

# Maryland State Rehabilitation Council



Maryland's Advocates  
for Public Vocational  
Rehabilitation

FY 2010 Annual Report

# 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 2,408 DORS participants who went to work in 2010, 84% will still be working a year from now – the highest retention rate of any Maryland workforce program. They will contribute over \$35.2 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 \$4,413. This cost 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.

### 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/Suzanne R. Page

Assistant State Superintendent in Rehabilitation Services

### Charles Crawford

American Council of the Blind

### Tim Daly

Public Advocate

### Ross Edwards

Owner, Ross & Tine Transportation

### Laurie Elinoff

Maryland Statewide Independent Living Council

### Paulette Epps

Director of Vocational Rehabilitation Services Division, Alliance, Inc.

### 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

Vocational Services Director, 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.



KALI MALLIK, CHAIRPERSON

DANIEL FRYE, VICE CHAIRPERSON

December 2010

To the Citizens of Maryland:

The Maryland State Rehabilitation Council (MSRC) serves 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, 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.

For a number of years, the Council had to sound the alarm about a growing waiting list crisis caused by federal funding shortfalls. By the start of State FY 2009 (July 2008) DORS had 5,230 people with significant disabilities on a waiting list for services – for some of them, it was a year and a half before they could even start the rehabilitation process to go to work! The good news is that, thanks to additional funding allocated by the Governor and Maryland General Assembly, as well as the one-time boost from the federal American Recovery & Reinvestment Act, also known as the stimulus, DORS was able to eliminate the waiting list for individuals with most significant disabilities, and reduce the waiting list for those with significant disabilities down to less than 1,100 people with a delay of less than three months by the start of State FY 2010.

**Now, however, the Council must report a new waiting list crisis, one caused not so much by a lack of financial resources, but by a lack of human resources.**

DORS VR counselors are experts in disability, employment and independent living issues. They provide one-on-one counseling, guidance, job development and placement services, and referral. They know what jobs exist in the community and help people make informed choices about their futures. Many have specialized in providing these services to people who are blind or deaf, have severe mental illness or are high school students with disabilities transitioning to the adult world. To provide these services to consumers with the level of quality, efficiency and dignity that these consumers deserve, rehabilitation professionals generally agree that VR counselors should carry an open caseload of no more than 120 people, and even fewer – up to 80 – for special populations such as deaf and blind.

**Some DORS VR Counselors currently have over 200 people on their open caseloads.**

With caseloads of such large size, things like one-on-one counseling and guidance can get curtailed. Provision of quality and timely services can get pushed aside by the sheer quantity of services that must be provided. And now that these caseloads have stretched to a point where they can absolutely accept no more consumers, the waiting list has begun to grow once again.

**From FY 2010 to FY 2011, the DORS Waiting List for individuals with significant disabilities has increased 51% and the wait time is now 10+ months.**

**By the start of FY 2012, the DORS Waiting List is projected to be 2,780.**

**The waiting list is growing because of a lack of staff to accommodate the growing caseload. Due to the State Hiring Freeze, there aren't enough VR Counselors to properly serve the thousands of Marylanders with disabilities who just want to go to work.**

Every time an employee leaves State employment, their agency must apply for an exception to the Hiring Freeze for permission to fill that position again. Many times, permission is not given at all and the position is abolished. DORS has already lost more than 50 positions – more than 12% of its workforce – since 2007.

**Even when permission is given, the process can take up to six months or even longer**, because it's in the State's interest to keep that vacancy open as long as possible. The irony with a DORS vacancy is that 80% of DORS funding is federal, not State. The positions that DORS requests are paid for primarily with federal, not State money, so there is much less benefit to the State in DORS positions staying open indefinitely.

