

Maryland State Rehabilitation Council Meeting Minutes

September 10, 2025

Members Present:

Dr. Katherine Jones – Chair
Kristen Patterson – Co- Chair
Dr. Erik Bonner
Marla Friedman
Neil Christopher
Penny Reeder
Michele Hamlin
L.A Benn
Cory Richo
Michele Hamlin
Braden Stinar
Kristina Richards
Nnamdi Obiako

Members Unable to Attend:

Todd Tolson
Sherria Young – Smith
Hunter Whitt
Chandra Smith
Marlo Lemon
Jamie Stoner
Rosa Raez
LaBria Shannon
Miah Smith

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

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:

Sherri Alban, Executive Associate DORS HQ

Welcome:

Dr. Katherine Jones welcomed everyone and opened the meeting.

Approval of Minutes: The minutes of May 7, 2025, were approved.

New member and applicants were welcomed and Introductions were made:

New member

- Braden Stinar
 - Introduced himself as a Staff Attorney with Disability Rights Maryland (DRM), where he has practiced for several years. His work focuses on special education, employment discrimination, and voting rights. He expressed appreciation to Dr. Jones for assistance during the application process and stated that he is excited to join the group and contribute to the community and clients served through DRM's advocacy work.

New applicants

- Costello Wilson III
 - Introduced himself as representing a collaboration between the faith-based Community of Hope AME Church, where he serves on the board, and the nonprofit COWOC (Creating Opportunity Within Our Community), Which he founded. COWOC focuses on violence intervention and providing resources to schools where 80% or more of the students live below the poverty line. He has 20 years of experience as a defense contractor

with the Federal government, overseeing more than 130 employees.

- Adama Bangura
 - Introduced herself and shared that she works with individuals with disabilities throughout the state of Maryland. She is currently employed with Melwood, an organization that provides employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities statewide. Ms. Bangura has previously served with the Commission for People with Disabilities and is looking forward to joining the State Rehabilitation Council to share her experiences and contribute to the work of the Council.

Dr. Erik Bonner, Assistant State Superintendent

Director's Report

- Welcomed attendees and new board members. Expressed appreciation for the opportunity to partner with the SRC and continue advancing shared initiatives.
- Introduced the members of the DORS leadership team present at the meeting.
- Shared updates regarding recent activities, including meetings with CIL Directors in Southern Maryland and participation in a CIL open house in Silver Spring.
- Reported on the annual SRC Retreat, highlighting discussions around federal funding and appropriations, and encouraged the DORS team to monitor appropriations, noting that a continuing resolution has not yet been signed.
- Noted that DORS has developed a short-term continuity plan to maintain operations in the event of a government shutdown
- MSRC members were encouraged to monitor federal legislative developments related to budget and funding, engage

with legislators, continue to let their voices be heard, and reach out for support as needed.

- The CSAVR conference is coming up, and DORS will continue to monitor conference-related activities.
- Announced the retirement of Jody Boone, Senior Executive Director Planning, Operations, and Field Services, thanking her for her years of service and contributions to DORS
- Concluded by emphasizing the importance of kindness, collaboration, and professionalism during times of fiscal uncertainty, stating: “You can change someone’s day with a smile...It costs nothing to be kind.”

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

Case Services review:

- Year-long round of case services reviews finished in August.
- Wrap-up event on September 26th (in person).
- Leadership and review teams will discuss results and improvements.
- Roxanne Rattray-Simmons found examples of good casework and has pulled people that are very good at their jobs to share tips and tricks.

Independent Living Older Blind QA case:

- October 27th – 29th (three days, three districts).
- Six reviewers.
- Instrument is tailored to that case type.
- Second time through, looking for improvements from last year.

Policy Updates

- **Self-employment policy:**
 - Vendor Psychometric Solutions contract ended.
 - Revamped program to remove vendor support.

- Identified community resources (Small Business Development Administration, community college programs, etc.) to fill the void
 - Developing an internal business plan and business proposal review team.
 - May reach out to committee members for assistance with reviews, depending on the type of business plans/proposals.
- **Full policy review committee meeting:**
 - October 7th at WTC (T130)
 - Full in-person meeting.

