



Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC)

55 Utley Drive, Camp Hill, PA 17011

Voice: (717) 975-2004 or (888) 250-5175 TTY: (888) 559-2658 Fax: (888) 524-9282
Email: parc@parehabilitationcouncil.org Website: parehabilitationcouncil.org

EMAIL/FACSIMILE COVER SHEET

Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC)

Visit the PaRC Web Site at
<https://parehabilitationcouncil.org/>
55 Utley Drive, Camp Hill, PA 17011

VOICE (717) 975-2004 FAX (888) 524-9282 TTY (717) 737-0158
EMAIL - parc@parehabilitationcouncil.org

TO: Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Full Council

CC: Lee Ann Stewart, Cheryl Novak

FROM: Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council

DATE: May 18, 2022

NUMBER OF PAGES: 13 (including this page)

MESSAGE: This document contains the APPROVED minutes of the
February 23, 2022 Full Council Meeting.

ZOOM Full Council Quarterly Meeting

Full Council Meeting February 23, 2022 APPROVED Minutes

Council Members: Present (P) Not Present (NP)

Jeanette Alexander (P)	Deb Arcoleo (P)	Cindy Duch (P)
Paul Fogle (NP)	Passle Helminski (P)	Michele Leahy (P)
Juliet Marsala (P)	Anthony McCloskey (NP)	Michelle Paonessa (NP)
Kara Donatucci Pham (P)	Laura Princiotta (P)	Susan Soderberg (P)
Susan Tomasic (P)	William Del Toro Vargas (P)	Rob Wallington (P)

Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) Staff Present: Beth Ann Fanning, Cheryl Novak, Lee Ann Stewart, Douglas Rand, Beth Harris, Shannon Austin, Jennifer Cave, Rod Alcidonis, Janice Mazzitti, Kim Robinson, Rebecca Gardner, Ralph Roach, Jeremiah Underhill, Angel Torres, Kaitlin Salvati, Susan Storm, Tammy Burke, Heidi Speidel

Project Staff Present: Michelle Gerrick, Christopher Todd

Moderator of Zoom Present: Nichole Wade

CART Present: Yvonne Gordon

Interpreters Present: Ashley Shenk, Sharon Nicarry

Guests Present: Lynn Heitz (National Federation of the Blind), James Martini (PA Workforce Development Board), Tracey Turner (PA Workforce Development Board, Andrew Pennington (Pennsylvania Client Assistance Program), Matthew Seeley, Esq. (Pennsylvania Statewide Independent Living Council), Melissa Hawkins (Office of the Deaf & Hard of Hearing), Karen Beaston (Web Design and Development), Julia Barol (Transition Consults, LLC), Jennifer Garman (Disability Rights Pennsylvania), Linda Carmona-Bell (Pennsylvania's Education for All Coalition, PEAC), Dale Verchick (Disability Rights Pennsylvania)

Convene the Meeting – Ms. Passle Helminski, Chair

- Roll Call
- Welcome & Introductions
- Mission Statement

Agenda Additions / Approval of Today's Agenda

- There were no additions to the agenda.

Ms. Cindy Duch motioned to accept today's agenda. Ms. Juliet Marsala seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) Director's Report Ms. Shannon Austin, OVR Executive Director

- Ms. Shannon Austin reported that OVR is continuing the hiring process for many positions in Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (BVRS), Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services (BBVS), outer facing position, Social Workers, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC) positions that are attached to caseloads, and others. There are over one hundred recommendations and open positions being filled with a focus on areas that are short staffed. OVR continues to remain on a telework status which can be a benefit but presents barriers at times for the hiring process.
- 2-year Modification for the Combined State Plan is on track and Ms. Lee Ann Stewart has worked closely with Mr. James Martini through that process. Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) has provided guidance for the Plan that will require additions for the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Programs which require an additional Public Comment period.
- OVR has finalized a second Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) regarding the Team Navigator position. This includes 29 positions with 2 geared toward working with students that speak Spanish across the Commonwealth. Once the process is complete, they will be sharing the MOU with the Council.
- Workforce Navigator Positions to be housed in the CareerLink System. This will include 10 positions that will each cover a region of the Commonwealth to help individuals with disabilities navigate through the one-stop system.
- Hiring for internships statewide for this summer through OVR, Office of Administration (OA), and other state agencies for students with a disability and one year of college. Working with OA for hiring for a Customized Employment position and looking at the Commonwealth to be a site for Project Search. Working with OA to hire for Career Transition Professionals / liaisons that will work alongside Human Resources (HR) analysts, recruitment, and Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) regarding accommodations for new recruitment or retention. Excited for these projects to lead to more vibrant working relationships for current and potential employees with disabilities within the Commonwealth.

