



# 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](mailto:parc@parehabilitationcouncil.org) Website: [parehabilitationcouncil.org](http://parehabilitationcouncil.org)

## ZOOM Full Council Quarterly Meeting

### Full Council Meeting

May 18, 2022

### Approved Minutes

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

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

**Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) Staff Present:** Cheryl Novak, Lee Ann Stewart, James Whitonis, Ryan Hyde, Tracie Maille, Kim Robinson, Carla Hill, Colleen Woodring, Hillary Hubbell, Susan Storm, Dana Barone, Douglas Rand, Rob Hodapp, Tammy Burke

**Project Staff Present:** Michelle Gerrick, Christopher Todd

**Moderator of Zoom Present:** Nichole Wade

**CART Present:** Ishan Howard

**Interpreters Present:** Ashley Shenk, Jessica Bentley Sassaman

**Guests Present:** Christine Hunsinger (PA Council of the Blind), James Martini (PA Workforce Development Board), Matthew Seeley, Esq. (Pennsylvania Statewide Independent Living Council), Melissa Hawkins (Office of the Deaf & Hard of Hearing), Dale Verchick (Disability Rights Pennsylvania), Alexandra Hermann (Disability Rights Pennsylvania), Michael White (PA Workforce Development), Marci Katona (Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation Services), Dawn Sokol (Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services)

**CONVENE THE MEETING: Ms. Passle Helminski, Chair**

**Welcome & Opening Remarks**

## **Roll Call – Ms. Nichole Wade, moderator**

### **Mission Statement**

### **Welcome New Members**

### **Member Recognition – Mr. Robert Wallington, PaRC member**

### **Agenda Additions / Approval of Today's Agenda**

- Mr. Rob Wallington acknowledged and thanked members who are soon cycling off from the Council as their appointment to the Council comes to an end in July 2022. Ms. Deb Arcoleo, Ms. Cindy Duch, Ms. Passle Helminski, Ms. Juliet Marsala, and Ms. Sue Soderberg were recognized for their time, dedication, and knowledge that was given toward the Council's continued fulfillment of its mission.

***Mr. Rob Wallington motioned to approve today's agenda. Ms. Michele Leahy seconded the motion. All were in favor.***

## **OFFICE OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (OVR) DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

### **Mr. Ryan Hyde, Acting Executive Director**

- Mr. Ryan Hyde stated there are about 150 open positions at OVR with those being a majority of counselor positions. OVR is working with Human Resources to get those positions filled as quickly as possible. Referrals for services are down in numbers because of repercussions of the pandemic, economy, and lack of staff but are starting to pick up. As of April 2022, all OVR offices are now physically open. Hiram G. Andrews Center (HGAC) will return to dual capacity for their dormitories. HGAC is working with Department of Human Services (DHS) on a training program for Daycare workers at HGAC. Reported HGAC has several building projects underway or approved including roof replacement, maintenance, energy efficient chillers, and other significant upgrades. HGAC will hold first in-person Career Fair in October since the start of the pandemic. Reported that the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) technical assistance centers are working with OVR on rapid eligibility determination with the goal to provide services and secure employment for customers as soon as possible. Training for rapid engagement will be rolled out through OVR in the coming weeks/months. Reported that there are about \$13 million dollars estimated for Summer programs for Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre ETS) with an estimate of serving about seven thousand students. Currently carrying over an estimate of \$40 million from the last fiscal year's Federal Grant and anticipate being able to match the current Federal Grant with a remaining balance of over \$100 million from the grant because of the pandemic and its impact on caseloads along with a lack of staff. Anticipate receiving \$48 million from the State VR Transfer on July 1 pending the budget

approval. Currently targeting the Financial Needs Test (FNT) policy and the College policy to see if the State Board of VR could provide temporary changes to those policies to allow OVR to invest the significant amount of funds anticipated to be carried over to invest in services and customers while the large amounts of carryover funds are available. Exploring rate increases for general college maximums, supported employment and Pre-ETS services to ensure additional staffing. Exploring FNT policy exemptions for HGAC and OVR customers that would reduce or eliminate financial participation in services.

