

**EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING
ALABAMA PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICE
SEPTEMBER 18, 2025**

The Executive Board of the Alabama Public Library Service (APLS) met on September 18, 2025 at the Alabama Public Library Service building in Montgomery, Alabama. A quorum was present and prior notice was given as required by the Alabama Open Meetings Act and Act #2022-421.

Chairman John Wahl called the Executive Board Regular Meeting to order at 1:03 p.m., with prayer by Pastor Troy Counts. He prayed for wisdom, unity, and respect, followed by the pledge of allegiance. Roll was taken. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and is honored to have them.

The following Board members were present: John Wahl, Debra Windsor, Amy Minton, Jerria Martin, and Ron Snider. Members absent were: Angelia Stokes and Kasandra Stevens. APLS staff members present: Kelyn Ralya, Katie Bailey, Jennifer Holman, Ryan Godfrey, Matt Sponsler, Jay Mims, and Vanessa Carr. Visitor attended: Ben Albritton, Office of the Attorney General.

Katie Bailey reminded participants of the two-minute time limit to address the Board in the Tallapoosa Conference Room. The regular board meeting will be held in the Alabamiana Room. She asked that all handouts be given to her to distribute to the Board.

Approval of Agenda

Chairman Wahl asked if there were any additions to the agenda. There was one addition under New Business. Add G-3, BPD Consumer Advisory Committee By-Laws. Members voting in favor by saying “aye” are as follows: John Wahl, Jerria Martin, Amy Minton, Ron Snider, and Debra Windsor. No “nays.” By unanimous decision the agenda was adopted with updates.

Approval of the Minutes

The Minutes of the July 17, 2025 meeting were presented to the Board for approval. Ms. Martin made the motion to approve the Minutes as written. Mrs. Minton seconded the motion. Members voting in favor by saying “aye” are as follows: Debra Windsor, John Wahl, Ron Snider, Jerria Martin, and Amy Minton. No “nays.” Motion passed by unanimous vote.

Chairman’s Comments

We will be retiring to the board meeting after a short pause but I hope everyone stays connected to this process. I know there are a wide range of opinions in this room. It is through that difference of perspective and opinions that we grow as a people and as a society. We all believe on acute principles and we can agree on the following:

- we want our libraries to be the best they possibly can for the people we represent; and
- we want to put parents in charge of what decisions are made for their children.

Participation

Charles Farley	Elizabeth Williams
Amanda Melcher	Lihn Nguyen-Hoach
Samantha Webb	James Gilbreath
Elizabeth Aversa	Erin de Jager
Angie Hayden	Amber Frey
Alyx Kim-Yohn	Lori Herring
Lindsay Gardner	Amber Ward
Carol Wilson	Dallas Baillio
Anne Johnson	
Katherine Hastings	
Toni Keener	
Linda Poiroux	
Rebecca Watson	

I heard comments about parental rights, and wanting parents to decide; that has been this Board’s commitment to respect people on both sides of the issue. We want everyone to feel welcome in Alabama’s libraries. I will never support using the power of government to ban a book, to

Chairman's Comments (continued)

prevent something from being purchased, or being printed. I look forward to public comments and thank you for your time.

After public comment, the meeting adjourned in the Tallapoosa Conference Room at 2:03 p.m.

At 2:10 p.m., the meeting reconvened in the Alabamiana Room.

Chairman's Report**Nominating Committee - Recommendation of Officers for FY2026**

A nominating committee was appointed at the July meeting to recommend officers for FY2026. The committee consisted of Debbie Windsor and Kasandra Stevens. The committee recommended John Wahl as Chairman and Jerria Martin as Vice-Chair for FY2026. Mrs. Windsor made the motion. Mrs. Minton seconded the motion. Chairman Wahl turned the meeting over to Ben Albritton to conduct the business at hand. Mr. Albritton asked for discussion of the nomination or if there were additional nominees for Chairman. No response. Members voting in favor by saying "aye" are as follows: Ron Snider, Jerria Martin, Amy Minton, and Debra Windsor. Vote taken, all in favor. Motion passed by unanimous decision. "No nays." Chairman Wahl will serve a second term as Chairman for FY2026. Mr. Wahl thanked the Board for the opportunity to serve another term.

