

Maryland State Rehabilitation Council Meeting Minutes

May 7,2025

Members Present:

Dr. Katherine Jones – Chair
Dr. Erik Bonner
Kristen Patterson
Marla Friedman
Todd Tolson
Cory Richo
Penny Reeder
Sherria Young- Smith
Michele Hamlin
Hunter Whitt
Kristina Richards
LA Benn
Chandra Smith
Neil Christopher
Marlo Lemon
Jamie Stoner

Members Unable to Attend:

Ronza M. Othman
Rosa Raez
LaBria Shannon
Miah Smith

DORS liaisons to Council:

Jody Boone, Senior Executive Director Planning, Operations, and Field Services
Toni March, Director, Office for Blindness and Vision Services
Wanda Peele, Program Manager II Business Relations Branch
Patrick Peto, Program Manager Policy, and planning DORS
Tom Liniak, Director of Community Based and Workforce Services
Beth Lash, Director, Office of Field Services
Samantha McGinley, Program Manager, Individual & Community Liaison
Kim Schutz, Director, Office of Communications & Accessibility
Jessica Markum, Staff Specialist for Students and Transition- aged Youth

Support Staff for the Council:

Erica Kneesi, Staff Specialist, Training & Professional Development
Sherri Alban, Executive Associate DORS HQ

Welcome:

Dr. Katherine Jones welcomed everyone and opened the meeting.

Approval of Minutes:

The minutes of February 5, 2024, were approved.

Introduction:

Introductions were made by council members and supporting Liaisons.

Guests:

Dr. Jones noted, “We have individuals who have joined us that are not part of the MSRC or working with DORS. Welcome, we are excited that you have joined us for this night’s call.”

Agenda Overview:

Dr. Jones stated, “Some of the things we have on the agenda tonight include restructuring the MSRC, creating stronger subcommittees and opening those subcommittees for the public to participate.

“Tonight’s agenda is full and there will be significant discussions on how we can better serve the citizens of Maryland.”

Dr. Erik Bonner, Assistant State Superintendent

Director’s Report

- Dr. Bonner thanked everyone for their time and commitment to the Division of Rehabilitation Services and acknowledged the dedication, flexibility and resilience of DORS staff and partners.

“Whether it’s adapting to our new regulations, expanding community partnerships or

supporting consumers through individualize plans our teams continue to demonstrate an unwavering focus on equity, service and outcomes.”

- **Celebrations and Recognitions:**

- Teacher Appreciation Week: Celebrating instructors at WTC and all DORS staff who serve as educators, mentors, and coaches.
- Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month: Honoring the achievements and resilience of AAPI communities across Maryland.

- **Key Updates:**

- FY27 budget planning is underway with regional and statewide budget meetings.
- A recent visit to Dunbar High School to envision reimagining training services in the field.
- Organizational culture and conduct: Upholding the PACS values of professionalism, accountability, communication, and safety.

MSRC DORS Liaisons Updates

Jody Boone, Senior Executive Director Planning, Operations, and Field Services

- **Disability Innovation Fund grant:** The Maryland Pathways to Partnership Initiative is progressing well.
 - A preliminary website is available at [MD Transitions:Home](#)
- **Budget Management:** Focusing on meeting the 15% requirement for pre-ETS expenditures.
- **Accounts Payable Systems:** Working on addendums for cooperative agreements to ensure invoices are submitted within 45 days.

Accounts Payable

- Providers will have a main contact.
- A new email inbox will be set up for inquiries about invoices that are 60+ days past due.
- Goal is to tighten controls over accounts payable for the sake of providers and internal controls.

Patrick Peto, Program Manager for Quality Assurance, Policy & Planning

Policy Updates

- Financial participation policy is being rolled back to the end of 2023.
- Updates to the post-secondary education policy have been published.
- Small group in-person training sessions are scheduled:
 - Hagerstown: Next Wednesday
 - Annapolis area: Thursday
 - WTC headquarters: Friday
 - WTC, room T130 (DHHU and Office of Blindness and Vision Services): Monday the 19th
 - Lanham area: Tuesday the 20th
- A FAQ document is being created to organize questions from the training sessions.

