

**Under the Home Tab Please add the following:**

**[Click Here](#) for 2021 Alabama AER Election Results.**

### **Alabama AER Election Results for 2021 and Information about Officers and Board Members**

The AER Board and membership extends its congratulations to the persons below who have been elected to serve as an officer or board member. The terms for the newly elected officers and board members began with their installation at the **38<sup>th</sup> Annual Business Meeting held by Zoom October 14<sup>th</sup>, 2021, from 10 AM until 12 Noon.** This Zoom meeting is a result of the continued impact of Covid-19. Congratulations to all who are willing to serve Alabama AER!

The May-June 2021 election cycle elected two members to serve three-year terms as board members. Steve Sullivan served as the Nominations and Elections Chairperson.

### **Information About Officers and Board Members**

**President 2021-2022, Dr. Yvette Pearce** serves as the Director of Student and General Services, Adult Education, and Business Enterprise Program (BEP) at the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind, E.H. Gentry. While working in the Residence Life Department at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia, Yvette earned her Bachelor's in Business/Human Resources Management and master's degree in Counseling. In 1993, she moved back to her hometown of Coldwater, Alabama and began working in the Student Development Department at the Alabama School for the Deaf. In 1999, she began a supervisory position at ASD and completed her Master's in Public Administration from Jacksonville State University that same year. In 2010, Yvette earned a Doctorate in Deaf Education from Lamar University in Beaumont, Texas. Yvette is a member of the Optimist Club of Talladega the American Council of the Blind (ACB) Alabama Chapter, and serves as the Treasurer for the Alabama Adult Education Director's Association.

**Past-President 2021-2022 Steve Sullivan, Ph.D.** Dr. Stephen M. Sullivan was born on April 6, 1967, in Mobile, Alabama to Eugene and Sylvia Sullivan. In 1990, he received a Bachelor of Science degree in Special Education with a certification in Mental Retardation (K-12) from the University of South Alabama. In 2007, Stephen received a Master of Science degree in Instructional Design and Development from the University of South Alabama, and in 2016 received his PhD. in Instructional Design and Development also from the University of South Alabama in 2016. Stephen has worked as a case manager, self-contained classroom teacher, and is currently employed at the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind Regional Center in Mobile as a Project Director/Adaptive Technology Specialist. For more than 23 years, Stephen has provided direct services related to education and technology (demonstration, assessment, recommendation, instruction, job placement, technical support, and others) center based, at work, at home, and at school to people who are vision impaired or blind in the state of Alabama. Stephen has presented locally, statewide (AER, NFB, ACB) and at international conferences (ATIA, Council for Exceptional Children, and others) regarding strategies and technology as they relate to services for people who are vision impaired and/or blind. Steve has been a member of AER since 1994. He has served the Alabama Chapter as a board member and newsletter editor. He also attended the AER, Alabama Chapter,

Leadership Training Institute in 2008. Stephen currently resides in Mobile, Alabama with his wife Staci, and their four children, Phillip, Lauren, George, and Vann.

**President Elect: 2021-2022 Steve Sullivan, Ph.D. Steve was elected to serve a second term as President of Alabama AER. During the 2021-2022 timeframe the Board may appoint a person to serve and hold the Past Presidents position for voting purposes such that the board will consist of eleven members.**

**Secretary 2021-2022, Caitlin Simpson:** Caitlin works as a Certified Orientation and Mobility Instructor for the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services in the Huntsville office. She received her undergraduate degree in English from the University of Alabama. She completed a master's degree at Florida State University, double majoring in Rehabilitation Teaching and Orientation and Mobility. Her internship was completed at E.H. Gentry and in the Gadsden ADRS office. She worked for five years in the Mobile area as an O&M instructor, and then transferred to Huntsville where she has served the mobility needs of north Alabama for the past four years.

**Treasurer 2021-2022, Joe Helm:** Joe retired from his position of Assistant Commissioner with the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services in April 2014. He currently serves as a consultant and trainer for various organizations and served as an administrative surveyor for CARF the Accreditation Commission for Rehabilitation Facilities. Joe has served as AER Treasurer since July of 2012, filling the unexpired term vacated by the unexpected passing of Rod Harrell. He was elected to serve as treasurer in 2014-2016 and has been re-elected to serve a two-year term in 2016-2018, in 2018-2020, and in 2021-2022. Joe has served the Alabama Chapter as President-Elect, President, Past-President and Treasurer. Joe also served as the District V representative to the AER International Board 2008-2010.

