



Alabama State Bar

Board of Bar Commission Minutes

Alabama State Bar Building
415 Dexter Avenue, Montgomery, AL 36104

May 1, 2026, at 10:00 a.m.

CALL TO ORDER

President Fred Helmsing convened this meeting of the Board of Bar Commissioners at 10:02 a.m. in the boardroom of the Alabama State Bar in Montgomery, Alabama. Helmsing led the members in the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL

The secretary took the roll of the Commission with the following commissioners answering as present and thus establishing a quorum:

Pratt Austin-Trucks	Josh Hayes	Holly Sawyer
Raymond Bell	Fred Helmsing	Pat Sefton
Edgar Black	Scott Holmes	Sebie Sellers
Mark Boardman	David Holt	Julius Shanks
Sally Bowers	Ralph Holt	Mitch Shelly
Jeff Bowling	Kesa Johnston	Jeff Sherrer
Randy Bozeman	Angela Kennedy	Tyler Sims
Will Broome	Edwin Lamberth	Elizabeth Smithart
Devan Byrd*	Will Lee	John Stamps
Clay Carr	Doug Martinson	Stephen Still
Matthew Carter	Bob McMillan	Ron Strawbridge
Hunter Compton	Wallace Mills	Sharon Stuart
Joel Connally	George Parker*	Jerome Thompson
Lisa Cooper	Evan Parrott	Jeff Utsey
Brad Cornett	Ashley Peinhardt	Al Vance
Kelly Davidson	Tom Perry	Artie Vaughn
Mark Debro	John Rea	Leila Watson
Jana Garner	Rob Richardson	Suntrease Williams-
Kirk Garrett	Brandy Robertson	Maynard
Lisha Graham	Ryan Robichaux	Robin Wolfe
Leon Hampton	Steven Savarese	

The following commissioners were absent:

Conrad Anderson	Felicia Long	Gregory Price
Christen Butler *	Leslie Moore	Chrissy Riddle
Deborah Dunsmore	Tamara Neeley	Freddy Rubio
Carmen Howell	Steve Nicholas	Doug Smith
Mitch Kemmer	Andrew Nix	Kyra Sparks
Lee Knowles	Manish Patel	Jimbo Terrell
David Langston	Lynn Perry	
Jorja Loftin	Bobby Poundstone	

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

President Helmsing asked for approval of the agenda.

- *Commissioner Scott Holmes moved to approve the agenda, seconded by Pratt Austin-Trucks, and approved by unanimous voice vote.*

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

President Helmsing welcomed special guests in attendance which included Associate Justice Will Sellers, Associate Justice Greg Cook, Megan Rhodebeck, Supreme Court Clerk, and Dawn Hathcock, Executive Director of the Alabama Law Foundation.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES MARCH 6, 2026

President Helmsing stated the minutes from the March 6, 2026, Board of Bar Commissioners meeting had been distributed prior to the meeting.

- *Commissioner Randy Bozeman moved to approve the minutes as submitted, seconded by Angela Kennedy, and said motion was approved by unanimous voice vote.*

PUBLIC REPRIMANDS

Montgomery, Alabama attorney **Walter James, III**, was issued a Public Reprimand with General Publication by the Disciplinary Commission of the Alabama State Bar on May 1, 2026, for violating Rules 8.4(d) and (g) [Misconduct], *Alabama Rules of Professional Conduct*. James was disbarred from the practice of law on March 17, 2020, for misappropriating funds while employed as an assistant principal for Jefferson Davis High School. On March 10, 2025, a complaint was filed against James alleging that he was attempting to represent a woman in eviction proceedings. In or about October 2024, James founded the “Civil Rights and Criminal Justice Reform Advocates,” a non-profit corporation registered in the State of Alabama. James is the sole employee of the organization. On January 28, 2025, James sent a letter to an apartment complex, and its attorney, on behalf

of a tenant that had a lease dispute. The letter was issued on the letterhead of the “Civil Rights and Criminal Justice Reform Advocates.” In the letter, James stated that the tenant had requested his organization to advocate on her behalf. James further responded to the apartment complex by citing various legal statutes, including the Alabama Landlord-Tenant Law. In the letter, James included that “[a]ny further efforts to remove the tenant without cause will be met with legal action.” James made a claim on behalf of the tenant for damages under Ala. Code Section 35-9A-204. James relayed to the apartment complex’s attorney that any further communications regarding the matter should be directed to his organization. Despite these communications on behalf of the tenant, James acknowledged that he was not an attorney. James also acknowledged that he cannot use a non-profit organization to engage in any activity related to the profession of law; the settlement of legal disputes; or the advising of third-parties as to their legal rights.