Mrs. Windsor made a motion that Jerria Martin remain as Vice-Chair for FY2026. Mrs. Minton seconded the motion. Chairman Wahl asked for discussion of the nomination or if there were additional nominees for Vice-Chair. No response. Members voting in favor by saying "aye" are as follows: John Wahl, Ron Snider, Amy Minton, and Debra Windsor. Vote taken, all in favor. Motion passed by unanimous decision. "No nays." Jerria Martin will serve a second term as Vice-Chair for FY2026. Ms. Martin thanked the Board for another term to serve.

Unfinished Business**Fairhope Public Library – Compliant/Non-Compliant with Administrative Code Rules**

Chairman Wahl acknowledged Mrs. Randal Wright and Robert Gourlay of Fairhope Public Library to address the Board.

Mrs. Wright thanked the Board for the opportunity to allow them to address the Board on behalf of Fairhope Public Library. An e-mail was forwarded to the Board prior to the meeting and the following questions were posed:

- Are there specific titles that you want moved before our funding can be reinstated? Most of these titles can be found in libraries in youth departments across the state.
- If there is a list of books that you require us to move to the adult section, let us know. Will that list be sent to all Alabama's public libraries?

Chairman Wahl responded there are no specific books; the Board and state code does not create a list of books. A good governmental principle, whether it's law or code, is to put in place the framework that works, not just in the current time frame, but permanently. Obviously, new books are being written and there should be a framework that dictates whether it's a current or future written book that accomplishes the goals to best serve the people of Alabama. That is the priority of APLS code change. It's not about a specific book, it's not about the content, the same as movie ratings. They don't concentrate on a certain movie it's content that creates the rating. There is no book that is wrong because of the title, it's about the content in the book, whether it is sexually explicit, contains obscenity, or inappropriate.

- Why was Fairhope singled out?

Chairman Wahl - All libraries were provided the list of code changes on what was expected of them to remove books with sexually explicit content from the children's section, create youth cards, and things listed in the code. Also included was the definition of sexually explicit passed by this Board. If it is the opinion of this board that we will be making the decision of what books are, then it may not be in state code, but that is the opinion of the current Board. That was a courtesy to Alabama libraries to make sure they knew what material they should be looking for, definitions on what they should be looking for, when looking at books to comply with state code. Ben Albritton agreed with the statements. It was never meant to be something that was in state code. It was meant as a resource and a guide for local libraries because they said they didn't

have any information and they asked the Board for a definition. There are seventy-one (71) libraries across the state that has not had a single request for reconsideration of a book. The vast majority of Alabama's libraries does not contain materials that some parents consider inappropriate.

I feel what put this board over the edge was when parents came to the board meeting and said we have gone to our board several times, and the board refused to reconsider the books. When you refuse parents to address a grievance, you left this board at the state level no choice but to get involved because refusal to revisit the grievance of parents.

Mr. Gourlay replied that we have treated this process with respect and tried to listen and engage this process faithfully. If there is not a list of books that is holding up our funding, how do we know what to do to become compliant. In the May 8 minutes, Mr. Wahl reiterated the distinction between a challenged book and a book that isn't in compliance with the administrative code. Just because someone brings something forward for review and we disagree, that doesn't necessarily mean that we made an incorrect decision.

Mrs. Wright – You stated that we refused to look at books. It needs to be understood that the books you're talking about were done prior to when the code was passed. There was a list of books that parents asked the library board and the director to reconsider. Then the parents came back six months to a year later after the code change and said we want you to re-look at these books. The policy states that once a decision is made it's in place for five (5) years and that's pretty much standard with other public libraries. It wasn't so much as we were refusing, we were just saying they've already been reviewed, so complete the appeal form and we will do it again. We were willing to talk about it but they didn't come to us to sit down and talk about it and ask us to do that.