**Currently, there are DORS offices with vacancy rates of nearly 50%, waiting for permission to fill those vacancies.**

The MSRC is grateful that the Governor and the State have been sensitive in the past to issues such as making sure that DORS could meet its Maintenance of Effort to qualify for federal funds as well as make its federal matching requirements. This is not an issue that will require a funding increase to solve. **These positions are already funded and in the budget.**

DORS just needs to be able to hire the personnel it requires, before the waiting list of Marylanders with disabilities who want to go to work balloons beyond 5,000 again.

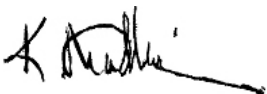
#### **What can be done?**

DORS is a proven, nationally recognized VR program, 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. In order to continue, DORS needs to be able to hire the best people and retain the best people. To that end, the MSRC requests the following:

1. Eliminate the Hiring Freeze on DORS VR Counselors and other direct service delivery personnel and allow existing positions to be recruited as soon as they become vacant.
2. Hold DORS harmless should any upcoming layoffs or other personnel actions become necessary. Consider the 50+ positions DORS has already given up since 2007.

The MSRC hopes to work closely with elected officials, DORS consumers, staff and other stakeholders in the coming year to resolve these staffing issues so that 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,



Kali Mallik  
Chairperson, Maryland State Rehabilitation Council

# DORS VR Programs 2010

- ✓ DORS matched **2,408 qualified individuals to job openings** in Maryland businesses. These new workers contributed \$35.2 million to the State's economy.
- ✓ DORS assisted **124 Maryland businesses** with worksite reviews so they could hire new employees or keep valued employees with disabilities.
- ✓ **162 individuals who are blind or visually impaired were successfully employed.** Their average wage was **\$15.27/hour.**
- ✓ DORS served **6,669 students with disabilities** to prepare them to move from high school to employment, higher education or career training. Transitioning youth represent more than **37% of DORS total open caseload.**
- ✓ DORS helped **1,075 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, **482 individuals went to work.**
- ✓ WTC served **818 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, **100 DORS consumers were hired by 27 different Federal agencies** in jobs including clerical, janitorial, laborer, management, technical, paraprofessional and professional positions.
- ✓ **18 individuals with brain injuries achieved employment** as part of the Governor's Employment Initiative for Persons with Acquired Brain Injuries, bringing the total successfully served in the program's four years to **135.**
- ✓ **252 high school students with disabilities earned work experience** in paid summer employment programs, many of them funded through American Recovery & Reinvestment Act grants.
- ✓ **27 DORS consumers** completed the annual **Governor's QUEST Internship Program** for Persons with Disabilities, which provides three-month internships in State government. **Two were hired immediately** into State contractual positions.
- ✓ For FY 2010, the Maryland public VR program **exceeded the Federal performances standards** for both employment outcomes and minority access to services.

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

## 2010 Comprehensive Statewide Assessment of the Rehabilitation and Career Needs of Individuals with Disabilities

Every three years, DORS and the MSRC conduct a Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment in order to ascertain the needs of individuals with disabilities throughout the state of Maryland. The 2010 assessment produced the following recommendations:

- ✓ **The overriding VR services need of individuals with disabilities in Maryland is equitable distribution of federal VR funds.** While other recommendations address ways to incrementally improve VR services, continuation of historical underfunding of Maryland VR in relations to other states will make it very difficult to implement changes that result in more people with disabilities achieving employment.
- ✓ Provide staff development for DORS staff and community partners in areas like employment services, needs of/resources for special populations and career counseling.
- ✓ Realign staff/new positions to meet needs of special populations, including blind, deaf/blind, deaf or hard of hearing individuals; non-special education (504 Plan) transitioning students; people with autism spectrum disorders.
- ✓ Enhance relationships with community partners, like community rehabilitation programs, One-Stop Career Centers, college Disability Support Services staff, local education authorities and the Library for the Blind & Physically Handicapped.
- ✓ Expand services offered by WTC and community programs for special populations.
- ✓ In collaboration with the Maryland Technology Assistance Program, assess and enhance current resources for providing assistive technology.
- ✓ Consider expansion of Pathways program and/or similar community programs for individuals on the autism spectrum.
- ✓ Continue outreach to minorities, especially those of Hispanic and Asian background.
- ✓ Explore outreach to veterans' organizations to assure that Maryland veterans are aware of the resources DORS provides as they re-enter Maryland communities and employment.
- ✓ Enhance capacity and expertise of community rehabilitation programs in the area of job development and job placement; emphasize the development of middle skill jobs.



