

# Maryland State Rehabilitation Council Meeting Minutes

November 5, 2025

## **Members Present:**

Dr. Katherine Jones – Chair  
Kristen Patterson – Co- Chair  
Dr. Erikk Bonner  
Marla Friedman  
Penny Reeder  
Michele Hamlin  
Cory Richo  
Michele Hamlin  
Kristina Richards  
Nnamdi Obiako  
Jamie Stoner  
Todd Tolson  
Sherria Young – Smith  
LaBria Shannon

## **Members Unable to Attend:**

L.A Benn  
Braden Stinar  
Hunter Whitt  
Chandra Smith  
Rosa Raez  
Miah Smith  
Neil Christopher

## **DORS liaisons to Council:**

Toni March, Director, Office for Blindness and Vision Services  
Patrick Peto, Program Manager Policy, and planning DORS  
Tom Liniak, Director of Community Based and Workforce Services  
Wanda Peele, Program Manager II Business Relations Branch

Beth Lash, Director, Office of Field Services  
Samantha McGinley, Program Manager, Individual & Community Liaison  
Kim Schutz, Director, Office of Communications & Accessibility

**Support Staff for the Council:**

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

**Community Members**

Adama Bangura, council member with Maryland Statewide Independence League.  
Latrice Fant, VR Counselor, DORS Columbia office  
Patrice Sedgwick, VR Counselor, DORS Columbia office

**Welcome:**

Dr. Katherine Jones welcomed everyone and opened the meeting.

**Approval of Minutes:** The minutes of September 10, 2025, were approved.

**NCSRC Conference Updates**

- The NCSRC conference was held in San Diego.
- Katherine thanked DORS for paying for the registration fee for her to be able to attend the conference.
- There were only 32 people at the conference.

**Annual Report**

- Katherine shared an example of Alabama's annual report.
- The current template is in paragraph format.
- Katherine asked the subcommittee chairs and co-chairs to look at the Alabama template and replicate it.
- The goal is to have this completed by the end of November.

- Michele stated that the PR & QA subcommittee have already started to use something similar to this with their meeting minutes.
- Michele also stated that they are going to try to throw a little agile in there by establishing not only a vision statement but also look at objectives and key results so that they can kind of measure their progress against certain goals.
- Wanda, Toni, and Penny agreed that the model is doable.

### **Subcommittee Updates and Mission/Vision Statements**

- Penny and Toni will collaborate on suggestions for the subcommittee, create a Word document, and seek group feedback by the end of November.
- Kristina will assist the Policy and Planning Subcommittee in creating a mission statement.
- A question was raised about aligning subcommittee mission/vision statements with the SRC and DORS' larger mission and vision.
  - The speaker clarified that the subcommittees should follow by laws and highlight their plans for the upcoming year.
- Individuals not on a subcommittee will receive an email to select one to join.
- Toni suggested using the Maryland State Rehabilitation Council website as a starting point for subcommittee discussions.

### **Conflict-of- Interest Form**

- A conflict-of-interest form was sent out after the last full council meeting, and the speaker is satisfied with the feedback.
- The council will vote on the conflict-of-interest form, and if approved, it will be sent to all voting members for signature via Adobe format.
- The form outlines expectations for SRC members and DORS staff, preventing personal gain and addressing conflicts of interest.
- The council will determine by majority vote if a member has a conflict of interest and whether it is reasonable and in the SRC's best interest.
- The form includes a signature section for voting SRC members, ex-officio members, non-voting SRC members, and officers to disclose any conflicts.
- Marla made a motion to approve the conflict-of-interest form, which Sherria seconded. The motion passed with an "aye" vote.

## **Secretary Position**

- Katherine mentioned the need for a secretary and that the position would transition to vice chair in January.
- Sherria Young Smith expressed interest in the secretary position and shared her background and qualifications.
  - Sherria is blind, a former DORS consumer and approved Braille vendor, and is pursuing a master's degree in clinical mental health counseling and rehabilitation counseling.
  - She is passionate about advocating for people with disabilities and ensuring state laws are equipped to protect their rights.
- Dr. Bonner suggested voting via email for consistency and to allow input from those not on the call.
- Agreement was made to vote via email.