Mr. Gourlay– The board did eventually vote, after our funding was paused, to revisit all of those books that was requested of us.

Chairman Wahl– I appreciate that. In the end that should be all of our goals, as a government body, whether it's here at APLS, or whether it's Fairhope, the goal should be representing the people we serve. Taxpayer resources are going into it, the taxpayers have a growing interest and they should have a chance to ask for revisit of a grievance. I appreciate you opening that back up.

Mr. Snider – As I said on several occasions, this Board has gone down a very slippery slope with respect to this. We all talk about how we support local government and local decisions. Here, we've had an instance where this library made up of board members who are prominent members of one of the wealthiest and most republican cities in this state. The city council election just occurred, with one of the issues being the library. The overwhelming number of people elected and re-elected were strong supporters of this library. I think it is very troubling that we who espouse small government sitting here saying we're going to decide what is occurring and that these books are obscene. What we're doing is listening to a small minority of people in Fairhope who are never going to be satisfied. I think we need to restore the funding of the Fairhope Public Library; they have gone beyond what we expected a library board to do in terms of the time they spent looking at books. We should respect local decisions and what they determined is in the best interest of their community.

Chairman Wahl – I am a big supporter of local government. We can't allow ourselves to go down the political route whether it's the Fairhope Public Library or the Republican Party, this is not about local control, this is about compliance with state code. That's what we will look at when we make this decision.

Mr. Snider – They've made a decision relative to state code and I think we ought to accept what their definition is. Otherwise, we are going to get into the position of the two hundred twenty-six (226) public libraries in this state where minorities are going to have some opposition and we're going to sit as a state board, hearing petition after petition because we heard today people speaking about the Mobile Public Library. We're going to get more and more of that; the radicalized opposition.

Chairman Wahl – I think it's very important that we make a decision and we take the time to do it. Do you have a list of books that were asked for reconsideration and an outcome of what you decided to do with those books so it can be given to the board? We have constituency citizens on both sides of the issues who are asking us to make a determination.

Mr. Snider – What are we going to do when we get those? Are we going to say those that you didn't remove that somebody complained about; we think your local board made the wrong decision, is that what this Board is doing to get into the position? That is far beyond what we should be doing. A very small minority.

Chairman Wahl stated, that's what makes America great is that we listen to the smallest minority. Even the smallest minorities have rights.

Mrs. Wright – One of our problems is we define sexually explicit different than you do, even though that definition is there, it is subjective and you cannot objectify it and make it a list of words or ideas. With my background and culture, experience determine how I feel about that term and yours could be entirely different than mine. You can't define it with words. The definition you gave us is for conduct not content. I have not yet seen anything about content obscenity or what's inappropriate for minors, basically it's the conduct to protect children from child pornography.

Chairman Wahl – Well, let me be very clear, the vast majority of legislation, federal or state in the vast majority of our country define things like this. It's why we have definitions; that's why they exist. This Board, to be clear, absolutely has the right and the authority to make that definition.

Mrs. Wright – Community standards is part of your definition. Our community supports what we're doing. That's what they wanted us to do. Part of your definition is the word "prurient" that means to sexually arouse someone; none of these books do that. They might have a paragraph that you find offensive; but it's not sexually explicit, it doesn't arouse.

Chairman Wahl – I struggle with this because I actually talked with the author of the book, "Sold". The author agreed that it is going to be some children that the book can help. I agree that the book has some very good literary merit. I do understand that similar books may be profitable for some children and they may need it; it could also not be healthy for children who may not be struggling, who may have never faced some of the things in the book; and at a young age to be exposed to such sexual abuse is not necessarily the best thing for them. There is one group that can decide that for children, it's not you or me or this board, it's the parents. That's what we're trying to say; we're not saying these books don't have value; we're not saying the difference of opinion what sexually explicit is, we're trying to say, let the parents decide. If the book contains sexually explicit content as defined by this Board, we want parents to make those decisions when it comes to material that is challenging. Sexuality is a complex issue and different families are going to have different ways to address the issue for their children and we want to respect them.

