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OIT ACCESS

STATE OF ALABAMA

OFFICE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

STREAMLINING IT IN ALABAMA STATE GOVERNMENT

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*Cover Photo: Becca Estes | Sunset in Prattville, AL

WELCOME to *OIT Access*, the Office of Information Technology's quarterly newsletter. This publication is intended to be a resource for the numerous Alabama state agencies that rely on OIT and its services to help carry out their important missions and more effectively serve the citizens of our great state.

In addition to sharing the latest OIT news and announcements, each issue will help to keep readers informed about the wide range of information technology (IT) products and services available to agencies through OIT's Service Catalog. *OIT Access* also aims to be a platform for sharing news about several of the exciting IT projects, initiatives, and programs taking place at agencies across Alabama state government.

OIT is firmly committed to meeting the continuously evolving IT demands of the agencies we serve. If we are successful in this effort, it is the people of Alabama who are the true beneficiaries. OIT thanks you for your partnership in this vital work and we hope you enjoy this issue of *OIT Access*!

Our Mission & Vision

MISSION

Through communication and collaboration, OIT aims to empower stakeholders with innovative services and technologies that reliably deliver highly available, secure, efficient, and cost-effective services for agencies, legislators, and citizens across all levels of Alabama state government.

VISION

OIT aspires to provide solutions and services that are standardized, implemented in a timely and high-quality manner, and designed to meet the operational needs of each agency, legislator, and citizen who depends on their services.

OIT Leadership

DANIEL URQUHART
Secretary
State Chief Information Officer

WILLIE FIELDS
Deputy Secretary

CHADWICK SMITH
Chief Information Security Officer

MARK CRAYMER
Executive Director
Shared Services

ROGER BOWMAN
Executive Director
Support Services

BROOKE COVINGTON
Executive Director
Finance and Procurement

KEITH COUSINS
Executive Director
Business Execution

STATE OF ALABAMA CISO COUNCIL

Communication and Collaboration for a More Cyber-Secure Alabama

In Alabama, as in other states, the role of Chief Information Security Officers (CISO) is more important than ever. Among numerous vital duties, CISOs are responsible for implementing policy development for governance, risk, and compliance; managing information security and cybersecurity for a state agency or an entire state; and continuously monitoring the threat landscape for incident trends and immediate risks.

Due to the sensitive and complex nature of this work, effective communication and ongoing collaboration across Alabama's executive branch is of utmost importance.

Communication

OIT is committed to cultivating an environment of candid, two-way communication between stakeholders which reflects the goal of uniting cybersecurity leaders to drive strategy, strengthen defenses, and protect Alabama's digital assets.

In early May, during his first State of Alabama CISO Council meeting as OIT/State CISO, Chad Smith emphasized that he and his team are intent on facilitating open and collaborative dialogue that will not be limited to meeting times or to a select group of agencies; the objective will be to work closely and constantly with all of Alabama's agencies to remain vigilant against threats to the State's security.

With this purpose in mind, Smith invited Jay Mosley from the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency's (ALEA) Alabama Fusion Center to present a brief summary of the history of fusion centers and their role in partnering with the federal government to address criminal cases involving gangs, school threats, narcotics, missing persons, cyber information, and other important issues.

In concert with the Cyber Intelligence Network, a 24/7 conglomerate of over 640 nationwide analysts and150 agencies, the Alabama Fusion Center shares vital cyber information in real time that saves real lives. Mosely encouraged other agency CISOs and cybersecurity personnel to share information and partner with the Fusion Center in a joint effort to keep Alabamians safe from criminal threats of all kinds.

Collaboration

With the recent passage of House Bill 207 (HB207), the need for multi-agency representation and partnership is crucial.

Laura Crowder, Legal Counsel for OIT, encouraged meeting attendees to work toward the goal of greater solidarity, whether or not they are in OIT's tenant. Crowder cited recent cooperation between OIT and ALEA as well as a multi-agency alliance of legal counsels to help push the passage of HB207 through the State House of Representatives and Senate State Government Committee.

In addition to formally adding cybersecurity to the list of OIT responsibilities, HB207:

- Enables OIT to begin the process of developing a cybersecurity insurance framework (in coordination with Risk Management) on behalf of state agencies
- Creates the foundation for a multi-agency review board to manage new technology challenges for state government such as the use of GenAI in state systems
- Consolidates all OIT responsibilities under a single chapter of the Code of Alabama

Cooperation among state agencies undergirds governance and compliance, security operations, and incident response, promoting improved cybersecurity strategy and fortifying vulnerability risks.

Securing Alabama's Digital Future

Whether it is implementing a zero trust model, developing a security operations center, partnering with third-party vendors for improved threat intelligence and unified decision-making, or spearheading a CISO Council to help safeguard Alabama's digital future, OIT strives to enable honest communication and productive collaboration with the goal of understanding and continued progress that will not only benefit state agencies, but will also advance technological innovation for the good of all Alabamians.

