

**Maryland State Rehabilitation Council**  
**Minutes**  
**February 10, 2021**

**Members Present:**

Anil Lewis, Chair  
Marsha Legg, Co-Chair  
Scott Dennis  
Chris Conklin  
Denise Carter-McCormick  
Christy Stuart  
Rene Averitt-Sanzone  
Hunter Whitt  
Calvin Doudt  
Mindy Lipsey  
Michelle Day  
Tom Laverty  
Tassie Thompson  
Andrea Landry  
Katherine Jones

**DORS Liaisons to Council:**

Jody Boone – OFS Director  
Kim Schultz, DORS – Public Relations  
Jean Jackson – WTC Director  
Toni March – OBVS Director  
Darlene Peregoy – AFS Director

**New Members Awaiting Appointment**

Penny Reeder

**Guests:**

Wanda Peele – Business Services  
Laurie Elinoff

**Support Staff for Council:**

Sandy Bowser  
Patrick Peto

**Welcome/Introduction – Anil Lewis, Chair**

Anil Lewis, Chair welcomed everyone to the State Rehabilitation Council meeting and introduced Ms. Penny Reeder as a new member.

Welcome to Ms. Penny Reeder. Penny is a contract trainer with the Department of Veterans Affairs. She teaches the Veterans Affairs employees who are blind to use their assistive

technology. Penny has served on the State Rehabilitation Council in previous years and she is happy to be back on board.

The November 18, 2020 minutes were approved as written with corrections to spell out acronyms. After these corrections are made, the November minutes will be posted on the Maryland State Rehabilitation Council website.

### **DORS Budget FY 22 – Scott Dennis**

In early January, the Governor released his budget for FY 22. The good news – the governor's budget in total gives the division in state money a little over 15 million dollars. Some of these funds are allocated for the Independent Living Program which is funding for the Centers of Independent Living around the state. Another portion is allocated for the Independent Living Older Blind Program and the Supported Employment Program. The rest of the funds are allocated for the Case Services budget as well as a portion of salaries for the Division staff. At this time, the Division has not received any permanent or contractual staff position cuts.

There is still a tight hiring freeze throughout the state. As of the end of December, there were approximately 127 vacancies in the agency. This includes all five programs within the Division of Rehabilitation Services – Headquarters, the Workforce & Technology Center, Disability Determination Services, Office of Field Services, and Office for Blindness & Vision Services. The Disability Determination Services had about 40 vacant positions and the VR program had about 80 vacancies. Unfortunately, the number of vacancies has grown to the mid 130's due to retirements and resignations. We are currently working with the Department of Budget and Management to fill these vacant positions.

Congress has passed the funding for Federal Funds FY21 which is October 1, 2020 – September 30, 2021. DORS is in good shape financially, we just need to be able to fill vacancies.

**Senate Bill 290:** – this was targeted at Special Education but DORS was included to provide extended services for students with disabilities after graduation. This created a dilemma for DORS as the law states if the individual is over the age of 21, they are not entitled to Pre-Employment Transition but would need to be Vocational Rehabilitation. This would mean that DORS would need to create a special Transition Program, set aside additional funds, and hire approximately 15-17 individuals separate from the Division. After reviewing the details and the high cost of implementation, the sponsors will reconvene to take a look at this.

### **State Rehabilitation Council Roles and Responsibilities:**

One of the roles and responsibility of the State Rehab Council is to review regulatory changes. One change that will need to be reviewed – DORS no longer provides Independent Living Services. These services are now provided by the Centers for Independent Living. This change will not be finalized for several months. DORS focus is to provide services to the Independent Living Program for Older Blind. DORS will be seeking comments from the SRC in the near future on this legislative change as well as any public comments.

**DORS Program Updates:**

**Office of Field Services (OFS) Report – Jody Boone**

The Office of Field Services is pleased to announce three promotions, effective February 24, 2021: Kerrie Handakas, Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor, Baltimore City; Lawrence Wright, Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor, Suitland; and Francis Fomba, Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor, Wheaton.

The Office of Field Services staff continue to provide Pre-Employment and Vocational Rehabilitation services remotely. Adult consumers are receiving in-person services from providers, while students with disabilities are still receiving remote services, with a few exceptions. We are considering opening in-person services to students as early as April 1, 2021.

We are currently updating a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) template so that we can move forward with accepting unsolicited proposals for the summer work based learning experiences for students. As of now, we are planning to allow in-person or telework experiences.

The hiring exception for the Statewide Coordinator for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services was recently approved. Derick Serra will coordinate the interview questions, panel, and schedule with a representative from the Department of Disabilities.