- Continued to place several thousand people into employment through this Fiscal Year. Last quarter engaged with over one thousand employers for referrals and employment.
- Continued working with Federal tax centers, Quality Employment Technical Assistance Collaborative (TAC), Quality Management TAC, and Transition Collaborative. Reported OVR is about halfway through the corrective action plan with the goal to address the findings from this plan.
- Preparing for the Transition Conference for August that will include PDE, Office of Developmental Programs (ODP), and OVR. Re-instating the employment connection with those three agencies to build capacity for Employment 1st that will share data and refine processes.
- Ms. Cindy Duch inquired if the Transition Conference will be held in person this year.
- Ms. Shannon Austin reported that the conference will have both options of in person and virtual attendance.

PUBLIC COMMENT

- Attendees had no public comments.

Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) Report: Update/Discussion of 2-Year Modification to the Combined State Plan, Ms. Lee Ann Stewart, OVR Division Chief of Policy, Staff Development & Training

- Ms. Lee Ann Stewart reported that there were two public comment periods held for the 2-Year Modification in October 2021 and January 2022. Drafts of the plan were previously provided to members throughout the process. Public comments included recommendations to serve those with HIV/AIDS as an unserved or underserved population in the next 3 year cycle of the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA), customer applications timelines, information sharing with the public, recommendations to continue to update MOU with the office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse that is soon ending, outreach to Transition age students to reach out no later than 14 years of age, inform public before making any change to OOS, recommendations that supervisors and counselors are familiar with Customized Employment, received compliments on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion (DEI), recommendations to continue to pay attention to language for different levels of comprehension, recommendations to be open with the public with any changes to any policies and/or procedures and inform Client Assistance Program (CAP) of those changes, revisions for category of disability, positive comments regarding Team Navigators to ensure providing employment for students with Most Significant Disabilities (MSD), positive comments regarding OVR exploring agreements with HR at OA to develop a Career Transition

Professional, suggestions to release a fact sheet to providers and families of students that include the expectations of working with OVR, positive comments regarding the apprenticeship program with Labor and Industry, support of improving referral experience for all stakeholders not just customers, encouraged to renew the MOU with office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse, requests for Project Search Outcomes information, requests to inform the public of any new information regarding the Order of Selection (OOS), comments on the return on investment that the Council recommends, disconnect between the 2021 PA Oversight Commission report and OVR's plans to upgrade facilities and programs, comments regarding the results and accessibility of the Customer Satisfaction Surveys, questions about Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) meeting minutes to be shared and posted on the PaRC website, suggestions to have electronic format of release forms for students receiving Transition services. Reported OVR is working to get DocuSign integrated into an OVR tool with the hopes to roll out training for staff to open up those opportunities. OVR staff and OVR Executive team review all public comments and consider if they substantiate a change in the draft of the State Plan. No changes were made as a result of the comments. OVR will be required to report on common performance measures or indicators and have been collecting baseline data. Will provide further updates regarding the indicators at the next quarterly meeting.

- Ms. Lynn Heitz stated that the Pa Council on the Blind included in their public comments for the State Plan comments and questions regarding accessibility concerns for customers who are blind regarding Project Search and other employment-based projects. Inquired if those comments were included and if they would result in modifying the Plan to include those who are blind or visually impaired in all of their new initiatives.
- Ms. Lee Ann Stewart stated public comments did include the letter to OVR from the Pa Council for the Blind. OVR appreciates the importance of being inclusive with all disability groups in all of their projects. The comments would not require a change to the State Plan because Project Search is listed generally and is inclusive to all who apply and was an important reminder of the need to make that program more inclusive.
- Ms. Juliet Marsala stated that she did not see specific mention of DEIA and underserved individuals. Inquired if there are considerations to include underserved individuals such as veterans and veteran services, equity disparities, and populations that are traditionally underserved like the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, Questioning, and Allied (LGBTQA) population for the State Plan. Inquired what is collected in data and applications regarding gender identity and

LGBTQA. Provided a recommendation for future CSNA to capture data regarding LGBTQA and gender identity.