- Ms. Lynn Heitz inquired if HGAC is working to expand curriculum to assist students who are blind. Inquired if providers of services for Pre-ETS or supported employment are provided training to work with someone who is blind or visually impaired and if not is there a plan to provide such training. Volunteered to assist OVR with improving OVR services for the Blind and Visually Impaired.
- Mr. Ryan Hyde will ask HGAC staff to follow up about the question regarding individuals who are blind or visually impaired.
- Ms. Dawn Sokol stated that she agrees and is working to set up a meeting to discuss collaboration for training for blindness and visually impaired to be built into the curriculum at HGAC. Have committed to a combined approach to the incorporation with blindness and visual services with Pre-ETS and all OVR services.
- Ms. Michelle Paonessa stated that she wants to ensure that there are services provided for deaf community, having qualified ASL staff not only at HGAC but also with counselors.
- Mr. Ryan Hyde stated that OVR works closely with Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH) and will provide those concerns with OVR leadership to ensure those concerns are addressed regarding providing services for the deaf community.
- Ms. Julia Barol stated that there are trainings available for individuals who are blind, visually impaired, deaf, or hard of hearing through the Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) and utilizing American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding.
- Ms. Dana Barone informed members she has been tasked with applying for the grant for Subminimum Wage to Competitive Integrated Employment (SWTCIE) made available to state vocational rehabilitation (VR) programs through the Disability Innovation Fund. The purpose of the grant is to assist individuals with disabilities currently employed in, or contemplating, subminimum wage employment to engage with State VR agencies so they may obtain competitive integrated employment (CIE). In PA there is currently a need for services to support individuals who would like to move from sub-minimum wage employment to CIE. National data shows that PA represents about ten percent of individuals currently in sub-minimum wage employment and there is a national trend to

eliminating sub-minimum wage employment. The grant would provide funds to develop a strategy to access to CIE with services such as transportation, support services for CIE, integration into the communities, identify and coordinate wrap around services, develop and share best practices. Hope to develop a model that can be replicated throughout PA for programs with the 14C Certificate to transition to CIE. Maximum amount available to a grantee would be \$13,943,946 for a term of 60 months, no state match required and sub grants are available. Grant application is due on 6/21/2022. Confirmed that OVR is asking for a letter of support from the PaRC and other entities.

- Mr. Ryan Hyde informed members in addition to the letter of support OVR would also welcome feedback from members regarding information to be included in the grant proposal. OVR understands that providing support for families and concerns about the health and safety of those in sub-minimum wage programs are important.
- Ms. Juliet Marsala stated that seeking the grant is welcome news, understands that Ohio has previously pursued a similar grant and Ohio VR program may have valuable information about how they are redesigning their 14C Certificate programs to CIE.

***Ms. Juliet Marsala motioned to approve a letter of support from the PaRC for the grant for Subminimum Wage to Competitive Integrated Employment (SWTCIE). Mr. Andrew Pennington seconded the motion. All were in favor.***

- Mr. Ryan Hyde recognized Ms. Passle Helminski for her advocacy, friendship, and leadership over the many years they have know each other and her time on the PaRC. Also provided a letter from PA Secretary Labor Berrier thanking Ms. Passle Helminski for her time and dedication serving on the PaRC for many years.

