

Maryland State Rehabilitation Council  
Maryland's Advocates for Public Vocational Rehabilitation  
FY 2009 Annual Report

## **Inside Cover**

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### **The 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. The MSRC believes that employment is critical to the quality of life of people with disabilities in Maryland. A majority of Council members are persons with a disability.

#### **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 do we do?**

The MSRC takes an active and visible role in how Maryland's public vocational rehabilitation program is administered.

- We review, analyze and advise DORS regarding performance of its responsibilities and quality of its 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.
- We develop and review State goals and priorities, and assist in the preparation of Maryland's annual State Plan for Vocational Rehabilitation.

## **What is VR's return on investment?**

- If DORS past record is any indication, of the 2,309 DORS participants who went to work in 2009, 84% will still be working a year from now – the highest retention rate of any Maryland workforce program. They will contribute over \$33.6 million to Maryland's economy in their first year of work.
- The average cost for a person with disabilities to achieve a successful employment outcome with DORS is \$4,431. This cost to the government is paid back through taxes and reduced reliance on public benefits in just two to four years.

- The Social Security Administration estimates that when disability benefits recipients go to work, they generate a savings to the Federal treasury and Social Security Trust Fund of \$7 for every \$1 spent on their VR services.

## **Sidebar: Membership List**

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**Lawrence Abramson**, Director of Vocational Services, St. Luke's House, Inc.

**Thomas Barkley**, Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services, Maryland State Department of Education

**Michael Bullis**, Executive Director, Maryland Technology Assistance Program, Maryland Department of Disabilities

**Robert Burns**, Assistant State Superintendent in Rehabilitation Services

**Joyce Callahan**, ADA Compliance Advocate, Maryland Transit Administration

**Charles Crawford**, American Council of the Blind

**Tim Daly**, Public Advocate

**Ross Edwards**, Owner, Ross & Tine Transportation

**Dan Frye**, National Federation of the Blind, MSRC Vice Chairperson

**Beth Lash**, Client Assistance Program Director, DORS

**Carol Lewis**, Rehabilitation Counselor, DORS

**Kali Mallik**, Public Advocate, MSRC Chairperson

**Mary Manzoni**, Humanim, Inc.

**Anne Rea**, Director of Employment & Resource Management Services, Way Station

**Eric Seleznow**, Executive Director, Governor's Workforce Investment Board

**Michael Shaw**, Academic Advisor, Baltimore City Community College

**Alfred Sonnenstrahl**, Public Advocate

**Josie Thomas**, Executive Director, Parents' Place of Maryland, Inc.

**Jennifer Whitcomb**, Executive Director, Deaf Independent Living Association, Inc.

**Michael Whitehill**, Vice President, McCrone, Inc.

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December 2009

To the Citizens of Maryland:

For the past 15 years, the Maryland State Rehabilitation Council (MSRC) has served as the people's advocate for increased employment for Marylanders with disabilities, for increased awareness of the employment capabilities of people with disabilities, and for State and national policies that support those goals. Accordingly, the Council monitors and oversees Maryland's Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS), the State agency that provides public vocational rehabilitation (VR) services to enable persons with disabilities to go to work. As set out in the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 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:

## **Good News: Successful Employment Outcomes Up**

The good news is that DORS helped 2,309 Marylanders with disabilities become successfully employed in 2009. That represents a 1% increase over 2008. During that same period, the unemployment rate in Maryland doubled, from 3.6% to 7.2% as of September 2009, while DORS staff were faced with budget cuts and furlough days. An increase in successful employment outcomes in the face of the worst economic climate in decades is something to celebrate.