- Ms. Lee Ann Stewart stated there is mention of DEI in the State Plan and is included in one of OVR's goals. One VR Specialist's area is Veteran Services. There is currently a vacancy in that area and will soon be hiring to fill that vacancy. The new cycle of the CSNA will be starting this fall, OVR and the Council are meeting in March to begin the conversation on what should be included in the next CSNA.
- Ms. Shannon Austin stated that all BVRS District Offices have designated VR Counselors with working with veterans, veteran programs, Federal Veterans Affairs (VA), and Veteran Leadership. Taking an active role with CSAVR, Mr. Jeremiah Underhill is the leader of the veteran network and they are meeting bi-monthly to strengthen collaboration, review data, triage veteran services, and streamline network of State and Federal Veteran Services.
- Ms. Lee Ann Stewart stated that the PA Workforce Development Board approved the Combined State Plan in February minus the VR portion. OVR State Board will hopefully be voting to approve the State Plan on March 3rd after which she will be working to submit the Plan to a portal as required before March 15th deadline. Plan becomes effective on July 2022.

POSSIBLE ACTION: Approval of 2-Year Modification to the Combined State Plan

Mr. Rob Wallington motioned to approve the 2-Year Modification to the Combined State Plan. Mr. William Del Toro Vargas seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) Report: Transition Update

**Ms. Kim Robinson, Transition and Section 511 Division
Chief/Bureau of Central Operations**

- Ms. Kaitlin Salvati reported OVR is working with BSE on hiring Team Navigators for the Intermediate Units (IU), District Offices are working with IU's to complete Youth Ambassador provider agreements, provided and developed Social Security Administration (SSA) Benefits Planning toolkit. Summer programs include the My Work Initiative, Professional Connections Experience, Summer Post-Secondary Experience. There are five new Transportation Provider Agreements, College Resources for Success Agreement was recently released and there are two provider agreements and several schools interested in the program. Continuing to work with PDE and ODP to revamp the Employment Experience Connection

renamed to PA Secondary Transition Connecting for Employment Program. Continue to make upgrades to Commonwealth Workforce Development System (CWDS) and Data Reporting since launch of Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre ETS) 2.0. Continuing to work on the Act 26 and Act 36 Reports.

- Ms. Michele Leahy provided feedback on the SSA Benefits Planning toolkit including that it does not include all Federally Funded Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) programs and inquired why only Achieva was included. Stated there are many organizations that provide benefits counseling and inquired why only Allsup was listed. Suggested adding items to the toolkit that would be accessible across the state and not just one region.
- Ms. Kaitlin Salvati reported that the toolkit was developed as part of the Community of Practice by OVR and ODP. Requested members send suggestions for the toolkit via email.
- Ms. Juliet Marsala inquired if the PaRC could be provided data from Transition services regarding Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting invitations, locations of those meetings, attendance of meetings by counselors, and outreach information provided.
- Ms. Kaitlin Salvati informed members that some of that data is included in the Act 26 reports. The Pre-ETS 2.0 data collection can now log data related to outreach in their events screen.
- Ms. Cindy Duch stated reports with the invite data requested is available on the PDE website. Suggested getting the resources including the MOU with PDE into the hands of families, cooperation, and advocacy between OVR, schools, and families.
- Mr. Rob Wallington inquired how information regarding IEP's get from the providers to families and students. Inquired what is being done to inform student's, families, and advocates about services in school districts that do not participate in OVR outreach.
- Mr. Andrew Pennington encouraged a more holistic approach in regard to informing parents and students of Transition Services that are available to them and how the process of attaining services to attain successful employment works in greater detail.
- Ms. Michele Leahy stated that once Early Age services are completed, OVR services need to be re-upped. This information needs to be conveyed to students and families. Reported that those with an Individual Support Plan (ISP), including people with an Intellectual Disability or Autism diagnosis continue to receive

guidance and resources to continue OVR services. Those with a physical, sensory, cognitive, or other types of disabilities do not receive this guidance once they leave school. Suggested continuing to provide resources for all disability groups. Suggested OVR visit all schools as those with a 504 and many others may not be made aware of the many resources available to them. Suggested research for OVR to find out which students over 18 are collecting SSI and other benefits to target meeting with those students.

