like where did someone go after receiving care. Making more outcomes known and deciding on what is going to be measured is important.

Commissioner Sawyer said this all makes sense but asked where this type of criteria exists. Was this included in the SAMHSA model? Did you find the model and how they tie? Savana responded to the questions and said the SAMHSA guidelines have a host of metrics that Crisis Centers should be measuring through data collection efforts. It is not the what but the how the data is being collected. She pointed out different methodologies between the crisis centers and that one crisis center entered zeros for a performance metric in 22 straight months. ACES staff looked at how researchers in other states, like Texas, do similar things and interviewed those people. They were able to determine if a consumer was less likely to go to jails or emergency departments. We wanted to do this, but we did not have access to good data.

Director Morgan added that SAMHSA has issued guidelines that go into great detail on what information needs to be collected and monitored. They recommend the data be held in a single repository, and the department does not have this. They rely on individual Crisis Centers to collect and retain that information.

Commissioner Albirtton said that it sounded like legislators need to be a little clearer on what they want, and we need to remedy that. On the larger scale, what we have done here is a good government model. He would encourage any advice or suggestions on what legislative language would be required. We have done a good job standing up a program and bringing it to fruition and then looking at the weaknesses or what needs to be done to make it better. This is good work.

Chairman Orr said he appreciated the comments. There is a lot of wisdom in the room, and it reminds him of the evaluation of the Helping Families Initiative (HFI). He pointed to a similarity between the programs being funded and delivered by providers. HFI works with local district attorneys and operates each program independently. Similarly, the Department of Mental Health is working through providers that are responsible for their specific territory and are not under the department or state employees. Chairman Orr has sympathy for the difficulty that the department has in executing the program and obtaining the desired outcomes. He also noted that the data collection will continue to be a challenge. There is mixed feedback, but we have to bring the centers into conformity.



Presentation by the Alabama Department of Mental Health Commissioner followed by Q&A

Commissioner Whitt asked a question about the engagement letter and the department's understanding of the evaluation's objectives. Commissioner Boswell of the Department of Mental Health mentioned twice in the department's presentation that they were unaware of the objectives until early August. Commissioner Whitt asked for a copy of the engagement letter. In response to the department's statement, Director Morgan told the members of the Commission that providing the evaluation's objectives were standard operating procedures; they are initially provided during the entrance conference as well as in a follow-up e-mail summarizing the entrance conference.

Commissioner Whitt asked the department about the crisis center that did not become operational for two years but continued to receive funding. Commissioner Boswell said she thought the report spoke to that issue and mentioned other services that the provider was offering. Commissioner Whitt followed up noting the \$6.6M in retained funds and questioned where the money was. Was it returned to the department, or is it just sitting in a bank account? Commissioner Boswell said she has not dug into that issue and was unsure of where the money was.

Commissioner Whitt made a statement which would address a needs-based budgeting model. Commissioner Boswell said the original crisis center model was based on Georgia and Texas but the needs-based funding model they were looking at was for a rural crisis center model in Oklahoma.

Commissioner Sawyer raised a question about the ability to have 72 hour holds within the crisis centers. This is one issue that she is hoping the crisis centers will be able to accomplish. Commissioner Boswell said the new guidelines allow for this, but the department has not agreed to doing that at this time.

Commissioner Albritton thanked the department for their response to the report and wanted to call attention to the recommendations laid out in the evaluation report. Specifically, he wanted to address the recommendations the department did not agree with and noted in their presentation. First was the recommendation to create a needs-based formula for crisis centers. Commissioner Albritton asked to what degree do you disagree or agree with the recommendation. Commissioner Boswell responded that they agree with the need for a needs-based funding formula for crisis centers, but they disagreed with the recommendation because this is something the department is already working on which is not reflected in the report. She acknowledged that the ACES team could not have known about the work being done because it was being addressed in another line item of their budget.

The second recommendation that Commissioner Albritton addressed was the need for Medicaid and private insurance providers to reimburse at the emergent rate for EMS drop-offs. Commissioner Albritton asked Commissioner Boswell if she minded if the legislature looked into this. Commissioner Boswell responded that she would like that, but that it was a bigger policy issue than just the crisis centers. Commissioner Albritton then summarized the five recommendations made in the evaluation report and stated that the department essentially agrees with all five recommendations although this was not reflected in the report from the department. Director Morgan clarified the reimbursement recommendation was a recommendation for the Governor and the Legislature, understanding that it could not be addressed by the department alone and we discussed that during our stakeholder workgroup meeting.

Vice-Chair Filmore thanked Commissioner Boswell for attending the meeting and providing a response.

Commissioner Whitt made a final statement raising the point that it appeared that everyone was on the same page with respect to the recommendations and that perhaps this evaluation should be repeated in a couple of years since the foundation has already been laid. Commissioner Albritton said that based on requests that have already come to him that there should be work in the interim that should not wait for two years.

**Old Business:**

None

New Business:**ACES Budget**

Director Morgan presented the proposed FY26 budget and the FY27 budget request to the Commission. There being no questions, a motion was made by Commissioner Sawyer to approve the proposed budgets. Commissioner Allred seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously with all those present voting.

FY26 Work Plan

Commissioner Albritton suggested removing the court backlogs from the work plan citing a new chief justice and their ongoing efforts. He suggested letting that work get underway before the issue is placed on the ACES work plan.

A motion was made by Commissioner Sawyer to adopt the work plan. Commissioner Carlton seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously with all those present voting.

Adjournment:

There being no further business, at 2:29 p.m. Vice-Chair Filmore moved the meeting be adjourned.