



MARYLAND STATE
REHABILITATION COUNCIL

To the Citizens of Maryland:

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 2015, the Council has good news and positive developments to report:

- Nearly 2,560 Marylanders with significant disabilities became successfully employed year with the help of DORS personnel and programs.
- More than 1,100 people were able to move off public benefits and have now become taxpayers.
- 9,000 students with significant disabilities prepared to move from high school to employment, higher education or career training with DORS' assistance.

However, 2015 was not without its concerns:

- Increased Wait List
The wait list for DORS services increased nearly 18%, from 2,293 at the start of FY 2015 to 2,697 at year's end. This means that some Marylanders with significant disabilities who contact DORS **today**, interested in starting to work, will have to wait **17 months** to begin the process.
- Personnel Shortages
The increase in the wait list is due to a shortage of resources – both human and monetary. As with all State agencies in FY 2015, DORS lost a number of positions through the Voluntary Separation Program and through the abolishment of vacant positions. In addition, the State hiring freeze that can make filling an open position take six months or more and the low salaries offered by Maryland compared with those offered by neighboring states and the federal government have all combined to leave DORS critically short-staffed. For example, at the end of FY 2015, DORS' Office for Blindness & Vision Services was **short 45% of the staff** it needs to serve the blind and visually impaired citizens of Maryland.
- Funding Shortfalls
In order to help close the gap between the State's FY 2016 budget and a projected State shortfall, State funds for all programs were reduced across the board by approximately 2%. The reduction brings DORS dangerously close to not meeting its federal Maintenance of Effort requirement – which could result in the loss of federal funding. In addition, with the federal sequestration cuts, federal funding to DORS has been flat for the last four years while demand for DORS services increases.

- Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA)

The 2014 passage of the federal Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA), which amends the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 governing public vocational rehabilitation (VR) programs like DORS, significantly revised the requirements of the individual states' VR and workforce development programs.

The implementation of WIOA – especially its requirement to create a Pre-Employment Transition Services (PETS) program available to all high school students with disabilities – will significantly increase the agency's caseload without providing any additional funding or increased staffing. According to Census figures, **more than 33,000 students a year** could potentially request PET services from DORS under WIOA.

This new workload could make the existing DORS wait list for adults with disabilities who want to find a job grow exponentially as limited resources must be diverted to the PETS program, which is not subject to the wait list. This is a major concern as DORS continues looking for ways to reduce the length of the wait list for the individuals it already serves.

As DORS continues to roll-out its Pre-Employment Transition Services program and other WIOA mandates throughout the coming year, the impact on the full spectrum of DORS services should become more clear.

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,

Jeffrey Moran, Chair, Maryland State Rehabilitation Council

By The Numbers

In 2015, the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS):

- Matched 2,559 qualified individuals to job openings in 1,355 Maryland businesses. Twenty-eight of those businesses hired 10 or more new employees with disabilities during the year.
- Helped 1,109 people move off public benefits and become taxpayers.
- Prepared 9,049 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 under the new WIOA regulations.
- Provided ergonomic and assistive technology worksite assessments to 70 Maryland businesses so they could keep valued employees on the job or hire new workers with disabilities.
- Worked with 173 blind or visually impaired individuals who found employment through DORS Office for Blindness & Vision Services. Their average wage was \$16.52.
- Partnered with businesses around the state so that nearly 250 high school students with disabilities could have paid summer employment opportunities and gain critical work experience

In 2015, DORS Workforce & Technology Center (WTC):

- Provided career assessment, job training and work readiness services to 556 people who became employed.
- Worked with 770 students with disabilities transitioning to work or post-secondary education.
- Served 171 deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals with specialized services and career training.