There is a Transition Youth (TY) check-in meeting scheduled for February 11, 2021; this type of meeting allows Transition Youth counselors and supervisors to ask questions and receive Agency updates regarding transition youth matters throughout the state.

DORS staff are constantly looking for ways to refine our best practices and processes while teleworking. The new online referral system that we began using in December is just one exciting example. Local school system staff will receive training regarding the new referral process in mid-March.

In an effort to provide an opportunity for staff to remotely socialize and to ensure all staff are receiving accurate and timely information, we have begun a monthly virtual “Coffee Hour”. This informal format allows staff to share good news, ask questions, and learn about ongoing projects throughout the agency. Approximately 175 staff attended the first Coffee Hour in February, and a lot of positive feedback was received. The Coffee Hour will be held again on March 3<sup>rd</sup>, and will be facilitated by representatives from the Office of Field Services, Office for Blindness & Vision Services and the Workforce & Technology Center.

**Office of Blindness & Vision Services (OBVS) – Toni March**

**Pre-Employment/Transitioning**

The first year of the current National Federation of the Blind (NFB) Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) has completed with great success, the Office of Blindness & Vision Services is looking forward to the second year and beyond.

The Transitioning Coalition is scheduled for February 22, 2021, to plan for the DORS Transition Meeting, which is scheduled for April 8, 2021.

The Office for Blindness & Vision Services continues to provide virtual Pre-Employment services including National Federal of the Blind (NFB) career mentoring, Explore Work through Blind Industries and Services of Maryland (BISM), Maryland School for the Blind (MSB), Columbia Lighthouse for the Blind (CLB) and other Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs).

#### Business Enterprise Program for the Blind (BEP):

As of December 2020, six months into the State Fiscal year, the Business Enterprise Program for the Blind (BEP) only achieved 26% of the revenue. The current trend indicates that we will only anticipate 505 of the projected revenue. Out of 69 facilities, currently 20 facilities are open. Out of 51 Licensed Blind Vendors, 14 are operating.

Since March 23, 2020, a Weekly Town hall meeting has been instituted with State Licensing Agency and managers to share information and provide upward mobility.

There are two new trainees participating in the new classroom requirement via Hadley. They are also incorporating an hourly session with the BEP team to clarify any issues with the trainees.

Most recently DORS has been notified that we will receive approximately \$550,00 to make financial relief and restoration payments to offset losses of blind vendors that occurred during calendar year 2020, if those losses were not otherwise compensated; and for the set aside purposes authorized by 34 C.F.R 395.9, but only if any funds remain after offsetting the losses incurred by blind vendors during calendar year 2020.

#### Independent Living:

The document that was sent to the SRC outlines the changes that are recommended for the Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR). The document shows exactly what is in COMAR, and the recommended changes are as follows:

- Where the Independent Living program is mentioned, the wording is changed to reflect independent Living Older Blind.
- Where the consumers who receive the Independent Living Older Blind Serves are mentioned, it is specified that the consumers are “older blind” and the eligibility requirements for the Independent Living Older Blind are details.
- The services specific to the Independent Living Older Blind program are outlined.
- Any place where procedures for the Independent Living Older Blind Program differ from the Vocational Program, the specific procedures for the Independent Living Older Blind Program are noted.

#### Administration and Financial Services (A&F) – Darlene Peregoy:

On January 8, 2021, DORS held *Goodbye 2020, Hello 2021*, a virtual event that replaced our typical holiday party. It went well and plans are underway to have another event in late spring, early summer. The DORS/MRA (Maryland Rehabilitation Counselor Association) conference is also scheduled (at this point) to be in person on November 4 and 5, 2021, at the Sheraton in Towson. This will be dependent on the state of things, pandemic-wise.

DORS was awarded an Innovative Training in Vocational Rehabilitation Grant last summer through George Washington University (GWU). The goals of the grant are to facilitate more effective delivery of rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities through training programs for vocational rehabilitation personnel; to demonstrate the effectiveness of new types of training programs for rehabilitation personnel; and to develop novel innovative training modules to supplement existing university rehabilitation counseling programs and In-Service Training programs. All DORS staff are required to take the following modules through a learning management system operated by the VR Development Group in partnership with GWU: the first two trainings were due to be completed by January 31, 2021.