### **Good News: Governor & Legislature Allocate Funds in FY 2009 Budget to Address Waiting List**

In our previous annual reports, the Council reported on the waiting list crisis caused by federal funding shortfalls. To summarize, over the past decade inflation – the cost of doing business – has risen nearly 25%, while DORS federal funding has risen less than 10%. Meanwhile, demand for DORS services – people with disabilities wanting to go to work – rose more than 40%! That left DORS at the start of State FY 2009 (July 2008) with 5,230 people on a waiting list for services, some of whom had to be told it might be up to a year and a half before they could even begin the rehabilitation process. That was the bad news. Here's good news: DORS had requested additional funding from the State to eliminate the waiting list and, despite overall budget tightening, the Governor and Legislature found a way to allocate an additional \$2.3 million in the FY 2009 budget. With the additional funding, DORS was able to cut the size of the waiting list and the duration of the wait both in half by December 2008.

### **Good News: American Recovery & Reinvestment Act of 2009**

The bright spot in the bad economic news of 2009 has been the federal American Recovery & Reinvestment Act (ARRA), also known as the stimulus funding. DORS received \$6.9 million in State grants for VR, with an additional \$600,000 dedicated to services for older individuals who are blind and \$250,000 in Independent Living grants.

DORS used the bulk of the VR grant to eliminate the waiting list entirely for all individuals in Category I – Individuals with Most Significant Disabilities, and reduce the waiting time for Category II – Individuals with Significant Disabilities to three months (from a high of 18 months). There are approximately 1,000 Category II individuals on the waiting list at this time. The rest of the ARRA funding is allocated to enhancing DORS programs, rebuilding critical infrastructure and promoting new programs targeting unserved and underserved populations (see ARRA sidebar on page 3 of the MSRC annual report).

However, 2009 is not without its concerns to report:

### **Concern: State Funding “Maintenance of Effort” in Jeopardy Due to Budget Cuts**

The collapses in the housing market, stock market and jobs market ultimately resulted in multiple rounds of deep cuts to the State budget. DORS State budget, which was \$15.3 million at the start of FY 2009, is down to \$13.4 million as of the November 2009 round of cuts.

This is troubling not just for the loss of State funds but also for the potential loss of federal funds it represents. Maryland is required to show a Maintenance of Effort each year. For the current year (FY 2010), the amount of State funding two years

prior (FY 2008) must be met or exceeded. For every dollar Maryland doesn't match from FY 2008, DORS loses a dollar of federal funding. As of the November 2009 budget cut, Maryland is less than \$600 away from not meeting its Maintenance of Effort. If there's another \$200,000 State budget cut similar to the last, that will result in a \$400,000 loss in funding for services to people with disabilities.

## **Concern: Long-term Federal Funding – GAO Report to Congress on Funding Inequity**

The ARRA funds discussed earlier are time-limited, so while they may address the State and federal funding shortfalls for FY 2010 and 2011, the long-term concerns with DORS waiting list still remain.

In September 2009, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a report to Congress (GAO-09-798) that studied the funding formula used to distribute federal funds to states for the administration of the public VR services program. As the MSRC has been reporting for several years, Maryland is in the bottom tier of states in the allocation of these funds because the formula disproportionately compounds a state's per capita income. The GAO report makes clear that Maryland has the third most poorly-funded state VR program; only Connecticut and Massachusetts are more poorly funded.

On a cost-adjusted basis, Maryland receives \$97 per working-aged person with a disability. Compare that to other states in our region:

- Virginia \$118
- Pennsylvania \$122
- West Virginia \$125
- Delaware \$141
- District of Columbia \$240

On the far end of the spectrum are states like North Dakota (\$277) and Wyoming (\$250 per person with a disability).

The GAO report substantiates that “the VR funding formula falls short of meeting equity standards because it uses imprecise measure of state needs and resources. The formula does not account for differences among states in the proportion of people with disability or the costs of providing services.” The GAO identifies three new funding formulas that would meet equity standards. All three would benefit Maryland, increasing its federal allotment by 13.2% to 22.3%.

However, without an act of Congress, Maryland’s federal funding will not be sufficient to prevent the buildup of another waiting list over time. It remains to be seen whether this issue is acted upon by Congress, as the states whose allotments might be seen as threatened could fight to retain the status quo.

