



December 31, 2025

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 students, youths, and adults 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 the Maryland State Department of Education's (MSDE) Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS). Established by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, the Council reports its findings annually to the U.S. Department of Education's Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), the Governor of Maryland and, most importantly, the people of Maryland.

## For Program Year 2025

### **DORS Updates**

#### **Reallotment:**

In addition to the federal funding originally received for Fiscal Year 2025 from the Rehabilitation Services Administration, DORS received a reallocation in the amount of \$2.0 million.

#### **MPPI Grant:**

The five-year Maryland Pathways to Partnership Initiative (MPPI) grant was awarded to Maryland through RSA's Disability Innovation Fund. MPPI partners DORS with four local education agencies (Allegany, Caroline, Charles, and Washington Counties), four Centers for Independent Living (Bay Area CIL, Independence Now, Resources for Independence, and Southern Maryland CIL), the University of Maryland Center for Transition and Career Innovation, MSDE Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services, Abt Global, the Parents Place of Maryland, and the Maryland Department of Disabilities.

#### **CSAVR:**

Dr. Erikk Bonner, Assistant State Superintendent for DORS, sent a DORS designee to the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) the week of November 3-7, 2025, in San Diego, California.

#### **Counselor Caseloads:**

Over the next year, DORS Office of Field Services will continue working to address the imbalance of rehabilitation counselor caseloads statewide. On average, the number of consumers on DORS counselor caseloads continues to be two to three times higher than the national average.

### **Waiting List:**

The waiting list for DORS services continues to be monitored and individuals moved off as quickly as possible. Each month the Quality Assurance (QA) staff evaluate the total number of Referrals received, Applications for Service completed, Eligibility Determinations made, and the number of eligible individuals added to the waiting list to determine if there are enough resources and staff capacity to move individuals off the waiting list and into active service.

When conditions support moving individuals from the waiting list, the QA staff work with DORS Executive Team to identify eligible individuals in order of their application date and contact them to confirm the individual is still interested in receiving DORS employment services. Then, a rehabilitation counselor will work with the new consumer to create an Individualized Plan for Employment detailing the next steps in their program.

### **Workforce & Technology Services:**

DORS Workforce & Technology Services has been working on implementing several community-based workforce programs over the past year, including:

- Year-over-year enrollment for WTC programs is up 23% versus last year.
- Established a partnership with Baltimore City Public Schools where four students have been granted interviews for food service positions, and where Dunbar High School will be used as a pilot site for the food services training program.
- Anne Arundel County Public Schools had 15 applicants for food service jobs.
- Two summer open houses drew close to 550 attendees and 62% of the attendees came from more than 20 miles away.
- Four new pre-ETS programs were offered, targeted to individuals with autism and those with visual impairments.
- The Driver's Education Program doubled capacity for driver's education classes for individuals with autism.
- Piloted a specific class for deaf consumers, which concluded on August 12th and will be repeated annually.
- Added a seventh community college, the College of Southern Maryland, to the Pathways program for students with autism.
- Program provides additional support with self-advocacy, communication, and organizational skills.
- Partnership with Salisbury University and Warwick Community College to create a hospitality and food service traffic training program on the Eastern Shore.
- Discussed the ILOB program and how to use community resources and staff differently.
- Sent 20+ students to Blind Industries and Services of Maryland for two four-week programs.
- BEP is working on a half-day program on careers in the Business Enterprise Program.
- WTC and OBVS staff are working on a four-week training for Pre-Employment Transition Services in conjunction with the ILOB Teachers for the Blind

### **Office of Communications and Accessibility:**

- Maryland State Rehabilitation Council and DORS held their annual public meetings on September 16th at 4:00 p.m. and the 18th at 10:00 a.m.
- The state of Maryland is changing its website template to a new content management system called Drupal and will use the MSRC website as their test site.

