

Maryland State Rehabilitation Council

Who are we?

The Maryland State Rehabilitation Council (MSRC) is made up of individuals interested in the success of Maryland's public vocational rehabilitation (VR) programs. Members are appointed by the Governor and include representatives from education, rehabilitation, employment, industry and consumer advocacy groups. A majority of Council members are persons with disabilities.

What do we believe?

The MSRC believes that employment is critical to the quality of citizenship of people with disabilities in Maryland. The MSRC advocates in Maryland for:

- Increased employment for people with disabilities.
- Increased awareness of individuals with disabilities and their employment capabilities.
- State policies that encourage and support employment.

What do we do?

The MSRC takes an active and visible role in how Maryland's public VR program is administered:

- We review, analyze and advise MSDE Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) regarding performance of its responsibilities and quality of services.
- We ensure that the needs of individuals with disabilities are identified and addressed by state and federal legislators, service providers, employers and the community.
- We collaborate with organizations and other state councils to promote services to underserved and unserved populations.

Maryland State Rehabilitation Council To the Citizens of Maryland:

The Maryland State Rehabilitation Council (MSRC) serves as the people's collective champion for employment of Marylanders with disabilities, for enhanced awareness of the capabilities of people with disabilities, and for promotion of State and national policies that support those goals. Accordingly, the Council, in compliance with Federal law, monitors and oversees Maryland's Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS), the State agency that provides public vocational rehabilitation (VR) services and is responsible for helping people with disabilities to find and retain jobs.

As set out in the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, the Council reports its findings to the federal Rehabilitation Administration, the Governor of Maryland, and most importantly, the people of Maryland.

To begin, the Council has good news and positive developments to report:

- DORS business services specialists are now in every region. These specialists promote and market the employment of persons with significant disabilities by developing active partnerships with businesses and business-related organizations. Identified as a need last year, DORS leadership was able to realign resources to recruit and hire specialists in each region of the state to improve opportunities for the employment of people with disabilities.
- The impact to the VR program from Sequestration was not as large as originally expected. The budget cuts caused by Sequestration were not as deep as they might have been due to a federally mandated cost-of-living adjustment increase for the VR program, which mitigated sequestration losses.

- DORS has improved and enhanced services to individuals who are deaf-blind, including creating a new position for a deaf-blind specialist. This was in direct response to feedback from the deaf-blind community received at the annual MSRC/DORS public meetings.

However, 2013 is not without its concerns to report:

- The waiting list for services increased 25% to 3,839, reflecting a 18-20 month delay in the start of services to Marylanders with significant disabilities. DORS has strategies in place to try to reduce the waiting list and has received additional state funding which should help lower that number for FY 2014.
- Senate Bill 1356 reauthorizing the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) is a concern. This bill includes major policy changes to the Rehabilitation Act. SB 1356 calls for significant changes involving the realignment of critical programs that serve people with disabilities, especially moving the national VR program to the US Department of Labor (from the Department of Education), and the weakening of education and credentialing requirements for rehabilitation counselors. The MSRC will continue to work with Maryland's lawmakers and the national Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation to voice our concerns regarding the negative impact of this legislation on vocational rehabilitation in Maryland.

During this last year, we formalized the practice of inviting public comment at each of our quarterly MSRC meetings. We invite you to come learn about the MSRC and to communicate with us so that we can be of optimal service to individual Marylanders and to DORS.

The MSRC will continue to work closely with elected officials, DORS consumers, staff and other stakeholders in the coming year

so DORS can continue to offer a quality path to employment and self-sufficiency to all Marylanders with disabilities who want to go to work.

Sincerely,

Josie Thomas, Acting Chair, Maryland State Rehabilitation Council

DORS VR Programs

What is vocational rehabilitation?

VR prepares people with disabilities to go to work, stay on the job and remain independent in their homes and communities. In Maryland, public VR is provided by the State Department of Education's Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS).

DORS statewide rehabilitation counselors provide for services that may include career counseling, assistive technology, vocational training and job placement. DORS provides personalized support and employment services so individuals with disabilities can plan a path to a successful career and independent living.

What were DORS outcomes for fiscal year 2013?

