

NEWS RELEASE  
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## **GOVERNOR BENTLEY MEETS WITH BLACK BELT COMMISSION**

### ***Progress Reported in Rural Areas***

THOMASVILLE-- Some 120 people representing the thirteen committees of the Alabama Black Belt Commission, along with representatives of the three regional councils in the Black Belt and dignitaries from the across region, met at the Thomasville Civic Center on July 23. Thomasville Mayor Sheldon Day hosted the gathering.

Governor Bentley listened intently as committee chairs reported on recent projects. Health Committee Co-Chair Chad Nichols reported on the children's eye clinics provided in partnership with Sight Savers America; this program insures that Alabama children have access to eye care regardless of where they live or their family income. Nichols also shared information about the successful KidCheck Plus Program, another partnership with Sight Savers America that provides comprehensive health screenings for preschool through 12th grade students in underserved parts of Alabama.

AIDT Director Ed Castile, who chairs the Workforce Development Committee, presented a strategic plan that addresses workforce issues in the Black Belt in order to enhance economic opportunities for its citizens. "I am very proud to be a part of the BBC Workforce Committee and applaud the work our members have put into developing the BBC Workforce Strategic Plan. This plan is aligned with Governor Bentley's Accelerate Plan and with the College and Career Ready Task Force recommendations recently made. This committee is dedicated to helping citizens of the Black Belt," Castile said.

Other committee reports addressed areas including small business development, infrastructure, agriculture, communications technology access, strengthening families, and improving education, among others.

Ron Sparks, Director of the Alabama Rural Development Office, which oversees the Black Belt Commission, was pleased with the meeting. “It was a great day for the Commission to share what they’ve accomplished,” Sparks said. . “People don’t realize that this Commission is made up of volunteers, and this is one way we can recognize their efforts.”

The Black Belt Commission is made up of thirteen committees that address the numerous problems confronting citizens of the Black Belt Region by devising strategies and implementing projects that target these issues. The Executive Committee meets bi-monthly to keep up to date on projects and provide additional assistance by way of speakers and services that can be utilized in the area. The Black Belt was named for the nutrient-rich, black soil that once grew superior cotton and, today, continues to support an abundance of opportunities.

For more information about the Black Belt Commission, contact the Alabama Rural Development Office at 334-353-5185 or email [emily.law@adeca.alabama.gov](mailto:emily.law@adeca.alabama.gov).