## **Recognition of Videos**

- Neil Christopher's PBS video about Arcadia Windows and DORS and Todd's accessible video from the retreat were shared at the NCSRC meeting.
- Todd's video was praised for its accessibility and was well-received.
- Todd requested that the part featuring Toni March, Director, Office of Blindness and Vision services be shown. In the video, Toni discussed program funding challenges and the resulting impact on services for older Marylanders with vision loss.
- Neil Christopher was congratulated for his work in the PBS video highlighting employing individuals with disabilities.

## **Dr. Erik Bonner, Assistant State Superintendent**

### **Director's Report**

- Dr. Bonner thanked everyone for attending and acknowledged the committee's growth.
- Dors is still operating under a government shutdown, which has a domino effect on the agency, primarily 80% federally funded. Our Disability Determination Services unit is 100% federally funded.
- A meeting with CRPs is scheduled to discuss authorization processes and updates.
- Dr. Bonner emphasized the importance of official communication coming from the state and the need for understanding regarding information sharing.

- Despite the challenges, staff are continuing to provide services to Marylanders.
- Highlights from the past quarter included an award ceremony for our consumers and an important MOU signed with Baltimore city for food services internship, aiming to build connections between school districts and employers.
- On Thursday, there will be a kickoff for the Model Employer Act working group with Secretary Beatty, the MD DOD, and the Governor.
- A committee will discuss government agency jobs, including local educational agency school districts.
- The hope is to have schools in all 24 counties set aside for young adults or recent graduates.
- WTC has added more autism driving classes and is looking to expand further.

### **Division of Rehabilitation Services**

- **Our** mission will always embed PACs: Professionalism, Accountability, Communication and Safety.

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

#### **Policy Updates**

- Held Policy Review Committee in-person meeting 10/7; follow up meeting scheduled for 12/02
- Self-Employment
  - Looking for volunteers to serve on Business Plan Review team
  - Internal Processes/ templates/ Scoring Metric
- Benefits Planning
  - In-house services provided by Program Income

#### **Informed Choice**

- CRP survey to update CRP/Vendor information to promote Informed Choice (CRP Advisory Meeting 11/19)

#### **Combined State Plan Updates**

- Nationwide Community of Practice meets 11/12

#### **Federal Reporting delayed (RSA-911)**

- Normally PY2025 Q1 reporting is due 11/15; extended until shutdown ends and RSA back to provide support

**OBVS- Since 7/1/25**

- 18 Rehabs
- Avg 29 hours/week
- Avg wage= \$23.32/ hour (highest \$53.26/hr: Technology Accessibility Specialist)

**OFS**

- 310 Rehabs
- Avg 27 hours/week
- Avg wage= \$18.60/ hour (highest \$63.48/hr: Lawyer)

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

- The OBVS subcommittee met on October 22nd and discussed the federal shutdown and its management.
- Blind Industries and Services of Maryland created a new pre-Employment Transition services program consisting of three sessions at community colleges and a four-year college.
- As of December 1st, OBVS will handle referrals, applications, and eligibility decisions internally, instead of the DORS eligibility unit.
- There was a discussion of the Office of Blindness and Vision Services' current challenges due to financial restraints, noting that significant budget reductions have impacted on the ability to purchase services for the community.

**Tom Liniak, Director WTC**

- An agreement has been reached with Baltimore Public Schools to be an internship site in food service warehouse, with the first hire already successful.
- Driver's education classes will increase to 10 in 2026, with a 67% capacity increase since the end of 2024.
- A partnership with Sodexo at Oregon State will begin for the environmental services training program in early December.

- A verbal agreement has been reached to add Five Below as a hiring partner for future CVS retail training programs.

### **Beth Lash, Director, Office of Field Services**

- Office of Field services is at 94% of rehabilitation goal as of the end of October.
- Special mention to the awards ceremony that the BSRs pulled together to recognize both consumers' successes in employment as well as outstanding staff support.
- Dr. Bonner served as a speaker, and the event included a luncheon hosted by the BSR team at the Workforce center.