Exit Data

- Top 10 Occupations at Exit were reviewed.
- Hourly wages are trending higher than entry-level wages.
- A closure in region one was highlighted: a young lady is now a physician assistant.
- Encouraging consumers and staff to pursue training and credentials.
- 255 successful Exeter's in the quarter.

Performance Data

- Second quarter after exit percentage: 46% of individuals were still working six months later.
- Fourth quarter after exit percentage: 43.3% of those exiting were still employed four quarters later.
- Goal is to continue to raise these percentages.

Measurable Skills Gains (MSGs)

- MSGs are achievements in a training program or milestones in education.
- Examples: passing courses, completing an academic year, earning a degree or high school diploma.
- Quarter three saw 301 MSGs, an improvement from 205 in the previous year.

Tom Liniak, Director WTC

- Enrollment in training programs and additional services is up 28% compared to the same period last year.
- Partnership with Sodexo at WTC food service program as an internship site.
 - First cohort: 8 out of 10 people were hired by the end of the training program.
 - Sodexo has invited them back for continued training.
- Sodexo Works: a rapid deployment training program.
 - DORS has been selected to test it.
 - Targeting the Eastern Shore and Montgomery County for potential locations.
- Driver's education programs:
 - Doubled the number of driver's education classes for people with autism this year.
 - Behind-the-wheel training in the community.
- March graduation: Over 70% placement rate across all programs.
- Working with Baltimore City Public Schools:
 - Direct hires for food service and warehouse jobs
 - Internship training site.
 - Using this as a pilot for other school systems around the state.

Toni March, Director of the Office for Blindness & Vision Services

Update on the Office for Blindness & Vision Services in combination with the SRC subgroup update:

- Subcommittee for the SRC Blindness and Vision services met and reviewed newly implemented policies.
- Discussed the ILOB program and how to use community resources and staff differently.
- Focus on pre-ETS activities for the summer.
- Sending 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 OBVS staff are working on a four-week training for Pre-Employment Transition Services in conjunction with the ILOB Teachers for the Blind.

Beth Lash, Director, Office of Field Services

- **Physician's assistant closure**

- The individuals wage at closure was over \$43 an hour.
- Substantial services were provided including college education.
- The Office of Field Services is at 93% of its rehabilitation goal to date.
- The office runs close to \$3 million in MOUs or grant awards for summer youth employment.
- Partnership with the EARN grant through the Department of Labor
 - Partners include Howard Community College, the Autism Society of Maryland, and the Department of Labor.
 - Grant funds Certified Logistics Associate Training and Certified Logistics Technician Training at HCC.
 - There is an internship component where students gain experience and earn a wage.

Kim Schultz, Director, Office of Communications and Accessibility

- Working on making documents accessible after policy updates.
- Working on using plain language in all materials, including fact sheets and informational documents, in accordance with Governor Moore’s executive order.
- Flyers for the DIFF grant and program have been translated into French, Spanish, and Creole.
- The Americans with Disabilities Act Title 2 deadline is approaching, imposing digital and document accessibility standards.
 - DORS staff will work with community partners and attend the CRP advisory committee to raise awareness and provide resources.

Wanda Peele, Program Manager II, Business Relations Branch

- Converted about twenty-five training for Pre-ETS on Soft Skills, Job Exploration, and other topics to a new format.
- About forty training presentations will be sent to Kim Schultz to ensure they are okay.
- Training on Soft Skills and Job Exploration will begin on May 14th, on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 5 to 6 PM.
- Recruiting employers from various industries to conduct virtual or in-person tours for pre-Ets students.
- We had a labor market training for CRPs and staff, which was well-received.
- Working to organize tours of the AJCs for students to understand the Maryland Workforce Exchange.

Chair Action Items and Committee Discussions

- Set the date for this year's in-person retreat and orientation in August.
 - Proposed dates are August 20th or August 27th, both Wednesdays.
 - August 27th was selected, pending any calendar conflicts.
 - The retreat will be combined with the orientation.
- Bylaws, refining subcommittees, and candidates for vice chair and Chair positions were discussed.
 - Candidates for Vice Chair shared a bit about themselves.
 - A closed survey will be sent out for voting.