## **Looking Ahead**

As policymakers on the State and Federal levels contemplate difficult budgetary choices in the current economic crisis, the Council urges them to consider the value of a proven, nationally recognized VR program like DORS offers, a program that helps people get jobs, creates new taxpayers, takes people off public assistance and returns millions of dollars each year to Maryland’s economy. DORS has been long recognized as having one of the best programs in the country for providing a path to employment and economic self-sufficiency for persons with disabilities. The MSRC will be working closely with elected officials, DORS consumers, staff and other stakeholders in the coming year to resolve these

funding issues so that DORS can continue to offer that path to all Marylanders with disabilities who want to go to work.

Sincerely,  
Kali Mallik  
Chairperson, Maryland State Rehabilitation Council

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### **DORS VR Programs 2009**

- DORS matched 2,309 qualified individuals to job openings in Maryland businesses. These new workers contributed \$33.6 million to the State's economy.
- DORS assisted 75 Maryland businesses with worksite reviews so they could hire new employees or keep valued employees with disabilities.
- 151 individuals who are blind or visually impaired were successfully employed. Their average wage was \$15.71/hour.
- DORS served 5,492 students with disabilities to prepare them to move from high school to employment, higher education or training.
- DORS helped 1,020 people with significant disabilities move from receiving public benefits to becoming employed taxpayers.
- After taking part in career training and rehabilitation technology programs at DORS Workforce & Technology Center (WTC) in Baltimore, 570 individuals went to work.

- WTC served 799 transitioning youths with specialized residential and day programs designed to help high school students with disabilities reach their work and independent living goals.
- As the result of an effort to increase job placement in Federal employment, 97 DORS consumers were hired by 24 different agencies in jobs including clerical, janitorial, laborer, management, technical, paraprofessional and professional positions.
- At the end of FY 2009, 74 individuals with brain injuries were taking part in programs and services and 38 were employed with the assistance of job coaches as part of the Governor's Employment Initiative for Persons with Acquired Brain Injuries.
- 225 high school students with disabilities earned work experience in paid summer employment programs, many of them funded through American Recovery & Reinvestment Act grants. Of them, 11 have become employees and another 13 are returning as volunteers or employees in the future.
- 24 DORS consumers completed the annual Governor's QUEST Internship Program for Persons with Disabilities, which provides three-month internships in State government.

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

## **Sidebar:**

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### **ARRA Funds Provide Stimulus For Maryland VR Programs**

American Recovery & Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 funding has helped Marylanders with disabilities receive new and improved employment services.

DORS eliminated the waiting list for services for individuals with Most Significant Disabilities and reduced the waiting time for individuals with Significant Disabilities to just three months (from a high of 18 months).

DORS awarded seven grants to community programs who agreed to target individuals who have traditionally been underserved:

1. PDG Rehabilitation Services, Inc. (Glen Burnie) – ex-offenders with severe mental illness
2. MD School for the Deaf (Frederick) – high students who are deaf and have an additional disability
3. Humanim, Inc. (Harford County) – high school students with significant disabilities
4. Arc of Baltimore (Baltimore County) – high school students with developmental disabilities
5. Arc of the Northern Chesapeake Region (Harford, Cecil & Kent Counties) – individuals with developmental disabilities

6. Deaf Independent Living Association (Salisbury) – individuals who are deaf or who have a hearing loss
7. Horizon Goodwill (Hagerstown) – recently released offenders with significant disabilities

DORS enhanced paid work experiences, including expanding summer employment programs for high school students and continuing the Governor's QUEST Internship Program, threatened by State budget cuts.

Outdated career training equipment at DORS Workforce & Technology Center was replaced with state-of-the-art equipment, to ensure that graduates are competitive in the workforce, including:

- CADD: Geographic Information Systems equipment and training; laser plotter; computers & software
- Auto Technology: Computerized wheel balancer with top dead center laser
- Food Service: Industry standard ranges, char-broiler and tilt skillet

WTC also updated its assistive technology, so its Rehabilitation Technology Specialists can stay familiar with what's on the market to better advise consumers who can benefit from it.