## **BUREAU OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES (BVRS) UPDATE**

### **Ms. Marci Katona, Acting BVRS Director**

- Ms. Marci Katona reported that staffing is a priority initiative for BVRS and has made 23 new hires and has been very active in hiring for the last two months with 42 hiring actions in process that could include multiple postings for a position. Has increased outreach to grow customer base, currently engaged within the bureau with over 32,000 customers. Have recently received over 14,000 new referrals and have successfully rehabilitated over 4,000 individuals. Reported that there is about \$13 million projected toward the Summer Program Initiatives to serve almost 7,000 students with disabilities. Reported there is continued intentional efforts to make all programs accessible, comprehensive, and integrated to all individuals

including individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing as well as blind and visually impaired. The My Work Initiative has been successful for many years, for which all 15 BVRS Offices are planning to host a program this summer with a goal of serving 391 students. Paid work experiences have been identified at all BVRS offices serving about 550 students. Programs focused on job shadowing and community involvement are in place in Norristown, Philadelphia, Erie, Pittsburgh, Reading, Washington, and York with a projection of serving 364 students. Community partnership with post-secondary school's experience projects serving 105 students. Beginning this Summer / Fall Youth Ambassador program allows students to connect with OVR and engage students with leadership roles. Excited they were able to give out an individual achievement awards recently to two exceptional customers from Altoona District Office one that is working at Sheetz and excited about partnership with Sheetz, the other a student working at Martin Grocery Store.

## **BUREAU OF BLINDNESS AND VISUAL SERVICES (BBVS) UPDATE**

### **Ms. Dawn Sokol, Active BBVS Director**

- Ms. Dawn Sokol reported that two priorities are referrals and staffing. Shortage in staff has caused disruption in achieving goals. Have concentrated efforts for outreach to obtain referrals. Working on special project to improve and increase outreach and referrals across OVR Bureaus. Working on project to assist people that use Assistive Technology (AT) which include recommendations, training, new equipment, triage project, resource account, and outside resources for customer requests. Exploring changes to low vision policy and streamlining services with providers. Have streamlined process that now has necessary equipment already delivered to customer's homes when staff arrives to provide lessons. Strive On program is held throughout the year and provides BBVS High School Students with skills to Transition to college and job placement.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

- Mr. Ryan Hyde reported that Melissa Hawkins is receiving the Governor's award for Excellence for her work during the pandemic to ensure people who are deaf and hard of hearing receive services and materials they need, interpreters were at all press events, spent countless hours with FEMA coordinating with the Governor's Office to ensure that the Department of Health messaging reached people who are deaf and hard of hearing.

## **QUARTERLY PROGRESS REPORT ON THE STATE PLAN GOALS**

## **Ms. Lee Ann Stewart, OVR Division Chief of Policy, Staff Development & Training**

- Ms. Lee Ann Stewart reported that the CSNA Statement of Work is almost finished and will be provided to PaRC for review. Introduced Mr. James Whitonis that will be the specialist working on the CSNA and State Plan. Current CSNA cycle will end on September 2022 and new cycle will begin in October 2022 and anticipates Temple will provide the final report sometime in September. In the new Statement of Work for the next cycle that goes from October 2022 to September 2025, will be the discussion held with the Council from March 2022 to identify barriers and strategies for individuals who are immunocompromised and with Long-COVID. Also looking at Technology gaps that exist throughout the Commonwealth, how it affects the customer base and what improvements can be made to increase and improve employment opportunities. The State Plan was reviewed by RSA and a few revisions were requested which include tweaks to measurables and goals, Description L in goals and priorities to include language regarding transportation and its associated barriers to employment. A transportation provider agreement has been developed by OVR staff. OVR has also recently hired staff to help implement services for vehicle modification, home modification, and transportation.

## **PRESENTATION: COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO ADA ACCESSIBILITY FOR THE PUBLIC WORKFORCE SYSTEM**

### **Mr. Rob Hodapp, Business Services & Outreach Specialist, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and Mr. Michael White, Policy Coordination and PA CareerLink® Finance & Budget Chief, Bureau of Workforce Development Administration**

- Mr. Michael White reported that nearly thirty reviews for American with Disabilities Act (ADA) Accessibility have been completed to date at CareerLink Centers after beginning nearly two years ago, with some delay due to the pandemic. The completion of the reviews is anticipated by the end of July.
- Mr. Rob Hodapp reported the review begins with physical access of the building including the transportation routes, parking areas, entrances, and doorways. Reviews continue with assessments of walkways, desks, open spaces, furniture, hallways, meeting rooms, room signage with braille, wall mounted objects and related safety concerns. Assessments of access to restrooms are also included. Access to technology such as phones, TTYs, computers and hardware, assistive technology hardware and software, adjustable chairs and desks, cameras, CC TVs, and other associated equipment are also reviewed for full accessibility.