Mr. Snider – So, we have one person that complains about a book, are they're supposed to remove the book?

Chairman Wahl – If the book goes against state code, they must. We will be looking at individual books and content.

Mr. Gourlay – You asked about a list of books to share with you. If we share that with this board that would imply that you are in fact interested in individual titles.

Mr. Snider – Is the Board going to start looking at the content of books? Are we doing to sit around and read books and decide what libraries should have? That is not our responsibility. We're becoming a board of censorship if you go down that road. When this Board is going to decide itself, if a book in Fairhope, Birmingham, Ashland, we think it's obscene.

Chairman Wahl – That is the duty of this Board – we are mediators between two different opinions. Getting information is never censorship. Deciding whether something is obscene is not censorship. Making the book illegal would be censorship.

Mr. Snider – When you're saying it has to be moved, it is censorship. Again, it needs to be local decisions. We have no business going down this road.

Chairman Wahl – Are R-rated movies censorship?– A child cannot go into a movie theater and watch that movie alone without a parent being with them because of the rating. It is a very fair question.

Mr. Gourlay – You had information from our library for months. I thought you were more familiar with the titles we have in our collection.

Mrs. Minton – Librarians every time they look at a new book decides censorship, if they're going to put them in their libraries or not. So, a form of censorship occurs every day. If not, each library will have over three million books.

Chairman Wahl– This is a societal standard that's been in place for thousands of years across all cultures. We can say this board has a duty to protect young minds from content that their parents, at least some parents, would deem inappropriate to have some input.

Mr. Gourlay – My goal is to understand this – that's why I'm asking about the books that were withheld. We've moved several books in an effort to comply with what you're talking about.

Chairman Wahl– That's why we passed the sexually explicit definition; we wanted to create clarity and we wanted you to have that definition. That was the Board's opinion on what reached the level of parents to have input.

Mrs. Wright – We have at Fairhope Public Library six (6) persons with MLIS degrees and a seventh working on her degree. If you can't trust those people to run the library. I don't understand. The people who are complaining about these books went to the city council, yelling and screaming. They did not come to our library director and say we are concerned about these books. Our library has handled this beautifully and we have done what you've asked us to do. We have moved the books that we felt were not appropriate for young teens. We will be happy to set up a shelf that says mature content and they will be checked out by a child with all access card but it will stay in the teen section.

Chairman Wahl – Do you believe that would comply with state code?

Mrs. Wright – Yes because you asked us to remove the books so the children going through the shelves won't have access to them. When you look at how often these books were checked out – the book has been in the library for six years and been checked out three times. It's not like the popular books coming off the shelves constantly.

Chairman Wahl – No library has 100% of all books ever printed. If you're saying these books are not popular in the community, then why are you upset about them being moved?

Mrs. Wright – They were due to be pulled, four of them, but they were checked out and not returned for three months.

Mr. Gourlay – I'm frustrated because we live in a politically active area. I feel like we've been singled out and I think some are honest parents and some are not. You will find dozens of the same titles around Alabama. It doesn't seem like these rules are being applied to all.

Chairman Wahl – I feel your frustration with that. I get phone calls all the time from concerned parents and I always send them to their local library board first. I hope this will work out where this Board will not have to take up more, but I also think it's a good chance that the consistency is coming. I'm sorry you are the first who have to jump through these hoops. At the same time, we have to accept in our culture there are going to be strong opinions on both sides. There are some people who are not respectful as they should be. We, as governmental leaders, have to go back to the basis. We have a duty to make sure that we protect children from things that are explicit and let the parents make the decision.

Mrs. Minton—The Board made a decision based on the public comment when we had the public hearing last time. It was not just the board that made a random decision. Six hours of public comments, five thousand letters, overwhelmingly, they said move the sexually explicit books, so we followed what the majority of Alabamians requested for funding based on tax dollars.

Chairman Wahl – The vast majority of Alabama parents are concerned about sexually explicit materials in the libraries. We have to respect that.

