

Maryland State Rehabilitation Council
Annapolis, Maryland
May 9, 2007

Members – Present

Larry Abramson
John Brennan
Andrea Buonincontro
Robert Burns
Joyce Callahan
Tim Daley
Ross Edwards
Niles Ellingson
Beth Lash
Carol Lewis
Kali Mallik
Mary Manzoni
Terri Massie-Burrell
Jerry Pantaleo
Anne Rea
Michael Shaw
Josie Thomas

Members Unable to Attend

Tom Barkley
Charles Crawford
Alfred Sonnenstrahl
Teresa Uttermohlen
Jennifer Whitcomb

Support Staff - Present

Polly Huston
Donna Lippa

DORS Liaison Staff – Present

Jean Jackson
Donna Lettow
Kathi Santora

Guests - Present

Lynette Cohen, DORS counselor
Joseph Doney, RSA
Joyce Lehrer, RISE Program
Deric Mims, RISE Program
Annie Norwood, DORS counselor
Catherine Raggio, Secretary, MD Department of Disability
Fred Rigney, RISE Program
Jeannette Shell, RSA
Morris Tranen, RISE Program
Ronald Winter, DORS Director, Office of Field Services
Tracey Wyant, DORS counselor

I. Introduction, Council Recognition and Approval of Minutes

Minutes of the 6 February 2007 meeting were approved with one change. Request was made to add John Brennan as a member present at the February 2007 meeting. Chairperson Larry Abramson welcomed guests and members.

At each meeting, the Council recognizes a DORS counselor/counselors for their outstanding performance. At today's meeting, the Council recognizes Tracey Wyant, Annie Norwood and Lynette Cohen. All three of these DORS counselors are being recognized for their work with consumers in helping achieve economic self-sufficiency

and discontinue social security benefits. DORS is reimbursed for the cost of rehabilitation when this occurs. In 2006, Lynette Cohen achieved 4 claims for a total of \$83,000, Annie Norwood achieved 6 claims for a total of \$42,000, and Tracey Wyant achieved 6 claims for a total of \$107,000.

II. RISE Program Update and Recognition of RISE Business Plan Review Committee

Morris Tranen presented an overview of the RISE Program (Reaching Independence through Self-Employment). Mr. Tranen stated that the RISE Program is an initiative of the Maryland State Department of Education's Division of Rehabilitation Services. The program's mission is to present self-employment as a vocational option to individuals with significant disabilities who are eligible to receive DORS services. RISE Program staff work with individuals and their families, DORS and community rehabilitation professionals, and the business community to facilitate and encourage the successful launch and operation of consumer-owned enterprises.

Supported Business Enterprise is an option for individuals with significant psychiatric, developmental, or intellectual disabilities who will require ongoing supports in the operation of their business.

DORS provides limited funding for a small business if necessary, after the business plan has been reviewed by the RISE Program's Business Plan Review Committee and approved by DORS. DORS is not the primary funder of any small business. Funding provided by DORS is in the form of purchase of all or part of required goods and/or services according to the approved business plan.

Morris Tranen and the Council recognized three (3) long-time members of the RISE Business Plan Review Committee. Recognized at the meeting today are Joyce Lehrer, Deric Mims and Frederick Rigney. DORS is grateful for the many years of service and ongoing commitment of Ms. Lehrer, Mr. Mims and Mr. Rigney.

III. Special Guest – Catherine Raggio, Secretary, Maryland Department of Disabilities

Secretary Raggio began by stating that employment is one of the major priorities as the new Secretary, Maryland Department of Disabilities, which is the ultimate economical empowerment of people with disabilities. Without it, people with disabilities will not be able to move forward with the cost of living rising. Social security benefits do not rise nearly as fast as the cost of living.

MDOD will focus on expanding the benefits counseling services in the state and use of the Employed Individuals with Disabilities (EID) Program (Medicaid Buy-In). MDOD is partnering with the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and working on increasing the enrollments in this program. Transitioning Youth initiatives is another priority of Secretary Raggio. MDOD has submitted a revised Executive Order to the Governor which would make changes to the Interagency Transitioning Council for Transitioning Youth. Mr. Burns has agreed to co-chair this Council.

Secretary Raggio recently visited St. Luke's House to hear about their programs and services, in particular, their intensive work with youth before they leave high school. She met with Diane Triplett, Brain Injury Association of Maryland, as was pleased to hear about the funding that DORS has received for that population which would extend the amount of time people receive services from DORS which would result in better jobs and outcomes with those individuals. MDOD would like to see this program expanded.

Secretary Raggio stated she is very concerned about the loss of federal funds that DORS has experienced over the last few years and will join together with DORS to prevent more of this from happening and work at getting some of the federal funding restored to our state.

MDOD will begin an annual celebration to highlight the anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Every July 26th we will have an event where people with disabilities can strut their pride about being Americans with disabilities. It is important for youth with disabilities to understand their history and culture that has kept them oppressed and the stereotypes that are present in our society and take pride in what they are capable of doing.

Mr. Burns thanked MDOD staff member, John Brennan, for his contribution as the MDOD representative on the SRC Office for Blindness and Vision Services Committee.