## Maryland SRC Bids Fond Farewell to Long-Time DORS Director Bob Burns



**MSRC Vice-Chair Dan Frye (left) and Chair Kali Malik (right) present retiring DORS Director Bob Burns with a small token of the Council's esteem at his last official Council meeting.**

When the inaugural meeting of the newly established State Rehabilitation Advisory Council began on January 26, 1994, newly appointed Assistant State Superintendent in Rehabilitation Services Robert A. Burns welcomed the Council members. From the outset, Bob Burns recognized the value and contributions the Council could bring to Marylanders with disabilities seeking employment. He was instrumental in creating a relationship between DORS and the MSRC characterized by mutual respect and commitment to improving the lives of individuals with disabilities.

In May 2010, after a 16-year partnership, the MSRC said farewell to Bob Burns. Mr. Burns retired from State service after more than 30 years, a proud career in VR that began with a grad school internship at the then-Maryland Rehabilitation Center (WTC) and led him to positions as varied as field counselor and supervisor, disability claims examiner and policy & planning specialist, before being appointed DORS Director.

While the MSRC is sad to see Robert Burns go, it wishes him well and thanks him for his many years of service and leadership devoted to the citizens of Maryland. The MSRC values his strong commitment to the disability community and his devotion to seamless administration of the Maryland public VR program, and is commissioning a plaque to be displayed in WTC honoring his service to Marylanders with disabilities.

## 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, including one "virtual" meeting by teleconference, to gather feedback on DORS performance from consumers and other stakeholders, and to discuss topics of concern to the participants. Topics included:
  - Preliminary findings of the Statewide Needs Assessment
  - Funding issues for the public VR program in Maryland
  - Recommendations from a DORS taskforce about services for people who are Deaf or hard of hearing
  - Maryland's Skills2Compete initiative
- ✓ MSRC members were involved in the planning, conduct, analysis and reporting of the triennial Statewide Assessment of the Needs of Individuals with Disabilities.
- ✓ Council reviewed the annual DORS consumer satisfaction survey. 88% of consumers who received VR services reported overall satisfaction with their experience.
- ✓ 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 reviewed the work of the Client Assistance Program, which advocates for consumers in Maryland's public VR program.
- ✓ The Policy & Planning Committee reviewed DORS Comprehensive System of Personnel Development and provided feedback on the federal five-year grant application for the VR staff training program.

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

- ✓ Council members paid calls on their State senators and delegates to discuss protecting DORS budget from further budget cuts in order to shorten DORS waiting list for services and in support of SB 58: Workers' Compensation for DORS Unpaid Work-Based Learning Experiences.
- ✓ Several MSRC members testified before the Maryland General Assembly in support of SB 58, which allows individuals in DORS-sponsored unpaid work-based learning experiences and internships to be covered under Workers' Compensation laws. The Council also issued letters in support of SB 221: the Disability Employment Tax Credit.
- ✓ Council leadership worked with staff from Senator Mikulski's office regarding the recent General Accounting Office report on the federal funding formula disparity that negatively impacts VR funding in Maryland.
- ✓ Members of the Employment & Career Development Committee worked with DORS Workforce & Technology Center on the realignment of resources related to employment outcomes and training programs 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 employers, with a particular focus on Federal hiring of individuals with disabilities.
- ✓ 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

- ✓ MSRC Policy & Planning Committee Chair served as a prime study participant in the 36th Institute on Rehabilitation Issues year-long study: *"The Vocational Rehabilitation – State Rehabilitation Council Partnership: Working Together Works"* sponsored by The George Washington University Center for Rehabilitation Counseling Research and Education.
- ✓ Members of the Council serve on a taskforce designing the Maryland State Model for Services for Persons who are Deaf & Hard of Hearing.
- ✓ 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 the Maryland Rehabilitation Association.

