

MARYLAND STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL'S MESSAGE

December 22, 2021

As Chair of the Maryland State Rehabilitation Council (MSRC), it is an honor to serve the people of Maryland. The MSRC is the people's champion for employment of Marylanders with disabilities, for enhanced awareness of the capabilities of students, youths, and adults with disabilities, and for promotion of State and national policies that support those goals.

The MSRC is appointed by the Governor of Maryland, in compliance with federal law, to monitor, advise and oversee the Maryland State Department of Education's Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS). Established in the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, the Council reports its findings annually to the U.S. Department of Education's Rehabilitation Services Administration, the Governor of Maryland and, most importantly, the people of Maryland.

For the fiscal year 2021:

COVID-19 Pandemic

With vaccines being administered widely across the State of Maryland, DORS reopened its field offices to the public on July 1, 2021, which allowed consumers the choice to either meet with their counselors in person or virtually. Because of the pandemic, DORS counselors and consumers have had to adjust to the new normal of virtual meetings. Since July, DORS has found that approximately 90% of consumers wish

to continue to meet virtually with their field counselors. In retrospect, this makes sense when considering that the majority of DORS consumers rely either on public transportation or on the assistance of family or friends to provide them with transportation. In addition, a number of the virtual services that started at the onset of the pandemic will be continuing as consumers and providers have found those services to be beneficial.

DORS Referrals

One of the initiatives started during the pandemic was the development and implementation of a fully automated online referral system. This system allows for consumer referrals to go directly into the DORS case management system and results in a quicker turnaround time for the opening of consumer cases. It also has allowed DORS to track, by office and counselor, the number of referrals coming into the division. The referral trends are showing that DORS weekly referrals are trending up from a low of 381 on February 2, 2021 to 580 on September 28, 2021, a 52% increase in DORS weekly referrals.

Waitlist

The waitlist continues to be an issue that the DORS is working to address. During FY 21, DORS VR Workforce & Technology Center staff assessed individuals on the waitlist to reevaluate their status and obtain additional documents to see if they were eligible to move from Category 2 to Category 1. As a result, DORS was able to reduce the number of individuals on the waitlist. The overall net effect of this initiative was that

368 individuals were able to move off the waitlist and start receiving VR services during the fiscal year.

Quality Assurance

The delivery of high quality services is the standard that both DORS and the MSRC apply to every consumer's case. During the latter part of 2020 and most of 2021, DORS focused on streamlining existing processes to reflect the new realities brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. With increases in the use of technology to provide and deliver services, DORS internal process and policies had to reflect these changes. Over the years, DORS has relied on a team of individuals to provide the Quality Assurance reviews. In 2021, DORS reallocated staff resources to have a single person be responsible for the oversight of the Quality Assurance Team. The Team will be looking at quality from two points of view: the consumer and our required reporting data to the Rehabilitation Services Administration.

Customer Service

During 2021, DORS continued to send electronic or paper customer service surveys to consumers. Overall, the survey results were positive. When asked if they would recommend DORS to a friend, 75% indicated that they would. Results of some of the other questions were inscrutable, but when asked if they were satisfied with their employment, 87% indicated that they were. DORS will continue to survey consumers in the coming year and to assess the survey to glean results that are more useful.

In closing, I would like to commend DORS for its commitment to the employment needs of people living with disabilities and for its transparency to the people of Maryland through its partnership with the MSRC.

Sincerely,
Marsha Legg, Chair, Maryland State Rehabilitation Council

By The Numbers

In 2021, the Division of Rehabilitation Services:

- Provided VR Services to 14,746 individuals with Significant or Most Significant Disabilities
- Served 9,973 Youth and Students with Disabilities
- Assisted 925 individuals with Significant or Most Significant Disabilities to achieve Competitive Integrated Employment settings.
- VR counselors made 5,011 eligibility decisions