Additionally, accommodation processes are assessed for accessibility including for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, providing interpreters and TTY systems, and alternative formats for individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

- Mr. Michael White reported that during the reviews or shortly afterward all necessary changes were made to ensure each center is fully accessible. Findings showed that Closed Circuit TVs needed to be replaced, some TTY phones were broken or not available, and JAWS and other Assistive Technology software needed updated. Resolutions included purchasing and installation of CC TVs, TTY phones and multiple analog phone lines are being installed, braille capable phones are being installed, software updates were funded, a communication device is also being assessed for purchase to enable people who are deaf and hard of hearing to communicate with CareerLink staff. An ADA monitoring toolkit is being purchased for each of the CareerLink sites with provided trainings for staff. Positive outcomes of the reviews include improved services and accessibility for the citizens of PA with the collaboration of OVR and Statewide Workforce Development, plan in place to keep centers accessible with continued collaboration for continued improvement at the PA CareerLink local level, and centers are at a better position to meet statutory and regulatory requirements upon the Labor and Industry, Office of Equal Opportunity reviews.
- Ms. Passle Helminski inquired what is being done to provide staff training and deal with the high turnover rate of staff to provide services to people with disabilities.
- Mr. Rob Hodapp informed members they have begun a partnership with CareerLink staff for disability awareness training to provide education to all staff several times a year on providing services at CareerLink sites to people with disabilities that visit the CareerLink sites. Ongoing OVR training will also be incorporated in the core competencies for all Workforce Development staff.
- Ms. Michele Paonessa made the recommendations of using video phones in CareerLink facilities as TTY is antiquated, training for staff using TTY as many people no longer use English, assessing for adequate lighting for video phones, providing ASL interpreters at each facility, and inquired if recommendations can be considered for future assessments.
- Mr. Rob Hodapp and Mr. Michael White agreed to work closely with staff on those recommendations and will continue to make improvements to CareerLink centers in an effort to make them fully accessible.
- Mr. Andrew Pennington stated that CAP has done extensive research for the deaf, hard of hearing, and deaf-blind. Inquired how does communication occur / made accessible outside of the CareerLink facilities. CareerLink website only lists phone number for contact, does not list TTY, TTY is outdated, suggested methods for contact including, email, videophone, fax, or 711 relay.

- Mr. Rob Hodapp and Mr. Michael White agreed to work closely with staff on those recommendations and will continue to make improvements to CareerLink website and fully accessible for contacting CareerLink staff.
- Ms. Julia Barol provided recommendations for staff to be well versed in all forms of accessibility and inquired about all equipment being made known of its availability to all visitors at the CareerLink facilities.
- Mr. Michael White stated that there is currently an effort working with a vendor to create core competencies for CareerLink staff and will be including accessibility in that curriculum. Working on initiative with OVR to have Career Navigators within the CareerLink facilities

## **PaRC FISCAL REPORT**

### **Mr. William Del Toro Vargas, Member at Large**

- Mr. William Del Toro Vargas reported that third quarter expenses included JANUARY 2022 = \$2284.13, FEBRUARY 2022 = \$202.47, MARCH 2022 = \$1306.42, with a total of THIRD QUARTER EXPENSES = \$3793.02, and a remaining BALANCE AS OF 03/31/22 = \$70,511.35. 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. Travel accommodations are typically the Council's largest expense

## **ELECTION OF PaRC OFFICERS FOR FY 2022-2023**

### **Ms. Juliet Marsala, Chair of Nomination Committee**

- As the Chair and only member of the PaRC Nomination Committee, Ms. Juliet Marsala provided instructions for the election of officers, read the nominations for Council Chair which include Ms. Michele Leahy, Mr. Paul Fogle, and Mr. William Del Toro Vargas, and asked members if there were additional nominations for Chair.
- There were no additional nominees for the position of Chair. The election results were as follows:

Jeanette Alexander – **Michele Leahy**

Deb Arcoleo – **not present**

Julia Barol – **Paul Fogle**

Cindy Duch – **Paul Fogle**

Paul Fogle – **Paul Fogle**

Lynn Heitz – **Paul Fogle**

Passle Helminski - **Paul Fogle**

Michele Leahy – **Michele Leahy**



Juliet Marsala - **abstained**

Anthony McCloskey – **not present**

Michelle Paonessa – **Michele Leahy**

Andrew Pennington – **Michele Leahy**

Kara Donatucci Pham – **not present**

Laura Princiotta – **not present**

Sue Soderberg – **Michele Leahy**

Susan Tomasic – **Paul Fogle**

William Del Toro Vargas – **Paul Fogle**

Rob Wallington – **William Del Toro Vargas**

- Ms. Michelle Gerrick (staff) announced that Mr. Paul Fogle has been elected as the new Chair with seven votes, Ms. Michele Leahy received five votes, and Mr. William Del Toro Vargas had one vote.
- Ms. Juliet Marsala asked members if there were any additional nominees for Vice-Chair, read the list of nominees which were Ms. Susan Tomasic, Ms. Michele Leahy and Mr. William Del Toro Vargas. The results were as follows:

Jeanette Alexander – **Susan Tomasic**

Deb Arcoleo – **not present**

Julia Barol – **Susan Tomasic**

Cindy Duch – **Susan Tomasic**

Paul Fogle – **Susan Tomasic**

Lynn Heitz – **Susan Tomasic**

Passle Helminski – **Susan Tomasic**

Michele Leahy - **abstained**

Juliet Marsala - **abstained**

Anthony McCloskey - **not present**

Michelle Paonessa – **Susan Tomasic**

Andrew Pennington – **Susan Tomasic**

Kara Donatucci Pham – **not present**

Laura Princiotta – **not present**

Sue Soderberg – **Susan Tomasic**

Susan Tomasic - **abstained**

William Del Toro Vargas – **William Del Toro Vargas**

Rob Wallington – **Susan Tomasic**

- Ms. Michelle Gerrick announced that Susan Tomasic has been elected as the new Vice-Chair with ten votes. Mr. William Del Toro Vargas received one vote.
- Ms. Juliet Marsala asked members for additional nominees for Member-At-Large, read the list of nominees which included Ms. Jeanette Alexander and Mr. William Del Toro Vargas. The election results were as follows:

Jeanette Alexander - **abstained**

Deb Arcoleo – **not present**  
Julia Barol – **Jeanette Alexander**  
Cindy Duch – **Jeanette Alexander**  
Paul Fogle – **Jeanette Alexander**  
Lynn Heitz – **Jeanette Alexander**  
Passle Helminski – **Jeanette Alexander**  
Michele Leahy – **Jeanette Alexander**  
Juliet Marsala - **abstained**  
Anthony McCloskey – **not present**  
Michelle Paonessa – **Jeanette Alexander**  
Andrew Pennington – **Jeanette Alexander**  
Kara Donatucci Pham – **not present**  
Laura Princiotta – **not present**  
Sue Soderberg – **Jeanette Alexander**  
Susan Tomasic – **Jeanette Alexander**  
William Del Toro Vargas – **Jeanette Alexander**  
Rob Wallington – **Jeanette Alexander**

- Ms. Michelle Gerrick announced that Jeanette Alexander has been elected as the new Member-at-Large.