ALABAMA BANS USE OF DEEPSEEK AND MANUS

Addressing Cybersecurity Threats from Foreign Entities

Photo: Office of the Governor

Alabama's IT infrastructure and networks house substantial amounts of sensitive data and manage innumerable governmental functions that impact Alabama's economy, emergency services, healthcare, schools, public safety, and much more. As such, it is essential to implement policies that address risks to these networks associated with foreign platforms.

Alabama recently joined a growing list of states that have placed bans on various harmful software and websites developed by overseas corporations. Two primary examples include DeepSeek and Manus, which are Chinese artificial intelligence (AI) startups that develop and offer open-source large language models (LLMs). These internationally run companies (among numerous others) pose significant privacy risks to government IT networks.

The cybersecurity dangers include potential espionage or surveillance by hostile foreign governments through extensive data collection and storage; supply chain disruption or manipulation from relying on vulnerable software and infrastructure; and damaging data breaches or leaks from cyberattacks.

As a preventative measure to ensure Alabama networks remain secure, Governor Kay Ivey released a memorandum which prohibits executive-branch agencies from using tools such as DeepSeek or Manus that endanger State data, resources, and infrastructure in terms of privacy and security.

OIT contributed to this effort by updating the State's Configuration Management Policy and adding these and other potentially malicious entities to an "Unauthorized Software List," a document that lists specific software programs and/or websites that have been designated as "unauthorized" due to concerns regarding possible threats involved in accessing them, especially on State-owned devices. OIT likewise took swift action to block access to these sites where applicable, and advised agencies that manage their own networks, internet content filtering, devices, and the like to take similar steps.

Governor Ivey and OIT are equally committed to defending the State of Alabama and its citizens from the ever-expanding risk posed by harmful technologies.

If your agency has questions or concerns regarding DeepSeek, Manus, or other entities on the Unauthorized Software List, please contact the OIT Governance, Risk, and Compliance team at grc.policy@oit.alabama.gov.

OIT SERVICE SPOTLIGHT

Recorded Future

In today's digital world, it is not a matter of if but when individuals, organizations, and governments will be targeted by bad actors. Having a broad set of tools to respond to and help prevent such attacks is imperative. Recorded Future is a dynamic new tool that the State has begun implementing to combat threats on the dark web, ranging from phishing attacks to the selling of confidential, stolen information like social security numbers and usernames and passwords.

Just having a presence on the internet makes one susceptible to malicious intent. Identity theft alone cost Americans $43 billion in 2023, and approximately 33% of U.S. citizens have experienced identity theft at some point. Attacks are happening more frequently and are becoming even more difficult to detect with the rise in artificial intelligence. When coupled with an increasing shortage of cybersecurity professionals to proactively manage and mitigate security risks, it is nearly impossible to manually search the hidden corners of the internet and dark web for lurking threats or compromised data.

This is where Recorded Future can facilitate a complete paradigm shift in how Alabama identifies potential dangers before they become actual breaches. Recorded Future provides unbiased, comprehensive, real-time, and actionable threat intelligence.

Below are some example use-cases on how the State can leverage Recorded Future:

- Ransomware Attack Mitigation
- Arson Investigations
- Human Trafficking
- Security Workflows Automation
- Exposure Management
- Digital Risks Prevention

Recorded Future

Recorded Future is trained to look for digital threats involving people, locations, third-party vendors, websites, and keywords. The power of the tool is how the State can use it to inform investigators without having to constantly be in "dark" places, leveraging the information to advise other resources to actively mitigate the threat or assist in isolating systems to limit the risks.

OIT welcomes agencies to reach out to OIT's Information Security team to discuss how your specific use-cases can be addressed with Recorded Future and other beneficial response tools.

DID YOU KNOW?

Passage of House Bill 207 (HB207)

In Act 2025-369 (formerly HB207) of the 2025 Alabama Legislative Session, OIT's duties were updated to formally include cybersecurity responsibility for executive-branch agencies. The Act also makes provision for state agencies to explore new technologies, such as generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) under the guidance of a Technology Quality Assurance board that will be formed in the coming months.

HB207 was sponsored by Representative Mike Shaw, and Act 2025-369 was signed into law by Governor Kay Ivey on May 13th.

Visit https://arc-sos.state.al.us/ucp/L1828543.AI1.pdf to read Act 2025-369 in its entirety.

Photo: Office of the Governor

OIT Launches LinkedIn Page

OIT is now officially on LinkedIn! Visit our LinkedIn page at https://www.linkedin.com/company/alabama-office-of-information-technology and follow us to receive the latest OIT news, including career opportunities and important information on staying cyber-aware.

Prefix Cleanup Reminder

As part of OIT's ongoing efforts to improve delegation, consistency, and scalability across the shared tenant, we are in the process of implementing a standardization initiative regarding the "Company" attribute used for user accounts and service-related objects. Historically, this attribute has been populated with an identifier chosen by each agency. To improve alignment, simplify automation, and support future delegation efforts, each agency's Billing Account Code (BAC) will be used as the standard for this attribute moving forward.

