



December 20, 2016

As Chair of the Maryland State Rehabilitation Council (MSRC), it is an honor to serve the people of Maryland. The MSRC is the people's 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.

The MSRC is appointed by the Governor of Maryland, in compliance with federal law, to monitor, advise and oversee Maryland's Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS). As established in the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, the Council reports its findings annually to the federal Rehabilitation Services Administration, the Governor of Maryland and, most importantly, the people of Maryland.

To begin, I would like to commend DORS for its commitment to the employment needs of people living with disabilities and also for its transparency to the people of Maryland through its partnership with the MSRC.

For the fiscal year 2016:

- 2,565 Marylanders with significant disabilities became successfully employed this year with the help of DORS personnel and programs.
- More than 1,122 people were able to move off public benefits and are now taxpayers.

- DORS prepared 9,121 students with significant disabilities to move from high school to employment, higher education or career training.
- DORS completed its triennial Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, in order to ascertain the needs of individuals with disabilities throughout the state who are minorities, students, served by other workforce programs, or unserved or underserved for other reasons.
- In close partnership with other State workforce partners including the Department of Labor, Licensing & Regulation and the Department of Human Resources, DORS contributed to Maryland's first Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA) Combined State Plan.

Not all the news is positive, however:

- The wait list for DORS services increased nearly 44%, from 2,697 at the start of FY 2016 to 3,893 at the fiscal year's end. These are individuals eligible for services but who have been determined to have Significant (Category 2) but not Most Significant Disabilities (Category 1).
- The expected wait time as of the end of FY 2016 for an individual in Category 2 is 27 months from the date of application.

The increase in the wait list is due to a shortage of resources – both human and monetary – and adjusting to new regulations under WIOA.

- WIOA: The influx of students with disabilities into the new Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) programs has significantly increased the agency's caseload without providing additional funding or increased staffing. This

new group of consumers has made the existing DORS wait list for adults with disabilities grow significantly as a share of already limited resources must be diverted to the Pre-ETS program, which is not subject to a wait list.

- Personnel Shortages: As with many State of Maryland agencies in FY 2016, DORS lost a number of positions through the abolishment of vacant positions. Additionally, the State hiring freeze makes filling an open position take six months or more. Combined with the salaries Maryland can offer compared with those offered by neighboring states and the federal government, this has left DORS critically short-staffed in some areas.
- Funding Shortfalls: Currently the State of Maryland is projecting a budgetary shortfall for both FY 2017 and FY 2018. In the past, State funds for all agencies and programs were reduced across the board to meet the deficit. There's a concern that similar reductions going forward would bring DORS close to not meeting its federal Maintenance of Effort requirement – which could result in the loss of federal funding. On the Federal level, with a series of Continuing Resolutions instead of new budgets from Congress, funding to DORS has been flat for the last five years while demand for DORS services increases.

The MSRC hopes to work closely with elected officials, DORS consumers, staff and other stakeholders in the coming year to address the wait list issues and find a way for DORS to continue to offer a quality path to employment and self-sufficiency to all Marylanders with disabilities who want to go to work.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey Moran, Chair, Maryland State Rehabilitation Council

## **By The Numbers**

In 2016, the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS):

- Matched 2,565 qualified individuals to job openings in 1,432 Maryland businesses. Twenty-seven of those businesses hired 10 or more new employees with disabilities during the year.
- Helped 1,122 people move off public benefits and become taxpayers and provided benefits counseling services for 813 individuals.
- Prepared 9,121 students with disabilities to move from high school to employment, higher education or career training. Students make up 35% of DORS' caseload. That figure is expected to increase significantly under the new WIOA regulations.
- Assisted 130 blind or visually impaired individuals who found employment through DORS Office for Blindness & Vision Services. Their average wage was \$14.76.
- Found paid summer employment opportunities with Maryland businesses so that 163 high school students with disabilities could gain critical work experience.