- Pre-Guide to Innovative Training
- History of Vocational Rehabilitation
- Intro to VR Part 1: Basics by February 28, 2021
- Intro to VR Part 2: Eligibility by February 28, 2021
- Intro to VR Part 3: Comprehensive Assessment by March 31, 2021
- Intro to VR Part 4: Individualized Plan for Employment by March 31, 2021
- Intro to VR Part 5: Job Development & employment Acquisition by April 30, 2021
- Intro to VR Part 6: Case Closure by April 30, 2021
- The Post-Guide to Innovative Training by May 31, 2021

The DORS Pandemic Recovery Task Force continues to meet bi-weekly to keep informed on the state's COVID-19 statistics and vaccination distribution plan and address issues relative to DORS employees, program and services.

The Social Security Administration scanning project of files that need to be retained for reimbursement claims has concluded. We will continue to scan files as needed to move to all-electronic case files.

Our next Community Rehabilitation Advisory Committee meeting is scheduled for February 23, 2021. It is an open virtual meeting and all Community Rehabilitation Program's (CRPs) have received an invitation to attend.

Next week, DORS will be installing the latest version of AWARE (DORS Case-Management System) on our Test Serves. We are also upgrading the services to the latest Server Operating System (2019) and SQ: Server (2019). Production servers will be upgraded once we test and confirm stability.

Within the next several months we will be installing AWARESign. This will allow consumers to electronically sign forms that are core to AWARE, such as Application, IPE (Individualized Plan for Employment), Barriers to Employment, etc.

Donna Lettow and Randy Diehl have been in discussions with DoIT concerning moving our current Intranet to a new platform.

To support staff training needs related to telework, MIS and Staff Development sent out a survey to staff inquiring about IT Training topics of interest. As a result, the first topic will cover using Cisco Jabber.

We are in the process of developing an MOU tracking system that will help all responsible parties in DORS track and take action on MOUs throughout the development and approval process.

The Program Income Branch has processed and received SSA reimbursement for about \$1.2 million in the first four months of this fiscal year.

**Workforce & Technology Center – Jean Jackson:**

JAWS virtual and in-person is continuing and has been very successful.

Four consumers completed and passed the remote 30 hour driving in school in January.

Sephora Warehouse Training will start a new class on February 22, 2021. Six consumers from the previous two classes have been hired at \$15.00 per hour with benefits.

Six consumers have completed the Autism Program Planning for Success. The next class is in March.

Environmental Services now has four consumers at the Workforce & Technology Center for in-person services.

Office Tech Training is now completing the pilot virtual program.

Self-Advocacy Support Group for Pre-Employment consumers who are blind and visually impaired began February 3, 2021 with five consumers.

Work Readiness is now completing the virtual class and new consumers are being added to the in-person classes.

Auto Detailing – one consumer is advancing to refinishing and one returning refinishing consumer is pursuing On-the-Job (OJT) Training to finish his programming.

The Auto General Services Tech has graduated two consumers and two new students start the program next week.

**Quality Assurance & Policy – Patrick Peto**

FY2020 Quarter 2 - 911 Report:

Measurable Skills Gains – 250

- 0 Educational Functional Level
- 41 Secondary
- 185 Post Secondary
- 2 Training Milestone
- 22 Skills Progression
- Overall 1,447 are enrolled in an education program

FY20 Quarter 2 Pre-ETS Paid Services Provided:

- Job Exploration – 869
- Work-Based Learning – 794
- Counseling on Enrollment Opportunities – 373
- Workplace Readiness – 1,280
- Self-Advocacy – 918
- There were 173 Successful Exiters in Quarter 2

Policy Announcements & Upcoming Policy:

Program Directive 21-04 - End of Temporary Process for Behavioral Health Supported Employment Eligibility; Begin Using OPTUM/Incedo

In March, 2020, DORS and BHA began the use of the coversheet as a temporary process for providers to complete and submit the DORS application for jointly served consumers as a remedy to the technical challenges experienced within the implementation of the new Administrative Services Organization, OPTUM.

Beginning November 16, 2020, **the use of the coversheet is being discontinued**. At that time DORS staff will be required to use OPTUM/Incedo system to gather the DORS application and associated eligibility information for individuals who receive Behavioral Health Supported Employment (Traditional and EBPSE).

Program Directive 21-05 - Updates to DORS Eligibility Policy, Procedures and Forms

This directive updates DORS Determination of Eligibility/Presumption of Eligibility criteria for individuals who have been determined eligible for DDA services, and related policy in alignment with the Memorandum of Understanding between DORS and the Maryland Department of Health, Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA).

Individuals who have been determined eligible for DDA Services and are pursuing competitive integrated employment are presumed eligible for VR services, but subject to Order of Selection based upon functional capacities seriously limited.