IV. Federal Funding for Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Mr. Burns began by stating that for fiscal year 2007, funding to the Maryland VR program was reduced by \$300,000 due to the federal distribution formula of the basic support grant for VR services. In addition, the President's FY 2008 budget request would result in the loss of an additional \$1.4 million in federal funding; a decrease of 3.6% over the previous year's funding level.

The President's 2008 budget proposes to eliminate the Cost of Living Adjustment (Consumer Price Index-Urban, or CPI-U) from Title I of the Rehabilitation Act. Maryland's vocational rehabilitation services program has been the most negatively impacted state VR agency in the nation by the current allocation formula. The current federal distribution formula uses state per capita income and growth in state population to allocate funding. Federal funding for the public VR program in Maryland has increased by only 6.7% over the past 8 years whereas the national Title I VR funding has grown by 18.2% and the compounding effect of inflation has exceeded 20% during this same time frame. The Maryland public VR is running about 5 million dollars behind where we would have been over the 8 year period in time if we had been paid at least at the CPI-Urban.

Eliminating the cost-of-living increase will result in fewer individuals with disabilities being served by the State VR program. The Maryland Department of Legislative Services estimates that over 3,000 persons with significant disabilities will be left unserved in FY 2008 by Maryland's VR program due to this shortfall in federal funding.

Bob Burns stated that the Division and Dr. Grasmick have been in contract with Maryland Congressional representatives with three requests:

- Increase the basic support grant for vocational rehabilitation services (Title I of the Rehabilitation Act) by 10% for fiscal year 2008.
- Enact legislation that would assure that no state VR agency would receive less than a cost-of-living increase in its basic support grant, and
- Restore funds in the FY 2008 budget that were eliminated in the President's budget for Supported Employment state grants.

ACTION: Mr. Burns asked that Council members write letters to their congressional delegation and that members take action on their own and mobilize their networks in terms of communicating with Maryland's delegation on the issues.

V. Summary of MSRC/DORS Public Meetings

Kathi Santora, DORS Staff Specialist, Public Information and Planning, stated that each year, the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS), in collaboration with the Maryland State Rehabilitation Council, holds public meetings throughout the state. The purpose of these meetings is to 1) solicit public comments on any proposed changes to the State Plan for Vocational Rehabilitation and Supported Employment and 2) to discuss and to obtain comment on current issues that affect the public vocational rehabilitation service delivery system in Maryland with consumers, partners and stakeholders.

Kathi Santora stated that DORS and the SRC held 4 public meetings at the Maryland School for the Deaf in Frederick, League for People with Disabilities in Baltimore City, Montgomery Works in Wheaton and the Chesapeake Center in Easton during the month of March.

At the public hearing, DORS proposed a change to Attachment 4.11(c) (3), Order of Selection for Services. It is estimated that 1300-1500 additional people could be served in this way.

At present, Maryland's three orders of selection categories are as follows:

1. **Individuals with the most Significant Disabilities.**
2. **Individuals with Significant Disabilities.**
3. **Individuals with Non-Severe Disabilities.** This includes individuals determined eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation Services but who are determined to not have a significant or most significant disability.

The Division is proposing to change these categories to five categories:

1. **Individuals Most Significant Disabilities.**
2. **Individuals with Significant Disabilities** – Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) limited to agency-provided services and comparable benefits.

- 3. Individuals with Significant Disabilities.**
- 4. Individuals with Non-Severe Disabilities** – IPE limited to agency-provided services and comparable benefits.
- 5. Individuals with Non-Severe Disabilities.**

DORS also gave updates and requested feedback on other topics of interest including:

- Waiting list and priority of services
- DORS programs and services for high school students
- Progress on the Governor's Employment Initiative for Persons with Acquired Brain Injuries

To notify stakeholders about the State Plan updates as well as to provide an opportunity to comment on them, DORS utilized its public web site and extensive e-mail notification. We also targeted DORS consumers who were currently receiving services. Others included in outreach were disability support professionals, transitioning professionals, principals/educators, workforce partners, community rehabilitation programs, advisory councils, advocacy groups and county disability commissions. Since one of the meetings was held at an educational facility for individuals who are deaf, there was extensive collaboration with the site as well as with deaf advocacy groups around the state.

Outreach information explained how to visit the Web site or to contact DORS to obtain information about the proposed State Plan, its recommended updates and the other topics of interest. Every effort was made to explain all issues in lay language. Information about the three general discussion topics was also provided on the Web site.

Press releases and public service announcements were mailed to media outlets in the vicinity of the meetings. In addition, DORS regional directors and the State Rehabilitation Council were asked to notify and invite local colleagues.

Some of the questions presented to DORS at the public meetings:

1. What is someone was in a category on a waiting list and receiving comparable benefits and their condition worsened, could they move from category to category?
2. There were also individuals who were concerned that people who have a Ticket to Work are not prioritized and end up on a waiting list
3. Because one of the locations was at the Maryland School for the Deaf, there was stated concern that people who are deaf would be adversely affected by this type of policy change.