- Ms. Jeanette Alexander provided the suggestion to meet with the school's guidance counselors to obtain this information. Inquired if OVR is still providing outreach at Middle Schools to families and students.
- Ms. Lynn Heitz stated that within OVR the Bureau of Blind and Visual Services has a program for students under the age of 14. Families and students need to be made aware of programs and services that OVR provides at an early age to ensure they have access to braille and technology to create an even playing field to obtain employment.
- Ms. Passle Helminski inquired how OVR is providing outreach to students who are deaf and hard of hearing. Also inquired if outreach includes the deaf-blind.
- Mr. Rob Wallington inquired how OVR is informed of students with an IEP and how schools are required and held accountable to provide information to OVR about students that qualify for their services.
- Ms. Kaitlin Salvati informed members that IEP information is provided through a combination of OVR outreach and informing the schools. Early Reach Coordinators are also involved in that process. Informed members that OVR's MOU agreement with PDE is to better communication, outreach, and collaboration with school districts. Families and advocates that are made aware of OVR services can be asked to attend IEP meetings without the school district's invitation. Pandemic has presented challenges because of less in person interaction with students and families. Hopes to increase ability to speak with, inform, and provide resources that inform more frequently. Youth Ambassador positions will include outreach to their peers. Will provide suggestions of OVR staff and counselors to know who to reach out to when in the schools to inform students of available resources/services. OVR works with the BBVS office to ensure staff is up to date and offers outreach with pre-employment transition services. OVR staff provides early outreach to students who are deaf and hard of hearing through IEP meetings, Summer programs, and communication to schools to provide services to all students including those with a 504 plan. This includes all students including those who are deaf-blind. Typically, OVR is informed of students with an IEP, 504

plan, or self-disclosed as in need of services by the school. OVR and ERC's are in the schools inform students and staff about services. Part of the outreach required of schools is mandated through Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN) and standards set for IEP meetings. Early Reach Coordinators are still providing the OVR 101 presentation to Middle Schools in preparation for High School Transition services.

PaRC Fiscal Report, Mr. William Del Toro Vargas, Member at Large

- Mr. William Del Toro Vargas provided the 2021-2022 fiscal year second quarter expenses were \$5469.96, first quarter expenses were \$3225.67 with a remaining total balance of \$74,304.97 as of 12/31/2021. Reported that expenses continue to be much lower due the ongoing concerns with COVID-19. The majority of meetings, conferences, and trainings have been virtual. As a result, there were no expenses related to travel accommodations in the 1st quarter. 2nd quarter travel expenses were limited to the Home & Community Based Services (HCBS) Conference only. Travel accommodations are typically the Council's largest expense.

PaRC Report on New Website, Social Media Committee / Ms. Karen Beaston, web designer

- Ms. Karen Beaston, web designer, presented the new Website Design Project to attendees for review, stated that the site will be fully accessible after adding the UserWay widget (that provides the user capabilities to increase contrast, change font size, use a screen reader and other accessibility tools) and further accessibility checks and adjustments that need to be made during the final stages of the project while preparing the site for live publication. Stated she will make the suggested edits and provide a link for members to test the site. Will look into providing UserWay on the test site.
- Ms. Michele Leahy stated that during project development other State Rehab Council (SRC) websites were reviewed, past Annual Reports are included, need approval from members to add a current member and staff page with their photos and information, described the History page and its importance for educating and engaging users, consciousness and effort to include images depicting diversity of disability, race and gender. Inquired about adding PaRC State and Federal Position Papers to a separate page that also includes the State Plan and Policy. Suggested providing edits to Karen from today's review and then providing members a link of the development site to test.

- Ms. Juliet Marsala stated that it would be more intuitive to move the link to the Community Advisory Council (CAC) page under the Resources dropdown menu. Suggested referring to Pennsylvania as a Commonwealth rather than using the word State. Suggested adding PaRC State and Federal Position Papers to the Get Involved page and the Committee page. Suggested making it clearer that the text for menu items are a link to a page. Suggested adding additional link in the dropdown and increasing the contrast of the dropdown menu text. Inquired about further user testing of the site.
- Members made suggestions to correct, edit, and add various resources such as Pennsylvania Client Assistance Programs (CAP), Department of Education, Bureau of Special Education. Members agreed about adding PaRC State and Federal Position Papers to a separate page that also includes the State Plan and Policy.
- Ms. Passle Helminski inquired if members would like to vote through email after further review of the site for its approval of suggested edits and useability.

POSSIBLE ACTION: Approval of new PaRC Website

Mr. Rob Wallington made a motion for members to review the new PaRC website after being provided the updated link and provide a vote for approval of the website through member email. Mr. William Del Toro Vargas seconded the motion. All were in favor.