Mr. Gourlay – I’m asking what books are holding the funds from the library?

Mr. Snider – What you’re asking is for this Board to give you a list of the books that were censored.

Chairman Wahl -You made it clear that you do not agree with the sexually explicit definition provided. You do not share and you did not make your decision based on it. Most of the books I’ve struggled with the most contain literary value. It brings up content that you want to talk to the child about it before reading it.

Mrs. Wright – We looked up the definition – community standards, prurient issues, so we did use your definition. The persons who read them have different views about what that means.

Mr. Snider – For the record, I propose that Fairhope’s funding be restored.

Chairman Wahl – You’ve already heard my recommendation that we take the time to look at the list and look at the books. Is there a second to the motion? No response. Motion failed.

Chairman Wahl asked Fairhope to provide the Board with a list of books pulled and hopefully we will have the time to come back next board meeting.

Mr. Snider – How are we going to look at the books?

Mrs. Minton said we will compare them to the definitions we passed.

Conclusion – Fairhope Public Library will provide the APLS Executive Board with a list of books that were removed from the library containing sexually explicit material. The list and books will be reviewed by the Board at the November meeting. Chairman Wahl reminded board members of the open meetings requirements not to discuss this with each other. It is very healthy to have the time to process a major reaction on either side to give Fairhope the fair opportunity for us to give due diligence. Chairman Wahl stated I encourage you (Mrs. Wright and Mr. Gourlay) if you have anything to send along with it, I will read everything you send with the list explaining. Mr. Gourlay brought a packet of letters of support from Fairhope residents. Mrs. Minton made the motion. Ms. Martin seconded the motion. Members voting in favor by saying “aye” are as follows: Debra Windsor, John Wahl, Jerria Martin and Amy Minton. Ron Snider voted “Nay.” Mr. Snider stated we’re going down a road that is inappropriate. Vote taken, most in favor. Motion passed by majority vote.

New Business

Administrative Code Revisions

Kelyn Ralya – Legislative Services Agency (LSA) received the code revisions that the Board approved and filed. The deadline for written comments is October 14, 2025. An administrative code public hearing will be held on October 21, 2025 at 10:00 a.m., at APLS. Chairman Wahl asked that a special board meeting be held on October 21, 2025 for recognition just in case the Board needs to take action. The meeting will be posted on the Secretary of State website. Mr. Snider reminded the Board that if the meeting is attended remotely, members can vote but not on personnel matters. Mr. Albritton confirmed they can’t vote on personnel matters and code changes. Mr. Albritton will let the Board know about voting remotely if needed. An agenda is required for the special called meeting and it will be a working lunch.

Waiver of the State Aid Rules – Lawrence County Public Library – Funding and Hours of Operation

Mrs. Bailey – Lawrence County Public Library is struggling with personnel issues. The hours of operation will be back up when persons return to work. Ms. Martin made the motion to grant

Waiver of the State Aid Rules – Lawrence County Public Library – Funding and Hours of Operation (continued)

Lawrence County Public Library a waiver for FY2026. Mrs. Windsor seconded the motion. Vote taken, all in favor. Motion passed by unanimous decision. “No Nays.”

Blind & Physically Disabled Consumer Advisory Committee By Laws – Kelyn Ralya

The majority of the updates were name changes of the agencies represented on the Committee. Ms. Martin made the motion to approve the By Laws. Mrs. Windsor seconded the motion. Vote taken, all in favor. Motion passed by unanimous decision. “No Nays.”

On a Different Topic - Search for Director of the Alabama Public Library Service

Amy Minton thanked Kelyn Ralya for an outstanding job filling in as interim director at APLS. She made a motion to open up the application process to interview qualified individuals to fill the director’s position for a time period of two weeks. Mrs. Minton asked that the Chairman have the authority to review applications and select three to bring before the Board for a final vote.

Mr. Snider responded that two weeks is not long enough. It’s a multi-month process, the position has to be advertised through national publications, state personnel, the library association, and posted on the website unless it’s a pre-ordained person you have in mind for the position.

