

Maryland State Rehabilitation Council Minutes
Annapolis, Maryland
February 3, 2009

Members – Present

Larry Abramson
Tom Barkley
Michael Bullis
Robert Burns
Joyce Callahan
Charles Crawford
Dan Frye
Beth Lash
Carol Lewis
Mary Manzoni
Josie Thomas
Michael Whitehill

DORS Liaison Staff – Present

Donna Lettow
Sue Schaffer
Kathi Santora

Members Unable to Attend

Andrea Buonincontro
Tim Daly
Ross Edwards
Kali Mallik
Anne Rea
Eric Seleznow
Michael Shaw
Alfred Sonnenstrahl
Jennifer Whitcomb

Support Staff – Present

Polly Huston
Donna Lippa

Introduction, Council Recognition and Approval of Minutes

In the absence of the Chair and Vice Chair, Acting Chair Larry Abramson welcomed members to the meeting. Members were asked to introduce themselves. Minutes of the November 5, 2008 meeting were approved as written.

Chairperson's Report (Acting Chair, Larry Abramson)

- **Letter of Appreciation to Governor O'Malley** – Mr. Abramson reported that a thank you letter has been sent to the Governor of Maryland from the SRC in appreciation for the support of the Maryland Division of Rehabilitation Services but also advocating for additional funding to eliminate the waiting list altogether. Council members were thanked for contributing to much of the language and message in this letter
- **SRC Strategic Federal & State 2009 Legislative Action Plan** – At this meeting there was much discussion about the impact of the federal economic stimulus package funding on employment of people with disabilities in our state and the funding of the Vocational (VR) program. The Council suggested that the MSRC contact the U.S. Congressional Delegation from Maryland regarding these issues. **Action: Staff will draft a letter to the U.S. Congressional Delegation for Council approval.**

Staff will keep the Council informed of any legislation which the Council may be interested in supporting/opposing.

Beth Lash stated that with the new change in administration, it might be a good time to address federal hiring for persons with disabilities. Larry Abramson suggested that this discussion be assigned to the SRC Employment Committee. Tom Barkley stated that the SRC should work with the Maryland Department of Disabilities to address this issue. Beth Lash stated that she feels that there are ways in which we can streamline the schedule A process. **Action: Recommendation was made to have a member of EEOC become a member of the SRC. This recommendation will be reviewed and discussed with Kali Mallik and the SRC Membership Committee.**

Director's Report (Robert Burns)

- Waiting List – DORS ended last fiscal year with a waiting list of 5,230 persons; DORS has been able to reduce its waiting list to less than 2,500 persons; still some eligible individuals must go into a delayed/waiting list status for 12 months due to inadequate funding of DORS services.
- DORS Budget Issues – DORS received the analyst's write-up on the proposed FY 2010 allowance and there were no cuts recommended for the DORS budget. The FY 2009 budget expenditures will be monitored very closely; case service expenditures continue to track within budgeted allocations.
- Federal Stimulus Bill – Passage of the current version could result in a \$6.6 million allocation to MD DORS; the language in the bill requires state VR agencies to use the monies to reduce waiting lists and/or serve unserved or underserved populations.
- Update of GAO Study – There is currently no update on the distribution formula. Will keep the Council informed on the progress of this initiative.
- Model State Plan for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services – When the statewide specialist for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing is hired a workgroup will be formed to include from the Council Al Sonnenstrahl, Jennifer Whitcomb and Josie Thomas to address services in Maryland.
- DORS 2010 Planning – Sue Schaffer, Chair of the DORS 2010 Committee shared the 4 main areas that the committee is focusing on: (1) Prepare a strategic plan that will support the hiring and retention of a qualified and dedicated workforce. (2) Study the feasibility and cost-benefits of technologies that will increase staff productivity and quality of service delivery. (3) Perform a high-level analysis of central and field office functions and recommend changes that should be considered to increase efficiencies. (4) Identify special initiatives that will provide increased flexibility and professional growth for DORS staff. **Action: Recommendations will be made and a formal report finalized in May 2009.**

Discussion on Visits with Legislators

Donna Lippa reported that there were thirty-six (36) scheduled appointments made with legislators today in Annapolis for the SRC 2009 Legislative Event. Kudos and thank you to the members of the Council for attending and visiting with their legislators.

The members thanked DORS staff for the excellent presentation materials which were provided for the legislative event. The materials were clear, concise and to the point and were quite helpful to the SRC members in meeting with their representatives. A suggestion was made that, in the future, be sure Council members are made aware which position on a certain bill (support/oppose) legislators are taking before meeting with the representatives.

Josie Thomas/Larry Abramson – Reported that their legislators are very supportive of the VR program. Senator Raskin stated that if an agency is able to retain current funding this year, consider yourself fortunate.

Tom Barkley – Senator Nancy Jacobs is very supportive of the VR program.