PaRC Report on Revised Bylaws to include the establishment of a Governance Committee

Ad Hoc Committee / Lead Paul Fogel

- Ms. Susan Tomasic informed members that the Ad hoc Bylaws Committee is discussing the formation of a Governance Committee which would include members being appointed by the Chair, responsible for soliciting nominations for Officer and presenting nominations to the Council, reviewing Bylaws and policies annually and making recommendations for amendments, evaluate and monitor the Council's self-assessment, provide recommendations for trainings to the Council, evaluate onboard trainings for new members, and promote best practices for Council member management. This Committee would eliminate the need for Ad hoc Committees for the Bylaws and Nominations.
- Ms. Cindy Duch inquired if it would be too many responsibilities for the Chair of the Governance Committee to be completed for one person.

- Ms. Susan Tomasic stated that as Chair of the Pennsylvania Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) they are currently establishing a similar Committee and would recommend appointing a Committee Chair that is a consumer and that would inform they would have enough time to complete the required tasks. Tasks would be distributed on a monthly basis in shorter time intervals. Information/overview about the Committee was draft language and can be changed by the Council.
- Ms. Michele Leahy noted that as a consumer she is a business owner and full-time employee and that time constraints are for consumers as well.
- Mr. Rob Wallington inquired about the streamlining of the tasks for this new Committee.
- Ms. Susan Tomasic stated that it is often difficult to find volunteers for the required various Ad hoc Committees. This will ensure a group that is already established and prepared to do the work for nominations and other tasks.
- Ms. Lynn Heitz inquired if delegation of Committee duties would be part of the Chair's responsibilities.
- Ms. Juliet Marsala inquired if there are current Council members willing to commit to be on a Governance Committee.
- Ms. Michelle Leahy and Ms. Susan Tomasic stated that they would be willing to serve on the Governance Committee.

POSSIBLE ACTION: Approval of the establishment of a Governance Committee

Mr. Robert Wallington motioned for approval of the establishment of a Governance Committee. Ms. Michelle Leahy seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Discussion/Approval of Consent Agenda to include:

- **Approval of the November 16, 2021 Full Council minutes**
- **Approval of Reports/motions**
- **Opportunity for all members to participate in online Conferences to include:**
 - **Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) Spring Conference April 12, 2022 to April 14, 2022**

- **Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) Annual Conference March 2 to March 4, 2022**
- **National Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE) Regional Event March 7, 2022**
 - **Executive Committee’s recommendation to conduct virtual Full Council Meetings on August 3, 2022 and October 19, 2022**
 - **Legislative Committee’s recommendation of updated State and Federal Position Papers/Legislation**
 - **The Client Assistance Program’s (CAP) recommendation that the State Board of Vocational Rehabilitation (Board) direct the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) to review its notification of CAP information in order to ensure that the agency is:**

(1) notifying persons with disabilities who are applicants for or recipients of services, including potentially eligible students for pre-employment transition services and individuals seeking employment at a subminimum wage, or their representatives, of the availability and purposes of CAP, including information on the means of requesting assistance under the program, and

(2) requiring programs, including community rehabilitation programs, and projects that provide individuals with disabilities services under the Act, to inform such individuals of the availability and purposes of CAP, including information on the means of requesting assistance under the program.

(3) CAP further recommends that OVR include the statutory language of Sec. 20 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 in OVR policies and procedures, including provider agreements, to ensure that agency and program staff are aware of the statutory CAP notification requirement.

Ms. Michele Leahy motioned to approve the Consent Agenda. Ms. Susan Tomasic seconded the motion. All were in favor.

PUBLIC COMMENT

- Ms. Michele Leahy stated that it is still very difficult to acquire Employment Success Stories for the Social Media Committee to post on the website. Inquired how OVR is fulfilling the WIPA program and getting benefits counseling out into the community. Stated that it seems like the program is still not well known or invoking long term employment.
- Ms. Passle Helminski informed members that Mr. John Seely has submitted his resignation and that the Council will need to recruit someone to fill his position.

- Ms. Juliet Marsala stated that she would like to thank Mr. John Seely for his time served on the Council. Inquired if we currently have some applications in place that could fill his category in business/labor/industry. Requested adding a note on the agenda for the second Public Comment period that the time may occur sooner or later than the time stated on the agenda.
- Ms. Michelle Gerrick (staff) stated that we did previously have an applicant that stated they may be appropriate to fill that category and it was determined by members they may not be eligible for the category of business/labor/industry. Will distribute material again for review.
- Mr. William Del Toro Vargas stated that Public Comments can be made in writing to the Council which is included on the Public Notice Ad, website, and Facebook.

ADJOURN

Mr. William Del Toro Vargas made a motion to conclude the Full Council Meeting. Ms. Deb Arcoleo seconded the motion. All were in favor.

The meeting was adjourned.