### **MSRC Sub-Committee Reports:**

#### **Public Relations and Quality Assurance - Michele Hamlin and Jamie Stone**

- Public information and communications will be a core area this year, building online presence and reputation.
  - Start with LinkedIn and coordinate with the employment subcommittee to start doing posts, get followers for the MSRC, and highlight success stories.
  - Todd will be heading up the YouTube channel.
  - Other social media platforms will come after those first two.
- QA component, the cap component, and the legislative and advocacy components will be in Jamie's wheelhouse and Michele's is around the PR and consultation communications.
- Next steps for PR are those different platforms to start off with.
  - Todd and Michele are working with Kim regarding the website.
  - Thinking about funding and platforms.
  - Planning for how to host a website presence and have that be a central core for all of the other public information.
- Jamie will partner with Marla on the client assistance programs and mediation reports.
- Legislative advocacy and events are the next area of follow-up to try and understand better what's been done in the past, what resources have been used, and then to look at how they can assign ownership to that.

## **Client Assistance Program (CAP) Update - Marla Friedman**

- CAP sees a lot of people throughout the year and tries to address their concerns.
- Looks for patterns in concerns.
  - Financial policy changes led to many calls.
  - Self-employment questions.
    - Clients have heard the messaging that they can add self-employment to plans.
  - There are concerns with sharing information about community rehabilitation partners (CRPs).
    - DORS is starting to move forward with gathering additional information to improve what is out there regarding informed choice and CRPs.
  - Met with Disability Rights Maryland representatives who offered to help with that type of project.
- A systemic change group has been created to meet and discuss some of these things.
- CAP is required to report, called the RSA 227 report.
  - The numbers for whom we served this past year will be in that report.
  - Once it's completed and submitted to RSA, which is due by December 31, then it can be shared at the next meeting.

## **Employment & Career Development Subcommittee – Katherine Jones**

- A lot of conversation about putting a face to the message, being able to talk to businesses to highlight what they're doing in hiring our disability community.
- By doing that, they're going to create a pool of other businesses that might want to join the MSRC in the future.
- Definitely going to be developing more of their mission and purpose.

## **Policy and planning – Kristina Richards**

- Met on September 30, 2025.
- Spoke about streamlining the policy review process and including the SRC and such items so that they're knowledgeable on what's going on, allowing for comment as well as public comments on the state website.
- Discussed the self-employment policy change.
- Spoke about recent program planning and annual plan and having a representative from the SRC in certain fragments for the agency including program planning and annual plan.
- Spoke about posting the draft policy and leaving it open for comments in the future for any new policies that are supposed to come out.
  - It was noted that even though it's posted, it doesn't mean the comments will be taken into consideration.
  - They will review, acknowledge and make changes if it benefits or serves the population as needed.
- Established a vision statement: establishing a team from the ground up, leveraging our individual talents and expertise to support the council and ultimately the agency in delivering comprehensive and individualized rehabilitation services.
- Plan to continue to meet virtually and hope to meet at least once in between MSRC Committee meetings.

## **Council Sharing**

Katherine:

- Appreciation for everyone who's leading the subcommittees.
- Proud to be on MSRC and be working with such distinguished individuals and DORS everyone, all our liaisons working with them, supporting them all these years.
- Looking forward to what happens in the future for Marylanders.
- Everyone will get copies of the drafts of the annual report as they are being generated.
- Dr. Bonner: "Everyone make sure you drive safely. Remember to change someone's day with a smile. And remember, you can enhance someone's day by treating people

better than you want to be treated. Continue to treat people better than you want to be treated. And remember, it costs nothing to be kind. Continue to be kind to one another. I look forward to seeing you around. Email me if you need something. Have a great night. Goodbye."

## **Public Comments**

**No comments**

## **Meeting Adjournment**

- Motion to adjourn was made and seconded.

Adjournment

Respectfully Submitted,

Sherri Alban

MSRC Staff Support