Mike Bullis/Dan Frye – Reported that their legislators are very supportive of the VR program and plan to support both pieces of legislation

Robert Burns – Met with Senator Harris who a very conservation Republican. Senator Harris is very supportive of the VR program and his aide identified constituents who will need services. Mr. Burns also met with Delegate Liz Bobo and we talked about the pros and cons of the end of life legislation.

Carol Lewis/Joyce Callahan – Carol and Joyce were able to meet with all of four legislators. Senator Brochin supports the VR program and would not support any cuts in funding. Senator Brochin does not plan to support the helmet bill. Delegates Susan Aumann and Frank were both very supportive of the VR program.

Charles Crawford – Legislators appeared to be supportive of the VR program.

Susan Schaffer – Delegate Guy Guzzone is very supportive of the DORS budget. Met with the policy analyst in Delegate Shane Pendergrass' Office who was also very supportive. Sue Schaffer stated that she attended the hearing for House Bill 20 – Intellectual Disability (Rosa's Law) which changes references to "mental retardation" in state law to "an intellectual disability"; and changes references to "a mentally retarded individual" to "an individual with an intellectual disability." Ms. Schaffer stated that this bill was passed today.

Beth Lash – All appointments went very well and staff and legislators were very supportive of the VR program.

Mary Manzoni - Meeting went very well and they were very interested in the DORS program. They liked having the information outlined with the cost of services clearly defined.

Michael Whitehill – Met with Senator Pipkin who stated that he was appreciative that we were not asking for more money. He does not plan to support the helmet legislation. Delegate Smiggel and Delegate Sossi both were very supportive of the public VR program.

Committee Reports - DISCUSSION ITEM

- **Policy and Planning Committee, Beth Lash** – The Policy and Planning Committee held a teleconference on January 28, 2009 to discuss the policy review committee activities and received an update on the upcoming public meetings and discussion as to the possibility of having a training opportunity relative to the State Plan process.
- **Public Relations and Quality Assurance Committee, Larry Abramson** – The Public relations and Quality Assurance Committee have not met since the last meeting. Have worked on the Annual Report for the SRC which was given out to all of our legislators.
- **Membership and Resource Committee, Kali Mallik** – Polly Huston reported that the Governor has made the following appointments to the Maryland State Rehabilitation:

New Appointments: Michael Bullis, Michael Whitehill and Daniel Frye.
Reappointments: Robert Burns, Tim Daly, Charles Crawford and Alfred Sonnenstrahl.

An orientation for new and continuing members will be scheduled within the next months.

- **Employment/Career Development Committee, Robert Burns** – Mr. Burns reported that the Employment Committee met on January 30, 2009 at SHA. The agenda topics for this meeting were: (1) 2009 Strategies for DORS Employment Specialist. The DORS Employment Specialists will be invited to join all future SRC Employment Committee meetings. (2) Workforce & Technology Center update and discussion, and (3) DOL/ODEP Employer Survey, implications for DORS.
- **Blindness and Vision Services Committee, Joyce Callahan** – Sue Schaffer reported on the activities of the Blindness and Vision Services Committee:
- ILOB Grant - New two year ILOB sub-grants have been awarded to Easter Seals, Columbia Lighthouse for the Blind and Blind Industries and Services of Maryland to assist the agency by filling critical gaps for seniors with visual

disabilities by maximizing their opportunity for independent living. The services provided are essential to decreasing injury, dependence on others and subsequently permanent residency at a nursing facility. Quarterly meetings with sub-grantees will take place to ensure quality work and progress towards stated goals.

- Office for Blindness and Vision Services currently have 404 open ILOB cases and the Average caseload size is 48
- AT Assessments - Lou Smith gave an explanation to the committee of the assessment process. He started with the referral process, individual goals – college or work, previous technical experience, extensive interviews and case review. Individuals are assessed on different pieces of equipment and what best fits their need. Recommendations are then forwarded to the DORS counselor. Recommended equipment includes Supnova from Dolphin Systems and Windoweyes.
- Employment Specialist - Darlene Peregoy was introduced to the committee as the new OBVS employment specialist. Darlene and Sue gave an overview of her job description and what they hope to accomplish. Dan Frye would like to meet to discuss new Schedule A provisions. Ellen Farnham would like to meet to discuss employment opportunities thru CLB.
- Consumer Satisfaction Survey - Sue reviewed the latest report which covered July, August and September 2008. A very large increase in client satisfaction with services. We anticipate lower satisfaction in reference to timeliness on next report because of our wait list. The satisfaction survey is at closure, so it is too early to see the outcomes related to the wait list.

Adjournment

The MSRC meeting adjourned at 2:00 p.m. The next meeting of the Maryland State Rehabilitation Council will be Wednesday, May 6, 2009, 4:30 – 7:00 p.m., Workforce & Technology Center, Baltimore, Maryland.

Respectfully submitted,
Donna M. Lippa, MSRC Staff Support