Policy Development Process

- The meeting will discuss the policy development process.
- Goal: Develop a consistent process using a checklist system.
- Aim: Finalize the process, ensure understanding, and gather feedback from the field and community.
- Objective: Create comprehensive policies that are as close to “one size fits all” as possible, while aligning with practice and considering consumer needs.

Annual Program Plan

- Megan Glaze Keller presented on the annual program plan at the retreat.
- A draft was shared prior to the retreat.
- Feedback is requested within the next week for finalization and publication on the public website

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

- Toni Reports that the latest federal budget has eliminated all funding for Independent Living Older Blind (ILOB).
 - ILOB provides services like rehab teaching, orientation and mobility instruction, and assistive devices for individuals 55+ who are losing their vision or are blind.

- “We are the only people that do that.”
- Toni encourages contacting senators and representatives to advocate for the reinstatement of ILOB funding.
 - “ This is not something that you can get rid of.”
 - ILOB is crucial for enabling individuals to stay in their homes and avoid long-term care facilities.
- Katherine Jones offers to help draft a template letter for the SRC to send to senators and delegates.

Additional Budget Information

- Penny Reeder amplifies the importance of independent living training to prevent unnecessary nursing home placement.
- Notes that the Department of Education has also eliminated funding for three important Braille training programs.
- On September 1st, the House Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriation Subcommittee released its appropriations bill version for FY26.
 - The bill includes \$4,648,000,000 to carry out the Rehabilitation Act and the Helen Keller National Center Act.
 - \$4,504,504 is for vocational rehabilitation state formula grants.

Budget Concerns and Eliminations

- National Technical Institute for the Deaf: \$94,500,00
- American Printing House for the Blind: \$44 million
- Funding eliminations:
 - Disability Innovation Fund
 - Supported employment state grants
 - Demonstration and training programs
 - Independent living for older blind
 - Client Assistance Program (CAP)
- “This is the first time ILOB’s been included, but that’s where we are at this time”
- No continuing resolution as of yet but hoping for one.

CAP and VR Funding

- VR money can be used for CAP and supported employment if extra funding is not received.
- VR money cannot be used for ILOB.
- Flat funding of DORS has heavily impacted rural centers, particularly Southern Maryland CIL and Bay Area CIL.

Tom Liniak, Director WTC

- Year-over-year enrollment for WTC programs is up 23% versus last year.
- RSA is filming an employment success story from each of the 50 states.
 - A former WTC CVS retail pharmacy tech student was selected for Maryland.
- Partnership with Baltimore City Public Schools:
 - Agreement expected to be signed this week.
 - Four students have been granted interviews for food service positions.
 - Dunbar High School will be a pilot site for the food services training program.
- Anne Arundel County Public Schools:
 - 15 applicants presented for food service jobs.
 - First person offered a job last week.
- Two summer open houses drew close to 550 attendees.
 - 62% of 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.

Driver's Education and Community college Programs

- 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

organization 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.
- 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

- OFS Closed out the last program year (ending June 30) at 96% of its successful rehabilitation goal.
- New program goals have been established.
- Office is nearing the end of the first quarter of the current program year, updated data will be shared at the next meeting.
- Office of Field Services has been focused on budget management as the federal fiscal year ends September 30th.
- 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.
- CTCL grant that previously handled referrals closed in July.
- Earn grant with Howard Community College.
 - Grant funded nationally recognized credentials for Certified Logistics Associate and Certified Logistics Technician.
 - Certified logistics Associate course begins October 22nd
 - Tuition free to individuals with disabilities referred by DORS counselors.