Valley, Alabama attorney **Roland Lewis Sledge** was issued a Public Reprimand with General Publication by the Disciplinary Commission of the Alabama State Bar on May 1, 2026, for violating Rules 1.3 [Diligence], 1.4 [Communication], 8.1 [Bar Admission and Disciplinary Matters], and 8.4 [Misconduct], *Alabama Rules of Professional Conduct*. Sledge was appointed to represent a client in a post-conviction Rule 32 Petition matter. The client stated Sledge failed to communicate with him regarding his case. The client filed a complaint with the Office of General Counsel on July 8, 2020. Sledge failed or refused to respond to the Office of General Counsel’s inquiries. The Disciplinary Commission of the Alabama State Bar determined that formal charges be filed against Sledge. When Sledge failed to respond to those charges, the Disciplinary Board of the Alabama State Bar accepted those charges as admitted and set the matter for a hearing to determine discipline. Sledge agreed to a conditional guilty plea accepting a Public Reprimand with General Publication to resolve the matter.

PRESIDENT’S REPORT

President Fred Helmsing began his report discussing the enactment of Act 26-58, clarifying the bar’s status as a judicial branch agency, and congratulating Suzi Huffaker for all her efforts. Helmsing provided a summary of his speaking engagements and travels since the last board meeting which included: the Mobile Bar Association, Cumberland Law School with past president Tom Bob Methvin, UA Law reception honoring Justice Sonia Sotomayor, ALF fellows’ dinner, St. Clair County Bar Association, and ASB Tackle Box Tour events in Phenix City and Andalusia. Helmsing concluded his remarks by recognizing retiring commissioners Lang Floyd, Kirk Garrett, Manish Patel, Jeff Bowling, and John Stamps. He further recognized those commissioners who were not retiring but concluding their terms of service to the bar.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR’S REPORT

Executive Director Terri Lovell informed the commission that Commissioner Lynn Perry had been involved in a serious car accident and commissioners were also informed of Commissioner Kyra Spark's hospitalization. Justice Greg Cook was recognized to provide a brief overview of the Supreme Court's recent opinion regarding the Alabama Rules Governing Admission to the Alabama State Bar. Lovell addressed the need for members of the commission to subscribe to their BBC community page and acknowledged the New Lawyer Boot Camp event occurring in Baldwin County later this month. She announced Law Day efforts were underway in classrooms throughout our state and that bar staff remained busy with events and efforts to serve our members.

GENERAL COUNSEL REPORT

General Counsel Roman Shaul stated a vote would not be occurring on the Disciplinary Board Appointment matters as the list of applicants needed to be vetted first by the Supreme Court. He stated his department/personnel had been busy defending five separate lawsuits and informed the commission that the Alabama Supreme Court had recently issued their first opinion assessing a \$17,000 fine to an attorney using artificial intelligence hallucination cases in their brief. Shaul provided an overview regarding the Supreme Court's decision to adopt a recommendation of the Alabama Securities Commission investigation and bypass the recommendation first being submitted to the disciplinary commission. He announced a meeting would occur on May 11, 2026, wherein a subset committee arising out of the disciplinary summit would be considering rule changes and Shaul commended Cathy Sue McCurry for her efforts in assisting members with their CLE compliance.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Finance Director Merinda Hall provided a financial report. She reported this is the midway point of the 2025/2026 fiscal year. Revenues are slightly ahead while spending is up approximately 14% due to the ProLearn payment and increased personnel costs associated with staff increases in the Office of General Counsel and Admissions.

- *A Motion to Accept the Financial Report was made by Ron Strawbridge, seconded by Leon Hampton, and approved by unanimous voice vote.*

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Finance Chair George Parker provided the Executive Council report. He stated the EC had met on April 30, 2026, and a discussion was held regarding the At-Large Commissioner selections and ASB Awards. Parker recognized the efforts of Devan Byrd this year as the Young Lawyers President.

LOCAL BAR REPORT

In lieu of a local bar report, retiring Commissioner John Stamps wished to address the commission. Stamps indicated his time as a commissioner had been rewarding and

expressed his gratitude to those in attendance for their friendship and willingness to serve. He presented all present with a gift to express his appreciation.

DISCUSSION ITEMS:

LEGAL SERVICES ALABAMA BOARD APPOINTMENT

As the Executive Secretary has been informed there are no vacancies at this time, this matter is hereby deferred.

ANNUAL LICENSE FEE RENEWAL

President Helmsing announced the recommendation is that license fees remain at the reduced amount of \$300.00 for the upcoming bar year.

CHARACTER AND FITNESS COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS

Approval of the Character and Fitness Committee is a yearly action item and will need to be approved at the July board meeting.

ACTION ITEMS:

CLIENT SECURITY FUND APPOINTMENTS:

Mike Ballard serves as a member on the Client Security Fund. Lee Boles and David Loe serve as lay members. All members are seeking reappointment.

- *A motion to appoint Mike Ballard, Lee Boles, and David Loe as members of the Client Security Fund was made by Ralph Holt, seconded by Pratt Austin-Trucks, and approved by unanimous voice vote.*

DISCIPLINARY BOARD ALTERNATE APPOINTMENTS

Shaul asked the appointments to be carried over to the July board meeting.

DISCIPLINARY BOARD HEARING OFFICER APPOINTMENTS

Shaul asked the appointments to be carried over to the July board meeting.

ALABAMA LAW FOUNDATION APPOINTMENTS

The BBC appoints six members to the ALF Board on staggered terms. Jeanne Rizzardi and Josh Hayes have been nominated for reappointment. No other nominations received.

