

Alabama AER Election Results for 2024 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 41st Annual Training Conference at the Hotel Capstone, Tuscaloosa, November 22, 2024. **Congratulations to all who are willing to serve Alabama AER!** The May-June 2024 election cycle elected two members to serve three-year terms as board members, LaTonya Chatman and Stephanie Pizza. Officers elected are Marquitta D. Riggins, President-Elect, Sharon McLean, Secretary, and Joe Helm, Treasurer. Steve Sullivan will serve as the Nominations and Elections Chairperson for the May-June 2025 election cycle.

Information About Officers and Board Members

President 2024-2026, Kelley Bond, is a Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS) and is currently serving adults with visual impairments at the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind on the E.H. Gentry campus. She received her Bachelor of Arts from the University of Louisiana at Monroe in 2010 and began working for the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services at the Addie McBryde Center for the Blind in Jackson, Mississippi in 2012. While working there, she completed her Master of Arts in Rehabilitation of the Blind at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock and became ACVREP certified in Orientation and Mobility. Kelley has been a member of AER since 2013 and has previously served the Mississippi chapter of AER as board member, president-elect, and president. Kelly has worked hard and achieved success serving as the Conference Chair for the 40th and 41st Annual Conference held at Opelika's RTJ Marriott and the Hotel Capstone in Tuscaloosa.

Past-President 2024-2026, Steve Sullivan, Ph.D. Dr. Stephen M. Sullivan has been a member of AER since 1994. He has served the Alabama Chapter as Board Member, Newsletter Editor, President Elect (2 terms), and currently serves as President for the second time. He also attended the first Alabama AER Leadership Training Institute in 2008. Stephen currently resides in Mobile, Alabama with his wife Staci.

Stephen was born on April 6, 1967, in Mobile, Alabama to Eugene and Sylvia Sullivan. He earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Special Education from the University of South Alabama in 1990. In 2007, Stephen earned a Master of Science degree in Instructional Design and Development and a Ph.D. in 2016.

Stephen has worked as a case manager, program coordinator, self-contained classroom teacher, and as an Assistive technology Specialist / Project Director for more than 23 years at Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind, Regional Center in Mobile. He has provided direct services related to education and technology (demonstration, assessment, recommendation, instruction, job placement, technical support, and others) for people who are vision impaired or blind in the state of Alabama. Stephen has presented on education and assistive technology topics locally, statewide (AER, NFB, ACB), and at international conferences (ATIA, Council for Exceptional Children, and others). After retiring from the state in 2018 he founded Navillus Technologies LLC, offering services similar to those mentioned above and conducting research and development of new and innovative assistive technologies for people who are visually impaired or blind.

President-Elect 2024-2026, Marquitta D. Riggins: Marquitta Riggins serves as the Regional Director of the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB) - Opelika Regional Center, where she oversees a team of professionals working with individuals who are deaf, blind, deafblind, and multi-disabled. Before this role, Marquitta served as Assistant Director of Development in the Office of Institutional Advancement at AIDB. She was responsible for creating and leading various types of fundraising campaigns and managing relationships with donors, corporations, and community partners. During her time in the role, she grew one of the Foundation's third-party events from \$15,000 in net revenue to more than \$55,000.

Marquitta holds a Bachelor of Arts in Behavior Science and a Master of Public Administration in Education from Jacksonville State University. She has extensive nonprofit administration, fundraising, and leadership experience. In her 17-year career, Marquitta has raised over three million dollars through special events, individual giving, and grant writing. She has served as Executive Director and Outreach Coordinator for the Anniston Community Education Foundation, where she helped transition the foundation from a private to a public charity. She served as Director of Big Brothers Big Sister of the Chattahoochee Valley in Columbus, Georgia, where she raised more than \$350,000 annually to support the program's operating budget. Lastly, Marquitta worked for the Enrichment Services Program in Columbus as the Development Director.

Marquitta is a past chair of the IDEA (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access) Committee for the Alabama Chapter of the Association of Fundraising Professionals. Under her tenure, the chapter received the IDEA Champion Award, a special recognition from the Association's Global chapter. Currently, she serves as a board member for the Alabama Chapter - Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER). Marquitta is a member of Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc., where she serves as a local President. She's married to Joey Riggins and together they have two sons and one grandson.

Secretary 2023-2024, Sharon McLean: Sharon McLean has lived in Mobile, AL for 32 years and counting. She is a Senior Vision Rehabilitation Therapist (SVRT) with the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS) and has been doing this for the past 10 years, however, she has worked in the deaf and blind unit for 16 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, she served as the Sight Chair for the Bay Minette Lion's Club for 4 years, 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. She has been on the AER board for several years. Sharon is the mother of two sons who are both married and is a proud grandma (Sunny) to Brady.

Treasurer 2023-2024, 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 until 2019. 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, in 2021-2022, in 2023-2024 and in 2025-2026. 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. Joe currently serves as Board Chairman of the Achievement Center Easterseals in Opelika, AL and serves as CEO of Southern Disability Foundation managing the foundations Ability Loan Fund for Alabama Citizens with disabilities that need funding to acquire Assistive Technology.