## Develop and review State goals and priorities, assist in preparation of the State Plan for Vocational Rehabilitation

- ✓ As required by the Rehabilitation Act, the MSRC contributed to the State Plan for Vocational Rehabilitation ([md-dors.org/AboutDORS/Plan](http://md-dors.org/AboutDORS/Plan)). Among the Council's recommendations in the Plan, some of which were based on stakeholder feedback gathered at the public meetings, were that DORS:
  1. Review methodology of satisfaction surveys, and explore web-based surveys and other alternative response methods. Consider strategies to expand sample size and reach underrepresented groups.
  2. Emphasize the Counselor's role in working with college Disability Support Services offices and developing appropriate individualized college supports. Also, explore providing college students with non-adaptive computers as a support for their rehab program.
  3. Implement outreach strategies to assure that non-special education secondary students (those with 504 plans and serious health conditions) are aware of transition services available through DORS.
  4. Explore the enhancement of agency relationships with the Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA), as the DDA further develops their Employment First initiative.
  5. Consider developing a formal referral relationship with Vehicles for Change in order to facilitate individualized transportation solutions for maintaining employment.
  6. Continue to work with the Governor's Workforce Investment Board on the development of strategies and measurable outcomes related to the State's Skills2Compete "middle-skill" training and employment initiative, to respond both to DORS consumer and Maryland workforce needs.
  7. Strive to increase job development and job placement capacities and effectiveness by studying existing job placement models (e.g., OBVS Job Squad, Business Liaisons, WTC, JDPR, etc.) in order to identify best practices and seek systemic improvements.
  8. Explore various means to educate employers regarding technology solutions for the employment of individuals who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing, including a possible video.
  9. Consider expansion of the Pathways college support model for individuals with autism, and other community program development needs relative to individuals on the autism spectrum.

## Suzanne Page, Newly Appointed DORS Director, Welcomed to Maryland SRC



Suzanne R. Page was appointed Assistant State Superintendent in Rehabilitation Services by the Maryland State Board of Education on May 25, 2010.

The Maryland State Rehabilitation Council is pleased and honored to welcome Sue Page as the new Director of the Maryland Division of Rehabilitation Services. Mrs. Page's appointment assures continuing strong leadership for Maryland's public VR program and a smooth transition at DORS.

Mrs. Page began her career with DORS in 1974 as a disability examiner in Disability Determination Services and has served as DDS Director and a member of the DORS Executive Staff since 2006. Under her leadership, DDS received numerous awards from the Social Security Administration for excellence in serving the citizens of Maryland. The MSRC is confident Mrs. Page will carry that distinguished service on to her new role as DORS Director.

At her first MSRC meeting as DORS Director, Sue Page addressed the Council: "I want to say what a pleasure it is to be a part of this important group. I can't say enough about the positive work the Council has done. The Council has provided the guidance and the support to DORS to help us move forward.

"I know that we'll continue the tradition of support, collaboration and partnership that the Rehabilitation Council and DORS have enjoyed and which has been so productive over the years. I know that together we'll expand initiatives that will have a positive impact on the lives of persons with disabilities in Maryland."

## **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.**

## **2011 Meeting Schedule**

February 3, 2011 Legislative Event  
Annapolis, Maryland

April 2011 Statewide Public Meetings

May 4, 2011 Workforce & Technology Center  
Baltimore, Maryland  
4:30-7:00 pm

August 2011 Executive Committee Planning Meeting

September 14, 2011 Workforce & Technology Center  
Baltimore, Maryland  
4:30-7:00 pm

November 16, 2011 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:**

**Maryland State Rehabilitation Council**  
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