SRC Subcommittees

- Katherine will send out virtual meeting invitations for each subcommittee to elect chairs.
- Subcommittees: Policy and Planning, Public Relations and Quality Assurance, Employment and Career Development, Blindness and Vision Services.
- Kim Schultz noted that in the past, each committee had a staff liaison.
 - Katherine confirmed that staff liaisons are still needed.
- Penny Reeder is the current chair for the subcommittee on Blindness and Vision Services.
 - Penny is fine with continuing as chair.

Maryland Open Meetings Act

- Marla Freeman noted that if the subcommittee is in the bylaws, then it needs to meet Maryland's Open Meetings Act.
- Kim needs to post the meeting dates on the subcommittee's page.
- Dr. Jones will email Sherri Alban and Kim Schultz with the lists of names on each subcommittee.

SRC Meeting Format

- Dr. Jones attended SRC meetings for the state of Texas, which are two full days with a packed agenda.
- Texas SRC meetings have Zoom registration, allowing the public to register and provide public comments.
- Dr. Jones suggests exploring new Zoom features to allow more input from the public and considering having public comments twice during meetings.

Public Comments

- Public comments will be addressed in two parts:
 - First, those who submitted their comments in advance will have their concerns addressed.
 - Second, there will be a public comment portion at the end of the meeting, allowing them a couple of minutes to share their thoughts.
- There will be a person designated to monitor the Zoom chat feature and share popular comments during public comment time.
- A suggestion was made to have a secretary for the board to manage public comments and other duties.
 - The bylaws currently designate a chairperson and a vice chair, but not a secretary.
- Suggestion was made to have an email address on the website for people to submit public comments prior to the meeting.

Email for Public Comments

- The generic SRC email, monitored by Sherri Alban, can be used for public comments.
- The plan is to implement this for August, allowing people to submit comments via email.

CSAVR Updates

- Dr. Bonner provided updates from the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR).
 - There is uncertainty regarding funding and the potential relocation of VR to a different federal agency. (Department of Labor or Department of Health and Human Services)
 - A hiring freeze is in place at the federal level for the SSA component, which oversees DDS in partnership with DORS.

Maryland Charity Campaign Award

- DORS received an award for being the highest agency for contributions to the Maryland Charity Campaign.
- Special thanks were given to Samantha McGinley and Janice Drakeford for their coordination and leadership.

Affirmations and Gratitude

- An emphasis was placed on the importance of affirming and recognizing each other, even during uncertain times, along with excitement about engaging with people and sharing the agency's work, noting that "people have dreams, and we are their hope."
- A Happy Mother's Day message is shared, encouraging listeners to treat others well and cherish loved ones.

Public Comment Guidelines

- Public comment is allowed, but council members may not be able to respond immediately.
- Questions that cannot be answered during the meeting will be addressed later.

RSA Monitoring and Corrective Action Plan

- RSA is still monitoring DORS progress under the corrective action plan.
- The agency is moving towards completion of the plan, with one more section to share.
- There is uncertainty about federal implications and placement, but internal teams will be informed first.

Executive Order and Workforce Development Programs

- An Executive order on April 23rd tasks the Secretaries of Commerce, Labor, and Education with evaluating workforce development programs.
- Recommendations for combining, reducing, or eliminating programs are due in 90 days (by July 23rd).

Public Comment

- Nina Saini, founder of an employment support group for parents of adults with disabilities, shares concerns about the lack of information provided about Community Rehabilitation Partners (CRPs).
- A survey revealed that many individuals did not receive useful information about CRPs from their DORS counselors prior to referral.
- 85% of survey respondents found the website unhelpful in determining which CRP to use.

Response to CRP Concerns

- The issue of CRP information will be discussed with the Public Relations and Quality Assurance subcommittee.

- The need to include more CRP information to help people navigate choice is acknowledged.
- Counselors tend to track CRP availability, which may lead to insufficient discussion about options.

Closing Remarks

- Feedback is welcomed to improve partnerships and support.
- CRPs can reach out to Dr. Jones with any concerns or anything that they would like to have addressed at the CRP advisory meetings that are held every quarter.
- CIL directors will reach out to Chandra Smith prior to SRC meetings to talk about what is going on with the CILS and how she can advocate for them.
- HHS will be releasing the second half of funding for CILS and just for any grant recipients through what was ACL, \$1.1 billion.

Adjournment

Respectfully Submitted,

Sherri Alban

MSRC Staff Support