## **Sidebar:**

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### **Champion for Maryland's Eastern Shore**

Jennifer Whitcomb is in her first term on the MSRC. She is the Executive Director for Deaf Independent Living Association and works on the Eastern Shore to ensure deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals have the employment and independent living skills they need. Here are her thoughts on working with the MSRC, in her own words.

**What are your goals for your time on the Maryland State Rehabilitation Council?**

“My goal is to ensure that statewide services are filtered down to the Eastern Shore and to provide input to enhance DORS direction and goals. I feel I have accomplished expanding awareness that resources grossly lack on the Eastern Shore and that, although the population may be smaller than that in Baltimore, the need is the same, if not greater, because of the lack of resources.”

**Why do you feel the SRC is so important to Marylanders with disabilities that you volunteer your time and commitment to make it work?**

“I do this because I know that this is an exciting time to be at the forefront of new initiatives to improve the employment opportunities of people with disabilities.

“I was a VR client many many years ago so I understand what it is like being a consumer of services. Through this experience, I believe that ultimate independence is securing employment in a job that is enjoyable and maximizes individuals’ potentials and talents. And if serving on the Council affords the opportunity to ensure that I can make a difference in people’s employment choices and assist with changing the perception of ‘disabled’ to ‘able,’ then volunteering for the MSRC is worthy of time invested.”

## **The Work of the MSRC**

### **Review, analyze and advise DORS regarding performance of its responsibilities and quality of its service**

- Public meetings were held throughout Maryland to gather feedback on DORS performance from consumers and other stakeholders, and to discuss topics of concern to the participants. Topics included:
  - Transitioning services for high school students
  - Transportation, especially in suburban and rural areas of the state
  - DORS Workforce & Technology Center
  - American Recovery & Reinvestment Act Stimulus Funding
- Council reviewed the annual DORS consumer satisfaction survey. Eighty eight percent of consumers who received VR services reported overall satisfaction with their experience, a 4% increase over the two previous years.
- The Blindness & Vision Services Committee worked with the University of Maryland on the satisfaction survey given to consumers of DORS Office for Blindness & Vision Services (OBVS). In the most recent, 85.4% reported being satisfied, an increase of 5% over the previous year.
- Council oversaw the work of the Client Assistance Program, which advocates for consumers in Maryland's public VR program.
- Members of DORS Workforce 2010 Task Force met with the Council for the Council's ongoing input into their mission to identify strategies, tools and resources to engage and retain a qualified and dedicated DORS workforce.

## **Ensure that the needs of individuals with disabilities are identified and addressed by state and federal legislators, service providers, employers and the community**

- The Council contacted members of the U.S. Congressional Delegation from Maryland regarding the impact of the federal economic stimulus funding on employment of people with disabilities.
- Council members paid calls on their State senators and delegates to discuss expansion of services to students with disabilities transitioning from high school to a career, support of the Governor's Employment Initiative for Persons with Acquired Brain Injury and the need for additional funding to shorten DORS waiting list for services.
- Letters were issued to the Maryland General Assembly in support of the Tax Credit for Qualifying Employees with Disabilities (SB 604) and the Prosthetic Parity Act (HB 579/SB 341).
- Members of the Employment & Career Development Committee worked with DORS, Maryland businesses and other agencies on issues regarding the Governor's Workforce Investment Board, Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC), and other initiatives. The Committee supported DORS efforts to establish ongoing relationships with key industry sectors to facilitate the employment of DORS consumers. They worked with the agency's business specialists, discussing and analyzing strategies to foster business-to-business relationships between DORS and Maryland employers.
- The Blindness & Vision Service Committee includes ad hoc members from the major advocacy groups for the blind/vision impairment community who act as advocates

within their communities to network job opportunities and promote employment.