Concerns were raised about the proposed order of selection changes and consistency with VR regulations. The SRC appreciated the difficult situation DORS is in regarding funding limitations and ability to serve all eligible individuals. The Council indicated a preference to study this issue further rather than continue with this particular proposal.

Mr. Burns stated that, if the new proposed order of selection is not supported fully by the council, the Division would not pursue this change. The Maryland State Plan for Vocational Services would be submitted as previously submitted.

Niles Ellingson stated he feels that the Council has not had enough time to discuss the implications. However, he said he thought this is a creative way of trying to address this catalog jam of people being put on a waiting list.

Motion: Motion made by Mr. Burns to remove this proposal and conduct public meeting to further discuss this issue.

VIII. Committee Reports

Policy and State Plan Development Committee, Beth Lash

Deferred until the next meeting.

Public Relations and Quality Assurance Committee, Jerry Pantaleo

Jerry Pantaleo reported on the activities of the Public Relations and Quality Assurance Committee.

- The committee met today before the full Council meeting attended by Joyce Callahan, Beth Lash, Jerry Pantaleo and Donna Lettow.
- The committee discussed the FY 2006 Office of Client Services consumer satisfaction results. In our initial review we noticed that the results yielded similar results as previous years; the committee then requested the FY 2005 results for a more in depth comparison. In reviewing both years, we observed that findings for each year were very similar, with non-significant changes apparent in most outcomes measured.
- Although the committee agreed that we need to measure and promote successful outcomes, we also need to develop a survey instrument and a research technique to survey a larger sample of those who are unsuccessful in the DORS process. Historically, we have not measured this population to the extent we measure successful closures. The committee believes since we serve a significant number of dissatisfied consumers, that a more in depth measurement of unsuccessful closure may yield additional data necessary to strengthen service delivery from the consumer's perspective.
- We also discussed different methods of data collection such as telephone surveys and also the possibility of surveying consumers at specific time intervals within the process, in addition to case closure.

Membership Committee, Andrea Buonincontro

Andrea Buonincontro updated the Council on the activities of the Membership Committee:

- Information has been forwarded to the Governor's Appointments Office requesting reappointment of: Joyce Callahan, Andrea Buonincontro, Anne Rea, Larry Abramson, Ross Edwards, and Kali Mallik. New appointments forwarded were: Tim Daly, President, Access Group, Inc., Carol Lewis, Rehabilitation Specialist, DORS Office for Blindness & Vision Services, Jennifer Whitcomb, Director, Deaf Independent Living Services, Salisbury, and Mary Manzoni, Humanim.
- SRC orientation will be planned once appointments are finalized.
- Terms that expire in September 2007:
 - Josie Thomas, served 1 term; can be reappointed
 - Beth Lash, can be reappointed as CAP representative
 - Tim Atkinson/Mary Manzoni, can be reappointed
 - Terri Massie Burrell – completed 2 full terms; cannot be reappointed
 - Jennifer Whitcomb, can be reappointed
 - Michael Shaw, served 1 term; can be reappointed.
- Robert Seurkamp is no longer with the Governor's Workforce Investment Board. Contact will be made with his replacement, Eric Selzenow, regarding participation on the SRC.

Resource and Program Planning Committee, Tim Atkinson

Announcement made that, due to the resignation of Tim Atkinson, Niles Ellingson has taken over the responsibility as Chair of the Resource and Program Planning Committee.

Employment/Career Development Committee, Robert Burns

Deferred until next meeting.

Blindness and Vision Services Committee, Joyce Callahan

Joyce Callahan reported on the activities of the Blindness and Vision Services Committee.

- Dr. Kim McDonald-Wilson of the University of Maryland, gave a presentation on the OBVS Consumer Satisfaction Survey. Results were distributed for the period April thru September 2006. Dr. McDonald-Wilson will attend the August 29, 2007 meeting for further discussion and updated results with data thru July 2007.
- A copy of the OBVS Performance Management Report for Fiscal Year 2006 was distributed and discussed. Federal standards were maintained or improved.
- Maryland School for the Blind Cooperative Agreement is being updated and BISM grant for next year is being updated.
- Budget and legislative session 2007 updated by Bob Burns – blind services not harmed due to Order of Selection. BISM Grant \$633,000 looks good because level funded. Maryland School for the Blind gets increase due to formula and High School/High Tech probably won't be funded/renewed.

Election of Officers

Andrea Buonincontro was elected to chair the Maryland State Rehabilitation Council and Kali Mallik was elected as Vice-Chair.

Josie Thomas, Executive Director of Parents' Place of Maryland and member of the Maryland State Rehabilitation Council announced an upcoming teleconference being held on May 14, 2007 in collaboration with the Maryland Division of Rehabilitation Services. This teleconference will provide information to parents of students with disabilities about DORS services to transitioning students.

Adjournment

The MSRC meeting adjourned at 7:15 p.m. The next meeting of the Maryland State Rehabilitation Council will be Wednesday, September 19, 2007, 4:30 – 7:00 p.m., Room T-130, Workforce & Technology Center, Baltimore.

Respectfully submitted,
Donna M. Lippa, MSRC Staff Support