Board Member 2023-2025 Kellee Sanchez: Kellee Sanchez is an Orientation & Mobility (O&M) Specialist with the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services since 2018. She received her training and Master of Education from Stephen F. Austin University in Nacogdoches, TX. Before stumbling upon O&M, Kellee was an educator in the Houston Texas Independent School District working with middle school students from 2009-2018. She taught 8th grade science, became the coordinator for numerous events, and had the privilege of making an impact in young minds to challenge themselves academically and personally. Kellee's medley of work, whether it was an educator or athletic trainer or Taco Bell connoisseur, has allowed her to connect with consumers that are blind and have low vision to conquer fears of their new reality. Kellee's greatest skills are asking questions and learning from her colleagues, attempting to learn how to be a better advocate for the blind community.

Board Member 2023-2025 Donte Little: Dontavious D. Little, Sr. serves as Assistant Director to the Executive Director at Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB) E. H. Gentry Facility. He has been in this role since August 2022. He is an AIDB alumnus, having graduated from the Alabama School for the Blind (ASB) in 2004. In 2010, he was employed as an Employment Specialist at AIDB E.H. Gentry Facility in the Project Green Program. He returned to his Alma Mater, ASB, to teach Business Education in 2011 and gained administrative experience as the Director of Outreach for the WeKare Community Development Center in Childersburg AL. Previously, he served as the Director at the AIDB Talladega Regional Center from 2015 to 2022.

Mr. Little holds an MBA from Troy University, a master's in business education from Auburn University, and a Master of Arts degree in Special Education with Visual Impairment Certification from University of Alabama at Birmingham. He is currently pursuing an advanced educational degree in Christian Leadership from Liberty University.

Throughout his life, Mr. Little has always been active in community service. He has served as a Youth Pastor, Associate Pastor, Community Outreach Director, and currently the Senior Pastor of First Missionary Baptist Church of Anniston, AL. He is also an active member of the Theta Tau Chapter of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Incorporated. Through these roles, he has gained valuable experiences in preaching, teaching, outreach, business management, and working collaboratively with large and small groups to achieve goals. However, he attributes his success to continuously finding great spiritual and professional mentors—road guides with more knowledge and experience than his own. Above all, his greatest achievements are being happily married to his college sweetheart, Tamara Little, and being the father of 5 amazing children: Jr, Dylan, Daleigh, Declan, and Donaldson.

Mr. Little is a proud member of the Blind community, a professional in the field of education and rehabilitation, and honored to serve as a Board Member of the Alabama Chapter of the Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER).

Board Member 2021-2023, Jack Harrison: Board Member 2021-2023, Jack Harrison: Jack Harrison has served in the fields of education and rehabilitation for over 40 years. He is currently the Principal Investigator for an O&M research project within 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

(Harrison cont.) 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 2024-2027 Stephaine Pizza: Stephanie currently serves as the Director of the Center for Assistive Technology Training (CATT) at AIDB through a federal partnership with APH. CATT's mission is to provide assistive technology training to teachers of the visually impaired, utilizing a "train the trainer" model, while also providing training for students and families. Devices are provided through American Printing House (APH) and training is provided through AIDB-employed trainers serving a nine-state region (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee), Puerto Rico, and the US Virgin Islands. Stephaine Pizza began her career as an Itinerant Teacher of the Visually Impaired and Orientation & Mobility Instructor in the Gwinnett County Public School District. Stephanie was later named Director of Children & Youth Services with the Center for the Visually Impaired in Georgia where she was responsible for overseeing two year-round programs and services for children, infant through high school graduation, and their families. Stephanie also acted as the Direct Supervisor to two full-time classes for young children who are blind or visually impaired in partnership with the Georgia Department of Education Division of State Schools. Most recently, Stephaine served as the Director of the AIDB Shoals Regional Center located in Tuscumbia, Alabama. Pizza completed the teacher prep program in Visual Disabilities at Florida State University and obtained an Educational Specialist Degree in Teacher Leadership through Thomas University.

Board Member 2024-2027 LaTonya Chatman: LaTonya Chatman has been employed with AIDB's EH Gentry Facility since 2011, holding various positions including Student Services Aide and Business Enterprise Program Instructional Aide. Since 2021, she has served as the Supervisor of Student Services. LaTonya earned both her undergraduate and master's degrees from Auburn University, completing a Master of Education in Clinical Rehabilitation Counseling in 2024. LaTonya is deeply committed to supporting individuals with disabilities, with a particular focus on those who are blind or visually impaired. She is an active member of the Alabama Council of the Blind and the National Federation of the Blind. Within the Talladega Chapter of the National Federation of the Blind, she contributes to the hospitality committee and has played a key role in drafting the chapter's constitution and by-laws. In addition to her professional endeavors, LaTonya is engaged in community service through the Winterboro Education Foundation, which provides scholarships to high school students and supports the Winterboro athletic department. She is also a member of the Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER), having participated in the AER Leadership Institute in 2022 and received the AER Billy Don Sims Scholarship the same year. LaTonya's proudest achievements are her two daughters. LaTonya has consistently demonstrated a strong

(Chatman cont.) commitment to serving others and is dedicated to advocating for individuals with disabilities.

Vacant Board Position:

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.