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## Mental health commissioner resigns; replaced by Indian Rivers director

*Staff report*

*Published: Tuesday, June 26, 2012 at 2:33 p.m.*

Zelia Baugh, commissioner of the Alabama Department of Mental Health, has resigned her position, effective Saturday. She will be replaced by Jim Reddoch, executive director of Indian Rivers Mental Health Center.



*Tuscaloosa News*

Jim Reddoch is the new state mental health commissioner. He replaces Zelia Baugh, who resigned effective June 30, citing family obligations

The governor's office released a press release Tuesday afternoon saying Baugh had resigned, citing family priorities.

"I appreciate the work Zelia has done to modernize mental health care services in this state," said Gov. Robert Bentley in the release. "She has fully dedicated herself to meeting the needs of patients and their families."

Baugh's tenure as commissioner of a significant state agency beset by money problems has been rocky since last year, when she announced the closing of the W.D. Partlow Developmental Disabled facility in Tuscaloosa. The closing had to be pushed back when family and local response forced Bentley to suspend the date.

Medicare cited the mental health agency for not protecting an underage client admitted to Partlow in 2010 before Baugh became commissioner. The boy was sexually assaulted by an adult who was a known pedophile but remained at Partlow until 2011, Medicare said.

This year, after a public outcry, Bentley had to rescind Baugh's plan to change the function of a new Bryce Hospital under construction in Tuscaloosa from a mental illness hospital to a ward for court-committed criminal defendants.

Bentley temporarily suspended construction of the hospital while a decision was made to revert back to a hospital for the mentally ill.

Baugh guided the department through a transition to close expensive state facilities, a transition that began in 1995. All state facilities for the developmentally disabled have been closed and all but two mental illness hospitals and the Taylor Hardin Secure Medical Facility will be closed by this time next year.

Baugh testified on Capitol Hill just last week about Alabama's progress in complying with a U.S. Supreme Court ruling to transition mentally ill and developmentally disabled patients into community settings.

"I believe the department is well-positioned to continue to make progress toward providing the highest caliber services to Alabamians with intellectual disabilities, mental illnesses, or substance addictions," she said in a statement announcing her resignation. "Throughout the department, there are dedicated individuals who are making a positive difference in the lives of consumers and their families, and I am honored to have served as commissioner."

The Department of Mental Health said under Baugh's leadership, Alabama became



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the first state in the Southeast to move all individuals with intellectual disabilities out of institutionalized settings and into more appropriate, community-based care environments.

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Reddoch was previously director of the Taylor Hardin Secure Medical Facility in Tuscaloosa from 2000 to 2009, and also served as an assistant attorney general during that time.

Before that, Reddoch was the director of Bryce Hospital from 1992 to 2000. He was also a deputy commissioner for the Department of Mental Health from 1988 to 1992.

“I am committed to building on the department's progress of developing the highest-quality services possible for all of the patients we serve,” Reddoch said in the same release. “From community-based care networks to services within our traditional mental health facilities, we will strive to meet the needs of everyone we serve.”