Program Directive 21-06 – New Online Referral Process

This new process facilitates direct entry of referral information into the **AWARE** case management system, and includes additional support from Central Office administrative staff to ensure initial contact letters and application materials are provided to individuals referred within 10 working days of receipt of referral.

Program Directive – 21-07 - Management of Consumer Financial Participation by Program Income Office

This directive updates and clarifies policy related to Consumer Financial Participation specific to Workforce & Technology Center career training programs and modification services, to which a financial contribution may apply.

Program Directive 21-08 - Social Security Benefits – Verification Procedures and Guidance

This Directive issues an update to the policies and procedures for the verification of Social Security benefits and amounts for DORS consumers.

### Program Directive 21-09 - Increased Rate for Providing Services to Individuals Requiring Communication Support Due to Hearing Loss

DORS provides Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and Pre-Employment Transitioning Services (Pre-ETS) through approved community providers to individuals with most significant disabilities to achieve competitive integrated employment. Historically it has been difficult to find providers willing to offer the level of support required by individuals who rely on American Sign Language (ASL) due to the high cost of interpreter services and/or lack of qualified individuals within their organizations. DORS is making an enhanced rate, the Communication Support Enhanced Rate (CSER), available to Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs) which have a staff person with demonstrable ASL proficiency.

### Upcoming Policy:

The next Policy Review Committee meeting will be held February 18, 2021 and will discuss the following policies:

- Increased Rate in providing services to individuals requiring blind and vision services – providers who complete OBVS training eligible for 25% increased rate.
- Consent to release confidential information updates. New form “Consent to Disclose to Service Providers”
- Pre-ETS changes: students applying for VR services earlier than next to last year of school.
- Electronic signature – exploring feasibility of several tools: Adobe Pro, Docusign, and AWARE Sign.

### Chairperson/Vice Chairperson Comments – Anil Lewis & Marsha Legg:

Anil expressed his appreciation for the work that DORS does and how important it is to recognize DORS efforts during this stressful time.

Marsha would like to share that she continues to be impressed with the volume of work that DORS has accomplished this past year. She is very happy to hear DORS is also providing social interaction for the staff with the Goodbye 2020, Hello 2021 event and the monthly Coffee Hours.

### Director Report – Scott Dennis

DORS Strategic Plan – was sent out to the State Rehabilitation Council to review. The current DORS Strategic Plan will end in September 30, 2021. Part of the responsibility of the State Rehabilitation Council is to participate in developing a strategic plan for the agency. A meeting will be scheduled sometime late spring early summer to bring DORS staff and members of the State Rehabilitation Council together to discuss the strategic plan that will be put in effect for the next three years.

Client Satisfaction Survey – this survey is conducted for the purpose of informing the State Rehabilitation Council how DORS is performing as an agency in providing services to consumers.



DORS will send invitations out by mail to a random sample of consumers with Open VR cases, along with consumers with Closed VR cases from December 1, 2020 through Feb. 28th. 2021.

The Customer Satisfaction Survey will begin March 1<sup>st</sup> and will remain open through April 2<sup>nd</sup>. Survey questions – including feedback on Virtual Experience include:

- About DORS in General
- About My current or Most Recent DORS Counselor
- About the DORS Application Process
- About the DORS Plan Development Process and Services Provided
- About Closure Outcomes
- Option for contact to discuss issues
- Additional feedback

This survey will be completed quarterly.

**Membership Discussion:**

Scott will have DORS staff assigned to the committees to serve as the liaison and schedule meetings.

Policy & Quality Assurance – Tom Laverty, Chair

- Chris Conklin
- Marsha Legg
- Christy Stuart
- Renee Averitt-Sanzone

Blindness and Vision Services – Chair - Vacant

- Mindy Lipsey
- Tassie Thompson
- Anil Lewis
- Penny Reeder

Membership – Marsh Legg, Chair

- Scott Dennis, DORS Liaison
- Katherine Jones

Employment/Career Development – Chair – Vacant

- Wanda Peele, DORS Liaison
- Denise Carter-McCormick
- Andrea Landry
- Michelle Day

Strategic Planning and Public Relations – Chair – Vacant

- Kim Schultz, DORS Liaison
- Calvin Doudt
- Andrea Landry
- Hunter Whitt

The assigned DORS Committee Liaison's will reach out to the members to schedule meetings.

**Council Sharing:**

Washington National Federal of the Blind Washington seminar is taking place virtually.

**Adjournment:**

Respectfully Submitted  
Sandy Bowser  
MSRC Staff Support