**Board Member 2021-2023, Dr. Courtney Dotson, CRC:** Dr. Courtney Dotson is the Director of Rehabilitation Training for the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS), Office of Staff Development and Training. Dr. Dotson earned her doctorate from Auburn University in 2015. Her dissertation titled, *Rehabilitation Counselors' Perception of Transition Programs, Services, and Practices for Youth with Disabilities*, reflects her dedication to the continuing advancement of knowledge for service delivery for individuals with disabilities. Dr. Dotson has vested the majority of her career in the area of rehabilitation, specializing in transition as a vocational rehabilitation counselor in Georgia and Alabama, 2005 until 2009; and is a certified rehabilitation counselor. She served as an instruction coordinator, assistant director, director, and assistant clinical professor at Auburn University's Transition Leadership Institute for ten years, 2009 until 2019. She is a co-founder of the Auburn University EAGLES Program. She became Director of Training for ADRS in 2019. Courtney to continuously find ways to provide ongoing instruction, professional development, and research in response to the constant changes in rehabilitation service delivery and in society. Helping improve the lives of others has always been her mission. Dr. Dotson's objective is to provide the highest quality of professional development and leadership through building new understandings of research and innovations and using all avenues of assistance.

**Board Member 2021-2023, Jack Harrison:** Jack Harrison has served in the education field for over 40 years. He is currently the Director of the Services for the Blind Department at E. H. Gentry, in Talladega, Alabama. E. H. Gentry is one of several Alabama Institute for the Deaf and Blind campuses. Jack earned a B. A. in Rehabilitation Services and Industrial Arts Education from Auburn University. He holds master's degrees in Rehabilitation Counseling and Special Education from the University of Alabama at Birmingham, and a master's degree and AA certification in Education Administration from the University of Alabama. He also holds an Ed. S. in Special Education and has completed the curriculum for a Ph.D. in Vision Science from the University of Alabama at Birmingham. Jack is a Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS). At the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind, Jack has been a pre-vocational instructor, a vocational evaluator, a supervising teacher, a work experience coordinator, a coach, an adult education instructor, and a program director. He has spent a total of twenty-five years in direct classroom instruction at three of the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind campuses. Jack has supervised students, student workers, teacher aides, college interns, and teachers in a variety of settings. He is experienced in planning, organizing, and coordinating activities and programs. Jack has made presentations at state, regional, and national conferences and has served on the boards of professional, educational, civic, and ecumenical organizations. He received Alabama AER's Hez Cox award in 1996. He was the United States Association of Blind Athletes Wrestling Coach of the year in 1995, and he received the Alabama School for the Blind's Honorary Redskin award twice (1988, 1999). Mr. Harrison has a strong commitment to personal and professional excellence and considers himself a lifelong learner.

**Board Member 2020-2022 Marge Lebrick:** Marge is the Coordinator of Vision Rehabilitation Therapist (VRT) services and Orientation and Mobility (O&M) services for the State of Alabama's Department of Rehabilitation Services. She is responsible for recruiting and training new VRT's and O&M employees, developing and managing annual training events and heading new projects to create the best environment for vision services in Alabama. Marge has been a member of Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired since 2005. She was instrumental in the development of an Adult Summer School for the visually impaired in Wisconsin and has been involved in our College Quest since she was hired in Alabama. She is very passionate about making sure every visually impaired person in Alabama knows about the services we provide at ADRS and can learn and become as independent as possible with these services. She believes strongly in community outreach to ensure our services are well known. Marge and her husband like to camp, golf, and bowl in their spare time. Her 10-year-old Collie is her pride and joy along with her six kids and six grandkids. Loves Alabama! Roll Tide! And go War Eagles!

**Board Member 2020-2022 Shelia Pennington:** Born in Mobile, Alabama Sheila Pennington is a passionate advocate for helping persons with disabilities and loves to ask, "How can I help you?" Being raised in a family of five brothers and two sisters taught her many valuable lessons on the importance of serving one's family and community, in addition to oneself and one's organization. Sheila began her career in a variety of support positions. After focusing on raising a family of five children, which she considers one of her most important and fulfilling life accomplishments, Sheila returned in 1998 to the corporate/social services world as Secretary to three Case Managers. She quickly promoted to Secretary to the

Executive Director, Secretary to the Vice President of Adult Services, and now is the Secretary to the Chief Financial Officer. As a result, Sheila has worked at the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind "AIDB" for over 20 years, gaining unparalleled experience in the field of blindness, deafness, and budgeting, while also establishing herself as a respected and knowledgeable executive administrative support partner. Sheila is widely known for her passion for serving and she knows the work she does behind the scenes empowers the direct service providers to touch those with disabilities to help them be limitless.