Mrs. Minton – I don’t have a person in mind but two weeks is long enough. The qualifications state you must live in this area and have a library of science degree. We need to fill the position. She emphasized that things have changed since that time, and the process will take approximately two weeks.

Chairman Wahl asked Mr. Albritton if he was familiar with the requirements for hiring from within versus hiring from without. Mr. Albritton responded that he is not familiar with the process.

Mr. Snider stated that he has been on the Board through five (5) different governors and has gone through three searches for directors. In the past, a committee was appointed and the position was advertised in various national publications. When applications were received, the committee reviewed them, selected the top three candidates, then the interview process took place. This is going to be a difficult search because this state agency is so controversial.

After much discussion, Pennie Broussard, APLS Human Resources, entered the meeting and explained the interview process. She stated that the pay grade is 88; and if a merit system employee is hired within, that would be step 1, it can happen today, effective October 1 or October 16, 2025. If you go outside the agency, the Board has to solicit the applications and conduct the interviews. If an outside candidate is selected, it must go through the Governor’s Office and State Personnel Board in order to bring the person selected in at step 1. To advertise the job, it takes thirty (30) to sixty (60) days. If you bring the person selected in above the minimum, it has to be approved through the Finance Department.

Mrs. Minton changed the motion to advertise the director’s position for thirty (30) days. Mrs. Windsor seconded the motion. Vote taken, majority in favor. Motion passed by majority vote. Persons voting “aye” are as follows: Jerria Martin, John Wahl, Debra Windsor, and Amy Minton. Ron Snider voted “Nay.”

Mr. Snider made a motion to amend the motion of thirty (30) days to sixty (60) days because it’s not going to be enough time. No second. Motion failed.

Director’s Report

APLS Financial Update – Jennifer Holman

APLS is at the end of the fiscal year, wrapping up everything. The Examiners of Public Accounts conducted a legal compliance audit for APLS for October 1, 2019 to September 30, 2024. We are waiting on them to come back with the end results of the audit.

Administrators' Meeting Statistics

The Administrators' meeting was held on July 24, 2025 at APLS via video-conference.

Statistics are as follows:

212 public libraries were represented

249 persons attended the meeting

APLS Building Update – Restroom Renovations – Randy Garmon

The renovation project is still in progress, the price is slightly higher, but we're moving forward. We have the funds for the renovations to continue as a project adding on to what we already have. For that to happen, the company that was doing the work has to carry insurance from that point until this project starts which will cost them approximately \$100,000.00. We elected to change that and put it out for bid. It should be advertised this upcoming week. The cost is approximately \$140,000.00 – \$150,000.00, a little more money than expected but in the long run, it will save us around \$200,000.

APLS Calendar of Meetings – FY2026

The calendar for FY2026 outlines meeting dates for the Executive Board, AVL Executive Council, LSTA Advisory Council and the BPD Consumer Advisory Committee.

On a Different Topic

The Chairman stated that APLS Executive Board meetings will be held on the third Thursday at 1:00 p.m., at APLS.

Front Desk Receptionist Statistics

The statistics for the front desk activity for July and August 2025 were presented to the Board for review.

New Directors' Orientation – August 20-21, 2025

New Directors' Orientation was held at APLS on August 20-21, 2025 for librarians serving as directors for five years or less. Stephanie Taylor, Coordinator.

Statistics are as follows:

August 20, 2025

21 public libraries were represented

21 directors

1 other librarian

2 presenters

TOTAL: 24

August 21, 2025

24 public libraries were represented

20 directors

1 other librarian

4 panelists

TOTAL: 25

Mrs. Bailey - Because of a high turnover in directors, another orientation will be held between February and March 2026. Follow-up meetings are held with staff after each orientation.

Service Certificates and Pins


The following APLS staff were scheduled to receive service certificates and pins for 15 years of service to the State of Alabama:

Ken Herston

Alisa McLeod

Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 3:32 p.m., by unanimous decision.


Chairman


Kelyn L. Ralya, Interim Director


Vanessa E. Carr, Recording Secretary