- *A motion to close nominations and reappoint Jeanne Rizzardi and Josh Hayes to the Alabama Law Foundation Board was made by Raymond Bell, seconded by Mark Debro, and approved by unanimous voice vote.*

ABA HOUSE OF DELEGATES ELECTION

The terms of Richard Gaal, Rich Raleigh, and John Stamps are expiring following the Annual ABA Meeting in August 2026. These positions are volunteer and do not receive reimbursement or compensation for travel. The BBC appoints four positions and a Young Lawyer representative on staggered terms. No other nominations received.

- *A motion to close nominations and reappoint Richard Gaal, Rich Raleigh, and John Stamps as ABA House of Delegates was made by Hunter Compton, seconded by Angela Kennedy, and approved by unanimous voice vote.*

BOARD OF BAR EXAMINERS (GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE)

Board of Bar Examiner David Hymer recently resigned his position on the governance committee. Members of the BBE hold office at the pleasure of the BBC. No member of the BBE may serve more than four consecutive years without the approval of the BBC. Tom Warburton was recommended by the BBE.

A motion to close nominations and appoint Tom Warburton to the Board of Bar Examiners Governance Committee was made by David Holt, seconded by Kirk Garrett, and approved by unanimous voice vote.

AT-LARGE COMMISSIONER ELECTIONS

Upon consideration of all applicants for the At-Large positions, the Executive Council recommends the reappointment of the following for At-Large Commissioners:

Place 3: Holly Sawyer

Place 6: Lisha Graham

- *A motion to reappoint Holly Sawyer as At-Large, Place 3, and Lisha Graham, Place 6, was made by Hunter Compton, seconded by Mark Debro, and approved by unanimous voice vote.*

Place 9: Pratt Austin-Trucks

Remarks and supportive comments were made by various commissioners regarding each of the three individuals seeking the at-large position. A vote was taken by all members present and Pratt Austin-Trucks received the majority of the votes for At-Large, Place 9.

APPROVAL OF ASB AWARDS

The Executive Council serves the dual role as Awards Committee and recommends the Bill Scruggs and Tony McLain award recipients:

Bill Scruggs Service to the Bar Award: Michael Upchurch

Tony McLain Professionalism Award: Bob McKenzie

The Judicial Conference Committee of Alabama recommends the Judicial Award of Merit recipient:

Judicial Award of Merit: Jefferson County Circuit Judge Tamara Harris

The Alabama State Bar President recommends the Michael Ermert, Commissioner Award, and President's award recipients:

Michael D. Ermert Award of Merit: Gibson Vance

Commissioners Award: Carmen Howell

President's Award: Honorable Jim Hill and Terry McCarthy

WOMENS SECTION AWARDS:

The Women's Section recommends the Maud McLure Kelly and the Susan B. Livingston award recipients:

Maud McLure Kelly Award: Mary Margaret Bailey

Susan B. Livingston Award: Leila Watson

PRO BONO AWARDS:

Albert L. Vreeland Award: Travis Chin

Law Firm/Group Award: Alabama Association of Paralegals

Mediator Award: Randy Gibson

Law Student Award: Delaney Russ

ALABAMA LAWYER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM AWARDS:

Jeanne Marie Leslie Award: Bradley Ekdahl

SOLO AND SMALL FIRM AWARD

Jesse P. Evans Award: Laura Calloway

- *A motion to approve all award nominees was made by Edgar Black, seconded by Scott Holmes, and approved by unanimous voice vote.*

ANNUAL MEETING TRAVEL

The Finance and Audit Committee recommends the approval of actual expenses for the Board during the 2026 Annual Meeting.

- *A motion to approve the payment of lodging expenses or the registration fee of any Bar Commissioner, Officer, or Executive Council member who registers for the 2026 Annual Meeting in their capacity as a Bar Commissioner, Officer, or Executive Council member; with the Bar Commissioner, Officer, or Executive Council member to be eligible to earn the continuing education credits earned by attendance at the 2026 Annual Meeting, was made by Mark Debro, seconded by Pratt Austin-Trucks, and approved by unanimous voice vote.*

CLIENT SECURITY FUND WAIVER

Pursuant to Client Security Fund Rule VIII (H), the Committee shall review the annual assessments and report to the Board of Bar Commissioners the sufficiency of the annual assessment in relation to the financial stability, strength, and integrity of the Fund. A letter recommending a waiver for FY 2026 is included in the meeting materials.

- *A motion to approve the one-year waiver of the \$25.00 annual assessment to the client security fund was made by Pratt Austin-Trucks, seconded by Bob McMillan, and approved by unanimous voice vote.*

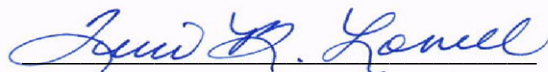
ADJOURNMENT

There being no further old or new business, President Fred Helmsing adjourned the meeting at 11:36 a.m.



Frederick G. Helmsing, Jr., President
Alabama State Bar

ATTEST:



Terri B. Lovell, Secretary
Alabama State Bar