- Change in the ADA goes into effect next April and requires digital accessibility across all platforms. Two trainings will be offered, one in September and one in October.
- CSAVR is doing a campaign called 100 stories in 100 days. One of the stories DORS submitted was selected and posted on social media. The link is available on DORS Facebook page and LinkedIn.
- MSRC Website has gone through several updates. The changes included accessibility features and tabs for joining meetings.
- Oversaw 230+ community outreach and education events, providing resources, education, and information.

#### **Office of Field Services (OFS):**

- OFS closed out the last program year (ending June 30) at 96% of its successful rehabilitation goal.
- Reconstituted the Self Employment Committee to review existing business proposals and plans and provide feedback and recommendations regarding approvals.
- Implemented a revamped Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) process for referral applications, and qualifications, aimed at improving efficiency and communication with families and LEAs through SARA AI. The system allows LEAs to submit documentation directly into cases, addressing prior feedback received from focus groups.
- CTCI grant that previously handled referrals closed in July.
- Earn grant with Howard Community College funded nationally recognized credentials for Certified Logistics Associate and Certified Logistics Technician.
- Certified logistics Associate course begins October 22<sup>nd</sup> and tuition is free to individuals with disabilities referred by DORS counselors.

#### **Client Assistance Program:**

The Maryland Client Assistance Program (CAP) is pleased to reflect on a year marked by meaningful advocacy, expanded outreach, and strengthened partnerships. In the Federal Fiscal Year 2025 (October 1, 2024 – September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2025), CAP provided Information and Referral services to over 800 individuals, helping to give the knowledge and resources needed to navigate services throughout the state. Additionally, CAP offered direct advocacy support to more than 100 individuals, supporting them to overcome barriers and move closer to their independent living and employment goals.

#### **MSRC Activities**

##### **NCSRC:**

The Chair of the Maryland State Rehabilitation Council, Dr. Katherine Jones, represented Maryland at the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils the weekend of November 1-2, 2025, in San Diego, California.

##### **Annual Retreat:**

The MSRC held their annual retreat on August 18, 2025. Agenda items included discussions on the federal budget, quality assurance measures, a demo of the MSRC website, an overview of the guidebook for SRCs, and strategic planning measures. Sub-committees broke out into their own private sessions to identify their vision and goals for the upcoming year. A fully

accessible video was created and posted on the MSRC website to highlight the purpose of the MSRC and to capture the day's events.

### **Call to Action Campaign:**

Chair, Dr. Katherine Jones, held a statewide "Call to Action" virtual meeting on July 2, 2025, to update all stakeholders on the risk of losing federal funding for FY 26. The call provided stakeholders information on the proposed budget cuts and the means for how Marylanders could advocate on behalf of DORS.

### **Sub-Committees**

#### **Blindness and Vision Services Committee:**

**Chair:** Penny Reeder

**Staff Liaison:** Toni March

**Mission Statement:** To ensure high quality services leading to successful employment and independence are provided for individuals with vision loss or blindness

#### **This committee's focus is on the following:**

1. Assist in development and monitoring of program plans and planning activities of the DORS OBVS.
2. Participate in the DORS policy development and review process as related to Blindness and Vision services.
3. Participate in Program Evaluation activities to determine effectiveness and outcomes of the DORS OBVS.
4. Participate in development and review of DORS Priority and Standing Objectives related to OBVS.
5. Assist in the development and monitoring of the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development regarding staff serving individuals with blindness and vision impairment.
6. Review and monitor DORS grant for Independent Living Services for Older Individuals who are Blind.
7. Develop means to assess satisfaction of consumers served by OBVS and review findings.

#### **Employment and Career Development Committee:**

**Chair:** Neill Christopher

**Vice Chair:** Vacant

**Members:** LaBria Shannon, Marlo Lemon, Chandra Smith, Penny Reeder, Kristen Patterson-LABOR, Michele Hamlin, Sherria Young

**Staff Liaison:** Wanda Peele, Tom Liniak

**Mission Statement:** Including all stakeholders (CRPs, Families, Employers, Consumers) as we make employment and training opportunities available for differently abled individuals. We will do this by networking, sharing experiences both positive and negative and educating us to open doors for employment and sustainability.