Kim Schultz, Director, Office of Communications and Accessibility

- Maryland State Rehabilitation Council and DORS are required to assess the effectiveness of the VR program in Maryland. As part of the process, we hold annual public meetings.
 - Our next public meeting will be held virtually on September 16th at 4:00 p.m. and the 18th at 10:00 a.m.
 - Information is on the MSRC website on the meetings tab and on the DORS website under the State Plan for VR Services link.
- 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.
 - Donna Lettow will be doing two trainings, one next week 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.
- It was nice to see so many other state VR programs who liked or commented on our story.
 - Use the hashtag#100storiesin100days to see the great work that other states are doing.
- The story we submitted was about a young woman with a severe learning disability who is now a Physician's Associate (PA) working in a medical practice in Montgomery County.
 - She is now making great money .
 - These are folks that would be getting benefits if we weren't spending money on them to get them where they need to be, whether it's working or independent.
- As individuals, DORS employees not wearing their "DORS cap", can call their representatives to voice concerns about cuts made to the programs.

- Voting members of the SRC can individually and collectively send a letter on SRC stationary
- SRC stationery can be provided.
- MSRC Website Updates
 - Public meetings scheduled have been posted.
 - Changes to the MSRC website include accessibility features and tabs for:
 - Joining
 - Next MSRC meetings
 - Subcommittee info and meetings
 - Virtual meeting links for subcommittee meetings should be sent to Kim to post on the website due to the Maryland Open Meetings Act.

Chair Action Items and Committee Discussions

National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC)

- Every state is represented at the NCSRC.
- The NCSRC will be held on Saturday, Nov 1st and Sunday Nov. 2nd , the weekend preceding the CSAVR Conference.
- Katherine will be present and representing Maryland at those meetings.

Todd Tolson's Video Project

- Todd Tolson is connecting the SRC with the community and educating the community on what they do.
- The goal is to highlight the impact of MSRC in a way that can be shared with the public.
- Todd took a picture of everyone at the end of the retreat.
- The retreat picture will be posted on the website.

Executive Committee

- Katherine Jones proposed the development of an executive committee for the

SRC.

- Looking to extend the executive committee out. Kathern's term will end as Chair come January, Kristen will move up to chair, we will need to have someone else in the lineup considering moving up to vice chair when she does.
- The executive committee would consist of a chair, vice chair, and a secretary.
- A motion was made to move forward with an executive committee for the MSRC, and it was seconded.
- All were in favor.
- Anticipate emails regarding:
 - Organizing subcommittee meetings.
 - Conflict of interest form for SRC members.
 - Draft template to support the Office of Independent Living Services.
 - Information for those interested in being a candidate for the executive committee.
- An annual report must be submitted to the governor's office and RSA before December 31st.
- Subcommittee meetings will be scheduled to develop a vision for subcommittees and create a first draft of a letter by early December.

Retreat Materials

- Digital copies of the Annual Program Plan and Quality Assurance Measures from the retreat will be distributed to those who did not attend.

Council Sharing

- Kathern now serves as a surveyor for CARF, surveying agencies in the US and Canada for CARF accreditation.
- DORS requires community resource providers (CRPs) to be DBA licensed and or have accreditation like CARF.
- CRPs undergo extensive training, quality assurance measures, and policy reviews.
- Input from consumers is valuable to CRPs and the MSRC through surveys.

- The MSRC advises and assists DORS, but the majority of members are volunteers, not DORS employees.

RSA Update

- Penny Reeder asked if there is a director of RSA and what will happen to RSA if the Department of Education shuts down.
- Council has not heard anything official about moving RSA.
- Chris Pope is still in an internal acting capacity at RSA.

Public Comments

- Nina Sani, founder and group facilitator for Employment Related Support Group for parents of adults with disabilities who are trying to navigate DORS, spoke as a representative for her group.
 - The group meets every other week.
- Sani shared suggestions from a letter sent by seven members of her group.
 - Request for more information about community rehabilitation partners, including qualifications and service provider credentials.
 - Request for understanding of outcomes and customer satisfaction with different community rehabilitation partners.
 - Request for more training on customized employment techniques for individuals at DORS and community rehabilitation partners.
- Marla Friedman followed up, stating that she has been bringing up these internal conversations at DORS, and hopes that improvements can be made in the suggested areas.

Meeting Adjournment

- Motion to adjourn was made and seconded.

Adjournment

Respectfully Submitted,

Sherri Alban

MSRC Staff Support