

**Maryland State Rehabilitation Council**  
**Minutes**  
**September 22, 2021**

**Members Present:**

Marsha Legg, Chair  
Scott Dennis  
Penny Reeder  
Mindy Lipsey  
Tom Laverty  
Calvin Doudt  
Katherine Jones  
Tassie Thompson  
Christy Stuart

**DORS Liaisons to Council:**

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

**Guests:**

Erica Kneessi – DORS Staff Specialist for Training & Professional Development  
Carmen Brown – Maryland State Department of Education

**Support Staff for Council:**

Sandy Bowser  
Patrick Peto

**Welcome & Opening Remarks**

Marsha Legg, Chair welcomed everyone to the State Rehabilitation Council meeting. Council members attended by Zoom and in-person.

**New SRC Member Training:**

A Power Point Training was presented to all SRC members. Below is a brief review of what was covered in the training.

- The Principles of the Rehabilitation Act
- DORS Overview and Structure
- Federal/State Relationship
- WIOA
- Roles and Responsibilities

### Principles of the Rehabilitation Act:

- VR agencies will presume that people with disabilities, including those with the most significant disabilities, are capable of being employed or achieving employment outcomes.
- A VR agency has to provide opportunities for a person with a disability to find employment in a competitive integrated setting.
- People with disabilities must be active and full partners in the VR process from the moment they apply for services. Informed choice starts at application.
- Families and other natural support systems can be important parts of the VR process.
- The belief that the VR process works better at helping people reach employment outcomes and objectives when the VR counselors and other staff are trained and qualified for their jobs.
- VR agencies must involve people with disabilities and/or their representatives when developing and implementing policies and must consider them full partners in the VR program in a meaningful way.
- VR agencies must use account accountability measures that promote and support their goals and objectives of the VR program in particular providing VR services to individuals with the most significant disabilities.

### DORS Structure

The Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) is a Division of the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE)

DORS Operates two programs:

- Disability Determination Services (DDS)
- Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program or DORS

DDS – adjudicates SSDI/SSA claims funded by SSA

VR Program – has 23 field offices and the Workforce & Technology Center:

- Office of Field Services (OFS)
- Office for Blindness & Vision Services (OBVS)
  - Independent Living Program
  - Independent Living Older Blind (ILOB)
  - Business Enterprise Program for the Blind (BEP)
- Workforce & Technology Center (WTC)

### Federal – State Relationship

The Federal VR Program has been in existence since 1920. Today's VR falls under Title 1 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended.

The VR program is a mandatory funded program – meaning that Congress must provide funding each year. The funding increases based on changes to the Cost of Living.

### Workforce Innovation & Opportunities Act of 2014 (WIOA)

- Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth programs administered by Department of Labor (DOL)
- Title II Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) program administered by Education Department (ED)
- Title III Employment Service – program under the Wagner-Peyser Act administered by DOL
- Title IV Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) – program under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 administered by ED

Pre-Employment Transitioning Services (Pre-ETS) which provides specific services for students with a disability.

- Students with disabilities which is defined as:
  - Enrolled in high school, post-secondary education program, or other recognized educational program and has not exited, graduated, or withdrawn
  - Is at least 14 years old but less than age 22
  - Has a disability documented with an IEP, 540 plan, medical records, or a doctor's note

Pre-ETS provides specific services for transition students with disabilities:

- Job Exploration Counseling
- Counseling on enrollment in a comprehensive transition or post-secondary program
- Work Readiness Training, which includes Work-Based Learning Experience
- Instruction on Self-Advocacy
- Transition Coordination and Collaboration

VR (DORS) can only recognize employment goals and outcomes that are a Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE).

CIE must meet the following standards

- Is performed on a full-time or part-time basis and for which an individual is compensated at a rate that:
  - A. Is not less than the higher of the rate specified in the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 or the rate required under the applicable State or local minimum wage law for the place of employment
  - B. Is not less than the customary rate paid by the employer for the same or similar work performed by other employees who are not individuals with disabilities and who are similarly situated in similar occupations by the same employer and who have similar training, experience and skills

CIO Location

- Typically found in the community
- Where the employee with a disability interacts for the purpose of performing the duties of the position with other employees within the particular work unit and the entire work site

- Opportunities for advancement are similar to those for other employees who are not individuals with disabilities and who have similar positions.

### Role of the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC)

To be eligible for a VR grant, the State VR must have an SRC.

Members are appointed by the Governor.

Members represent the disability and community.

The Role of the SRC is to review/analyze data and advise the State Director in areas related to:

- Eligibility, Order of Selection and the Waiting List
- The extent, scope and effectiveness of agency services
- Functions affecting individual achievement of employment outcomes
- Review agency reports and evaluations
- Participate in the development of the state agency's strategic plan
- Develop, agree to, and review State agency goals and priorities
- Evaluate effectiveness of the vr program and submit an annual progress report the RSA commissioner
- Review/analyze consumer satisfaction
- Participate in the triennial statewide needs assessment

SRC Members play an important role in the operation and success of DORS to help fulfill its mission...to provide leadership and support in promoting the employment, economic self-sufficiency and independence of individuals with disabilities.

### Program Measure for Program Year 2020:

Last year the Division served 14,720 individuals in the VR program and served over 6,300 students with disabilities.

DORS has been given a new set of benchmarks for the next program year. We will be held accountable for how many individuals are still employed in the second and fourth quarter.

DORS consumers are getting younger – we served close to 55% of individuals who are 24 years and younger.

### Preliminary Customer Satisfaction Results:

Two Customer Satisfaction Surveys were distributed to consumers in the month of September:

Vocational Rehabilitation Survey

Independent Living Old Blind Survey (ILOB)

The surveys were mailed and also emailed to individuals in different statuses - Eligible, Delayed List, Employed, Service Closed Rehabilitation and Closed Other.

As of today, 231 responses were received.

The OBVS consumers will be contacted by phone the last week of the survey as another option to respond.

**DORS Strategic Plan:**

Discussion was held with the SRC Members on updating the DORS Strategic Plan which will go into effect October 2021 – September 2023.

Goals for the next three years:

- Organizational structure will support the success of DORS customers and accurate/timely disability decisions for claimants in a manner that reflects statutory and regulatory requirements, respect for customer and claimants, and equitable working conditions for staff.
- Increased use of current information technology will continue to enhance administration of the program, provision of services, and achievement of employment for consumers and timely and accurate decisions for claimants.
- Collaboration with partners identified within the WIOA Combined State Plan will be enhanced.
- A strategy for increasing consistent staff training and practice will be implemented.

The SRC is being asked to review the Draft State Plan and provide comments.

Combined State Plan – The work on this Plan will begin in May 2022 to be completed by October 2022.

The next SRC Meeting will be held virtually November 10, 2021, 4:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted

Sandy Bowser

MSRC Staff Support