### **Collaborate with organizations and other state councils to promote services to underserved/unserved populations**

- Four members of the Council are part of a task force set up to design a State Plan for Services for Persons who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing, based on a model developed by the Arkansas Research & Training Center.
- The Council was instrumental in encouraging the use of ARRA funding in the form of grants to community providers to create programs addressing the needs of unserved and underserved populations. DORS ultimately awarded grants to seven providers around the state, for a variety of programs including ones serving transitioning youth, ex-offenders, or individuals who are deaf, have developmental disabilities or a mental illness.
- The Council worked with the Brain Injury Association of Maryland and the Maryland Traumatic Brain Injury Advisory Board to oversee the Governor's Employment Initiative for Individuals with Acquired Brain Injuries. Over its first two years of operation, the initiative has achieved a successful employment rate of 82% of cases closed for this population.
- Council members attended the biannual meetings of the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) and participated with the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils.
- The Council was also represented at meetings of the National Federation of the Blind, American Council of the Blind and Maryland Rehabilitation Association.

## **Develop and review State goals and priorities, assist in preparation of the State Plan for VR**

- As required by the Rehabilitation Act, the MSRC reviewed and contributed to the State Plan for Vocational Rehabilitation ([md-dors.org/AboutDORS/ Plan](http://md-dors.org/AboutDORS/Plan)). The Council's recommendations in the Plan, many of which were based on stakeholder feedback from public meetings, were that DORS should:
  1. Focus a large part of the ARRA funding received on further reducing, or eliminating, the waiting list.
  2. Direct additional ARRA funding to continuing the Governor's QUEST Internship program, creating summer job experiences for youth, and enhancing services for individuals who are unserved or underserved.
  3. Provide staff training about personal assistance services, particularly as they relate to college students with disabilities.
  4. Assure that students exploring options for post-secondary education have the information they need to compare available disability services.
  5. Develop training or other outreach to high school administrators to ensure that non-special education students with disabilities are being identified for referral to DORS as well as special education students.
  6. Explore creative ways to solve transportation barriers that prevent otherwise job-ready individuals from becoming employed.
  7. Develop more training opportunities for non-college-bound students.
  8. Examine DORS job development and placement programs and their effectiveness.

9. Form a workgroup to study services for people who are deaf or hard-of-hearing.
10. Review methodology of consumer satisfaction surveys to ensure reliability of results.

## **Sidebar:**

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### **Long-Time MSRC Member Bids Fond Farewell**

After serving the maximum two three-year terms on the Council, MTA's Internal ADA Compliance Chief Joyce Callahan stepped down from the MSRC at the end of 2009. Here she reflects in her own words on her work for Marylanders with disabilities:

#### **How did your work with MTA, the disability community and the MSRC relate?**

"I wear dual hats in life – one as a person who is legally blind and one as a person who has dedicated her professional life to the greater good of persons with disabilities. One hat is that of a person who stands for equality, inclusion and independence of all people with disabilities; the other that of a proud, contributing citizen of the disability community."

#### **In your time with the MSRC, what do you feel you were able to accomplish?**

"The legislative visits to the Maryland General Assembly come first to mind. To be recognized year after year and have personal involvement as a real-life role model of a successful individual with a disability and abilities left a lasting impression on the legislators. Another accomplishment was the support and promotion of DORS Office for Blindness & Vision Services as the MSRC's first chair of the committee overseeing that

newly formed office. I was able to be a liaison to the blindness community to ensure that all voices were represented.”

### **What thoughts would you pass on to someone considering joining the MSRC?**

”I got much more than I gave to the MSRC. Everyone asked to serve should be honored and consider it a privilege; I sure did.”

## **Back Cover**

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### **Belief Statement**

The Maryland State Rehabilitation Council (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.

### **2010 Meeting Schedule**

February 2, 2010	Legislative Event, Annapolis, Maryland
April 2010	Statewide Public Meetings
May 5, 2010	Workforce & Technology Center Baltimore, Maryland 4:30 - 7:00 pm
August 2010	Executive Committee Planning Meeting
September 15, 2010	Workforce & Technology Center Baltimore, Maryland 4:30 - 7:00 pm
November 17, 2010	Workforce & Technology Center Baltimore, Maryland

4:30 - 7:00 pm

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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