All newly created items – such as new Microsoft Teams, SharePoint sites, Power Platform Groups, and other automated solutions – will begin using the updated "Company" attribute format. This change will not immediately affect any existing services (i.e., agencies' current Teams, SharePoint sites, etc.). However, over time OIT will work with agencies to address and organize existing objects through migration, consolidation, and decommission (where applicable).

If you have any questions, concerns, or would like assistance with planning for this change, please contact the OIT Service Desk.

New MSPs for IT Staffing

The State of Alabama Office of Information Technology (OIT), through the Alabama Department of Finance Division of Procurement, is pleased to announce new statewide NASPO contracts with two experienced, capable managed service providers (MSPs):

- **Computer Aid, Inc. (CAI)** - Contact: Walter Ales, walter.ales@cai.io
- **Knowledge Services (KS)** - Contact: Tyler Thurn, ALMSP@KnowledgeServices.com

The contracts will take effect on **September 1, 2025**, and replace ACRO Service Corporation (Acro).

User agencies will continue using Acro until that contract expires on August 31, 2025.

Benefit to State Agencies

CAI and KS are well known MSPs that have for more than two decades actively provided services to other states and government entities and will assist in selecting, onboarding, and maintaining skilled and cost-effective hourly IT contracted staff. The new MSPs will enhance efficiency, reduce cost, and help agencies better accomplish their missions.

What Does This Mean for Current Contractors?

Individual contractors are to continue unaffected, as CAI, KS, and Acro are committed to a smooth process with the contractor and employer (supplier) relationship remaining in place. Individual contractors will roll into the new vendor management systems (VMS), etc.

Upcoming Training Sessions

- A mandatory training window has been established from **July 2 through July 15**, during which both virtual and on-site training sessions will be available.
- CAI and KS will notify agencies directly with specific session dates/times and will coordinate with each to schedule training on their respective VMS so that agencies can make the best decision on which MSP (one or both) will fit best.

Next Steps

- State agencies currently using Acro are required to select one or both MSPs to ensure uninterrupted staffing support. The agency selection window will be open from **July 16 through July 21**.
- **ACTION REQUIRED:** Simply email CAI or KS contacts (one or both) with the names and email addresses for individuals at your agency who will attend training.

OIT is excited about the value this transition will bring and looks forward to the expanded opportunities it will provide to State agencies. If you have questions or concerns, please contact the OIT Service Desk at Service.Desk@oit.alabama.gov or (334) 242-2222.

OUT & ABOUT WITH OIT

Above - NASCIO Conference: OIT Secretary Daniel Urquhart and Deputy Secretary Willie Fields recently attended the National Association of State Chief Information Officers (NASCIO) Midyear 2025 Conference in Philadelphia, PA. NASCIO conferences facilitate peer learning, relationship building, and collaborative solutioning among its many members.

Above - OIT All Hands Meeting: On Tuesday, April 22nd, OIT staff attended an All Hands Meeting in the Gordon Persons Building to discuss work management, organization structure, FY2024 accomplishments, and FY2025 priorities.

Above - Laserfiche Training: In mid-May, OIT's Application Support Team hosted a Laserfiche training, which included an installation demo, introductory bootcamp, and new features and programs.

Left - State of Alabama Days Job Fair: OIT Communications Director Jeremy Ward and his team attended the inaugural State of Alabama Day, a career fair dedicated to recruiting bright, new talent for the many exciting opportunities across Alabama state government.

Above - State Employee Recognition Week: The OIT Team celebrated State Employee Recognition Week on Tuesday, May 6th, by taking in all the festivities of the 2nd Annual OIT Employee Recognition Cookout on top of the Kelly Butler Parking Deck. We work hard and play hard!

Above - Montgomery Biscuits host State of Alabama Employees Appreciation Night: OIT's Network Engineering team recently enjoyed a night out to a Montgomery Biscuits baseball game for the State of Alabama Employees Appreciation Night.

Above - App Build & Pitch Competition: OIT Deputy Secretary Willie Fields (2nd from left) recently participated as an illustrious judge for the Alabama Collective's App Build & Pitch Competition.

The competition, hosted at Montgomery Whitewater, brought together leading student innovators from Alabama's HBCUs to demonstrate their creative enterprise and technical ingenuity.

Above - State Combined Campaign Awards Celebration: OIT's Kenyatta Fishoe, Melanie Talley, Rachel Mayer, Tanzania Johnson, and Samantha Brown attended the State Combined Campaign Awards Banquet and were recognized for OIT's tremendous efforts in the 2024 campaign. OIT exceeded its charitable expectations, more than doubling the agency's contribution goal and achieving its highest ever employee participation rate!

OFFICE OF
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