- DORS Office of Field Services matched 2,370 qualified individuals to job openings in Maryland businesses, an increase of nearly 2% over the previous year.
- In addition, 163 blind or visually impaired individuals found employment through DORS Office for Blindness & Vision Services, with an average wage of \$16.39/hour.
- DORS helped 1,608 people with significant disabilities move off public benefits and become taxpayers.
- DORS served 9,431 students with disabilities to prepare them to move from high school to employment, higher education or

career training. Maryland high school students represent 38% of DORS caseload.

- WTC served 874 transitioning youths with specialized residential and day programs designed to help high school students with disabilities reach their work and independent living goals.
- 242 high school students with disabilities earned work experience in paid summer employment programs in partnership with businesses throughout the state.
- After taking part in career training and rehabilitation technology programs at DORS Workforce & Technology Center (WTC) in Baltimore, 573 individuals went to work.
- Despite the Federal hiring freeze, 75 DORS consumers were newly hired or able to retain their jobs in Federal agencies in positions ranging from clerical to engineering.
- 21 individuals with traumatic brain injuries achieved employment as part of the Governor's Employment Program for Persons with Acquired Brain Injuries.
- 19 DORS consumers completed the annual Governor's QUEST Internship Program for Persons with Disabilities, which provides three-month work experiences in State government. 75% of QUEST participants have found employment since the program's inception. Due to its success, this program will be offered twice a year beginning in FY 2014.
- DORS assisted 78 Maryland businesses with worksite reviews so they could hire new workers or keep valued employees who have developed a disability.
- For FY 2013, the Maryland public VR program exceeded the Federal performance standards for both employment outcomes and minority access to services.

What is VR's return on investment?

- If DORS past record is any indication, of the 2,533 DORS participants who went to work in 2013, 84% will still be working a year from now – the highest retention rate of any Maryland workforce program. These new workers will contribute over \$35 million to Maryland's economy in their first year of work.
- The average cost for a person with disabilities to achieve successful employment with DORS is \$4,731. This cost is paid back through their taxes and reduced reliance on public benefits in just two to four years.
- At the time of application, only 11% of DORS consumers list “wages” as their primary source of income. After receiving services from DORS, nearly 79% report that wages are their primary source of income.
- The Social Security Administration estimates that when disability benefits recipients go to work, they generate a savings to the Federal treasury and Social Security of \$7 for every \$1 spent on VR services.

For more information about DORS and vocational rehabilitation in Maryland, please visit: www.md-dors.org/report

The Maryland State Rehabilitation Council

- Thomas Barkley, Division of Special Education, MSDE
- Michael Bullis, Executive Director, The IMAGE Center
- Charles Crawford, American Council of the Blind
- Tim Daly, Business/Industry Representative
- Laurie Elinoff, Maryland Statewide Independent Living Council
- Paulette Epps, Director of VR Services Division, Alliance, Inc.
- Dan Frye, National Federation of the Blind; MSRC Chair
- Tom Laverty, Director, Client Assistance Program
- Mary Manzoni, Vocational Services Director, Humanim, Inc.

- Suzanne R. Page, Assistant State Superintendent, Division of Rehabilitation Services
- Barry Shaw, Public Advocate
- Alfred Sonnenstrahl, Public Advocate
- Josie Thomas, Executive Director, Parents' Place of Maryland, Inc.; MSRC Vice Chair
- Michael Whitehill, Business/Industry Representative
- Zosia Zaks, Public Advocate

2014 Meeting Schedule

- February 4, 2014 – Legislative Event, Annapolis, Maryland
- April 2014 – Statewide Public Meetings
- May 7, 2014 – Workforce & Technology Center, Baltimore, Maryland 4:00-7:00 pm
- August 2014 – Executive Committee Planning Meeting
- September 10, 2014 – Workforce & Technology Center, Baltimore, Maryland 4:00-7:00 pm
- November 19, 2014 – Workforce & Technology Center, Baltimore, Maryland 4:00-7:00 pm

The public is welcome to attend and give comments at every MSRC meeting. Dates are subject to change. Please check MSRC website at www.md-src.org.

For more information about the Maryland State Rehabilitation Council, its meetings and activities, or if you would like to be considered for membership:

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