## **DISCUSSION/APPROVAL OF CONSENT AGENDA**

### **Minutes/Reports/Motions**

### **PaRC Bylaws**

### **PaRC Member Re-Appointments**

### **William Del Toro Vargas & Kara Donatucci Pham**

### **Jessica Keogh’s application for PaRC membership to fulfill category of Intellectual Disabilities**

### **PaRC Committee Goals & Budgets for FY 2022-2023**

### **PaRC Operational Budget to remain \$83,000.00**

### **Results from Election of PaRC Officers**

### **2023 Full Council Meeting Dates**

**Wednesday, February 15, 2023**

**Wednesday, May 17, 2023**

**Wednesday, August 2, 2023**

**Wednesday, October 18, 2023**

***Mr. William Del Toro Vargas motioned to approve today’s Consent Agenda. Mr. Paul Fogle seconded the motion. All were in favor.***

## **COUNCIL WORK TIME**

## **Discuss expectations of the OVR State Board, and how they can best work with the PaRC to meet the needs of Pennsylvanians with disabilities**

### **Discussion of future Retreats**

#### **Committee Recruitment**

- Ms. Passle Helminski inquired about holding strategic planning meetings with members of the OVR State Board and also about increased collaboration and communication beyond the Council Chair providing report during OVR Board meetings.
- Mr. Paul Fogle inquired if the meetings with OVR Board would be in-person or virtual.
- Ms. Juliet Marsala stated that she hopes to keep equity and accessibility at the forefront of any decisions made regarding the format of meetings. A hybrid meeting model that would incorporate both in-person and virtual option may be more equitable in terms of allowing more people across the Commonwealth to attend that are not able to travel to Harrisburg to provide comments. Clarified that members that can attend in-person should do so and that a hybrid format could be publicly broadcast to provide a means for the public to participate, listen, provide public comment both virtually and in-person.
- Mr. Paul Fogle inquired in terms of the Sunshine Act what would be required if a majority of both the Board and Council were to attend a meeting together.
- Mr. Ryan Hyde stated they will consult legal staff and will be careful about requirements for deliberation and other issues regarding compliance to the Sunshine Act. Stated the Board is asking for information from the Council on how the Board can better collaborate with the Council, Council expectations of the Board, what information to provide to the Council, and any other issues regarding collaboration and communication.
- Ms. Michele Leahy agreed about providing a hybrid format for meetings and stated that attending in-person for members when possible is important. Suggested that OVR and the Board provide information to the Council such as data requested regarding VR services, Transition Services, benefits counseling, and employment success stories.
- Ms. Passle Helminski asked members to help brainstorm on how to better communicate and collaborate with the OVR Board.
- Ms. Sue Soderberg suggested that the newly elected leadership of the Council initiate communication with the OVR Board leadership to discuss and agenda for a first level meeting. As the Board works to better define their role and communication with OVR, leadership may be able to better structure that conversation.

- Mr. Andrew Pennington stated the Council and Board work together to better facilitate communication between both entities.
- Ms. Michele Leahy stated as Chair of the Social Media Committee would appreciate Council members joining the Committee, recently worked towards the approval and deployment of the new website, would be helpful for member involvement to provide new ideas for member recruitment, continue to expand social media involvement and will be creating new PaRC videos.
- Ms. Sue Soderberg encouraged members to committing to at least a couple of the Committees.
- Ms. Passle Helminski suggested members try out different Committees.
- Mr. William Del Toro Vargas stated there is a mandate to be a part of one Committee, members can attend any Committee meetings they would like, Policy Committee is focusing more on the HGAC and CACs to increase number of participants, and encouraged members to look into increased involvement with the CACs. Encouraged other members to consider chairing the Policy Committee. Thanked Ms. Passle Helminski, Ms. Juliet Marsala, and Committee Chairs for their contributions to the Council.
- Ms. Passle Helminski encouraged members to also consider being a Committee Vice-Chair.
- Mr. Andrew Pennington inquired about joining Committees.
- Ms. Passle Helminski stated members need to inform staff what Committees they would like to join, and staff will provide the necessary information.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

- There was no public comment.

## **ADJOURN**

***Mr. William Del Toro Vargas motioned to adjourn. Ms. Juliet Marsala seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned.***