In addition to her many duties at AIDB, she has served as registration chair for Alabama's Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired "AER" conference for 12 years, as secretary for Easter Seals of North Talladega County for 14 years and has been on the Alabama Council of the Blind's Dancing with the D'ega Stars; an event which has raised over \$100,000.00, committee for four years. Sheila has been recognized as the AER's Paraprofessional of the Year, AIDB's Volunteer of the Year, and she was recognized for outstanding dedication, devotion, service, and loyalty to the Talladega Lion's Club.

**Board Member 2022-2024, Ashley Townsend:** W. Ashley Townsend is the director of Special Programs for the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services Blind and Deaf Division and has been so since 2014. He holds a BS in Rehabilitation from Troy University an MA in Rehabilitation Counseling from the University of Alabama at Birmingham. Ashley has been directly involved with Blind and Low Vision Vocational Rehabilitation service provision since 2009 when he became the VR Field Supervisor for North Central Alabama. Ashley has also worked as a Job Coach for individuals with Traumatic Brain Injury as well as a General VR Counselor. Previous non-profit work includes work with the Arc of Shelby County which consisted of a term as Board President. In his current position he serves as the program director for the OASIS Program and the Vision Rehabilitation Therapy and Orientation & Mobility Programs. In addition, Ashley is involved in the implementation of special VR projects and initiatives, policy and procedure development, and oversees quality assurance for blind and deaf services. He is the state office liaison to AIDB's EH Gentry Facility and implements/monitors ADRS's longstanding MOA's with AIDB, Troy University, and Mississippi State University. Ashley is a resident of Shelby County and married to Krista Townsend who is the Assistant Principal at Calera Elementary school. They have two daughters Emma (22) and Lily (14).

**Board Member 2022-2024, William Adams:** William (Bill) Adams is a Senior Orientation and Mobility Specialist with the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services and has held many previous positions before his current job. In the past Bill has worked in Information Technology at the Kent State medical center, as a programmer for the Department of Veterans Affairs, a Case Manager for the Blind with the Alabama Institute for the Deaf and Blind. Bill lives with the love of his life Sara Roberts, who happens to be a wheelchair user, and has led Bill as an O&M to focus on people with multiple disabilities. While at the VA, Bill wrote the admissions, automatic scheduling, and data collection system for the Blind Rehabilitation Services. With Bill's extensive background in technology, he is always looking to push the field of Assistive Technology and Orientation and Mobility and has developed ways to make indoor maps, and easily printed Braille that is usable and long lasting with 3D printing technology.

Bill was born with albinism and had mild vision loss and planned to be a member of the Air Force Security Forces until he received a traumatic brain injury in 2004. The brain injury caused Bill's vision to be very unstable. Now Bill is a guide dog user and depending on the day uses a screen reader or screen magnification software. Bill attributes his ability to thrive with vision loss because of his first O&M and VR Counselor. Because of them, Bill did not have to leave college and in fact completed his bachelor's degree from Kent State University in Justice Studies and Political Science. His final semester was in their world-renowned Washington Program in National Issues where he interned at the American Council of the Blind. Bill then completed his masters in Orientation and Mobility at Western Michigan University. For those who are curious his guide dog's name is Travis and is a blonde lab.

**Sharon McLean:** Sharon McLean has lived in Mobile, AL for 32 years and counting. She is a Senior Vision Rehabilitation Therapist (VRT) with the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS) and has been doing this for the past 9 years, however, she has worked in the deaf and blind unit for 15 years. Sharon's passion is assisting Alabamians in adjusting with their visual impairments and ensuring the person is supported in all aspects of their adjustment process. Sharon's accomplishments include, serving as the Sight Chair of the Bay Minette Lion's Club, serving on the Board of Lions Eyes Research Institute (LERI) located on the campus of the University of South Alabama, and serving on the Board of Alabama Lion's Sight (ALS) in Birmingham. This year she was asked to serve on the Alabama's Lions High School Leadership Forum. Sharon is the mother of two sons who are both married and will become a grandma at the end of January 2022.

**Julia Brock, Permanent Chair BDS Scholarship:** In 2021 the AER Board approved Julie as the Permanent Chair of the Billy Don Sims Scholarship. Julie is retired from the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services with over 29 years of service and served for several years as a consultant with the American Foundation for the Blind and with Disability Rights and Resources of Greater Birmingham. She earned the Bachelor of Science from Jacksonville State University and the Master of Arts from the University of Alabama. She is a longtime member of AER having served numerous terms as Alabama Chapter Board Member and as Board Secretary during which time she was instrumental in the Alabama Chapter's establishment of the Billy Don Sims Scholarship.