#### **This committee's focus is the following:**

1. Educate each other through networking, and (maybe more importantly), what doesn't work regarding employing differently abled individuals.
2. Share this knowledge with CRPs.

3. Work on keeping relationships with employers sustainable—what if the initial contact with the employer leaves; what if the DORS contact is no longer available?

**Strategies:**

1. Highlight at least one CRP/DORS success story from each DORS region. Encourage businesses to participate in this committee.
2. This committee will meet quarterly at 4-5 PM on Monday afternoon.

**Policy and Planning Sub-Committee:**

**Chair:** Kristina Richards

**Vice-Chair:** Vacant

**Members:** Dr. Erikk Bonner, Dr. Katherine Jones, Marla Friedman, Chandra Smith

**Staff Liaison:** Beth Lash

**Mission Statement:**

To establish a team for leveraging our individual talents and expertise to support the Council and, ultimately, the agency in delivering comprehensive and individualized rehabilitation services.

**This committee's focus is the following:**

1. Assist in the development and monitoring of DORS State Plan, program plans and planning activities.
2. Participate in the development of annual goals and objectives.
3. Review and monitor the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment.

**Strategies:**

1. Finalizing the change in policy for Self-Employment plan for job seekers.
2. Discussing changes or amending current policies to meet the financial restrictions the agency currently has but with the goal of still being able to serve job seekers.
3. Streamline the process of policy amendment and creation allowing for public comment and review by stakeholders.

**Public Relations and Quality Assurance Committee (PRQA):**

**Co-Chairs:** Michele Hamlin and Jamie Stoner

**Members:** Todd Tolson, Dr. Katherine Jones, Hunter Whitt, Marla Friedman, Corey Richo

**Staff Liaison:** Kimberlee Schultz

**Mission Statement:** Marylanders with disabilities, and their families, and the broader community need clear, accurate, accessible information about public vocational rehabilitation programs and outcomes. The Public Relations and Quality Assurance Committee will provide collaborative communication, outreach, and quality advisory support for the MSRC and DORS. We will develop and disseminate public information that strengthens awareness of VR services, review quality and consumer experience data, and provide recommendations to improve transparency, accessibility, and service excellence. Our committee will focus solely on internal operations and elevate public engagement, amplify consumer voice, showcase achievements, monitor quality, and ensure that MSRC's work is visible, trusted, and clearly connected to better outcomes for Marylanders with disabilities.

**This committee's focus is the following:**

1. Establish clear, consistent, accessible PRQA messaging aligned with MSRC mission and vision.
2. Expand public engagement and awareness of MSRC programs and impact.
3. Strengthen quality, transparency, and reporting across PRQA deliverables.
4. Enhance collaborative storytelling and advocacy support across MSRC and DORS.
5. Improve PRQA operational excellence and committee enablement.
6. Strengthen PRQA's legislative and stakeholder communication influence.

**Strategies:**

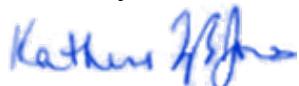
1. Publish updated MSRC messaging and PRQA templates.
2. Launch a structured monthly social media cadence.
3. Publish redesigned, accessible Annual Report.
4. Launch a quarterly storytelling series featuring consumers, partners, and MSRC Committees.
5. Publish an annual editorial calendar aligned with MSRC meetings, state cycles, and legislative timelines.
6. Develop a Legislative Education Packet.

## **Concluding Thoughts**

It is with great confidence that I state that Maryland's Division of Rehabilitation Services is a champion in partnering with Marylanders with disabilities to develop employment opportunities. Dr. Erikk Bonner, Director of DORS, and DORS staff worked closely with the MSRC in developing strategies to better serve our communities. It is with great pleasure to share the MSRC is operating at full capacity at 26 members strong, actively participating in quarterly and sub-committee meetings.

Please let me know if I can be of further assistance in providing more of DORS great accomplishments over the past year.

Sincerely,



Dr. Katherine L.R. Jones  
Chair, Maryland State Rehabilitation Council