

Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC)

ANNUAL REPORT FOR
FISCAL YEAR 2021 - 2022



The Mission of the Council is to inform and advise the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, the State Board of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Legislature and the Governor on the diverse issues affecting employment of people with disabilities.

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This report covers the activities of the Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC) for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2021, and ending June 30, 2022. Alternate formats and additional copies are available upon request. Contact:

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Support Project
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Current and past reports are also available on the PaRC website:

parehabilitationcouncil.org

Pennsylvania State Law requires the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) publish an annual program report on a different timeline than this product. Therefore, the PaRC reports the most recently available OVR data. For a more detailed OVR report, you may request OVR's Program Report from:

**Pennsylvania Office of Vocational
Rehabilitation
651 Boas Street Room 700
Harrisburg, PA 17121**

Cover Image Description: Photo collage of U.S. Capitol, photographer with a disability working, person using sign language during a meeting on their laptop, PA Capitol, PaRC Logo in the center.

PaRC



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A Message from Our Past Chair Passle Helminski



Dear fellow Pennsylvanians, Governor, Secretary of Labor & Industry, Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) Commissioner, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) staff, State Board of Vocational Rehabilitation, PA Legislators, PA Workforce Development Boards, and Stakeholders:

It has been an honor and privilege to serve as Chair of the Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC) for the last three years. With the help of Council members and Project Staff, Paul Fogle, the incoming Chair, will continue the fight to ensure that all Pennsylvanians with disabilities can obtain the goal of competitive integrated employment. Please accept my thanks for the support over the last three years and know that I am very appreciative of this.

The Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council will continue to fulfill its mandate under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Most importantly, the Council has continued to collaborate with OVR, which has continued to recover from the impacts of COVID-19 and provide vital services for Pennsylvanians which includes the full reopening of the Order of Selection (OOS). Similarly, the Rehabilitation Council will continue to educate the General Assembly on legislation that removes barriers to employment and the advancement of Pennsylvanians with disabilities, especially within the Commonwealth's Civil Service hiring framework.

The Council maintains involvement in the reporting of the Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services, Client Assistance Program, Department of Education/Bureau of Special Education, Disability Rights PA, Office for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing, Office of Administration, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, Statewide Independent Living Council, and Workforce Development Boards. Strengthening these relationships and working together will positively affect successful employment and independent living outcomes for Pennsylvanians with disabilities. Thank you again to my fellow Council members and partners for allowing me the opportunity to serve as Chair. Best of luck in this upcoming year.

Respectfully,

Passle Helminski BA, MA, MFA



*Photo Descriptions:
Top: Passle with
Representative
Bizzarro
Middle: Passle and
her service dog
Bottom: Passle with
Governor Ridge*

A Message from Our Current Chair

Paul Fogle

Dear Friends and Fellow Stakeholders,

I would like to thank you for taking the time to review our Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2021-2022. You will find in the following pages information about the work of the Council and highlights of our partnership with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR).

The Council is looking forward to a very busy 2023. There will be an emphasis on supporting and collaborating with OVR on Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, State Plan, and developing new policies that will benefit the employment of Pennsylvanians with disabilities. In addition, we look forward to working with our new Governor and members of the General Assembly in advancing policy and budgetary priorities that directly impact opportunities for people with disabilities.

We will be working on a number of other projects as well which include:

- Increasing our outreach and education activities.
- Learning more about the work of the Hiram G. Andrews Center.
- Reorganizing council policies and bylaws to make PaRC operations more efficient.

If you have an interest in our work and want to become involved, I invite you to visit the section of this report about joining the Council as a member. There are numerous ways you can contribute to the council by being a member. If you have further questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to the Council's staff. Their contact information can be found later in this report.

I would be remiss if I did not highlight the efforts of individuals who not only made this report happen but serve as behind the scenes to make sure the Council functions. Project Support Staff, Michelle Gerrick and Christopher Todd, support the work of our Council through a partnership with United Cerebral Palsy in Camp Hill, Pennsylvania. They field all questions and inquiries for the Council and help prepare materials for all meetings. Throughout the pandemic, Michelle and Chris have been extremely flexible with making sure the Council had everything that was required. THANK YOU!

Finally, as we turn the page on Calendar Year 2022, I would like to invite you to our 2023 Council Meetings. These meetings contain information for people with disabilities not only in the OVR system, but in other disability service areas such as education, transition, and long-term living. Our first meeting of 2023 will be February 15th via zoom. If interested in learning more about joining Full Council meetings, please visit our website at <https://parehabilitationcouncil.org/>.

Have a prosperous 2023!

Paul Fogle
Chair 2022-2023

2021 VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION HIGHLIGHTS



45,535 individuals engaged with OVR ¹



9,719 new applicants



14,353 students received Pre-Employment Transition Services ²



4,773 individuals placed into employment



\$14.61 average hourly wage of individuals employed



\$34.52 M estimated annual government savings ³



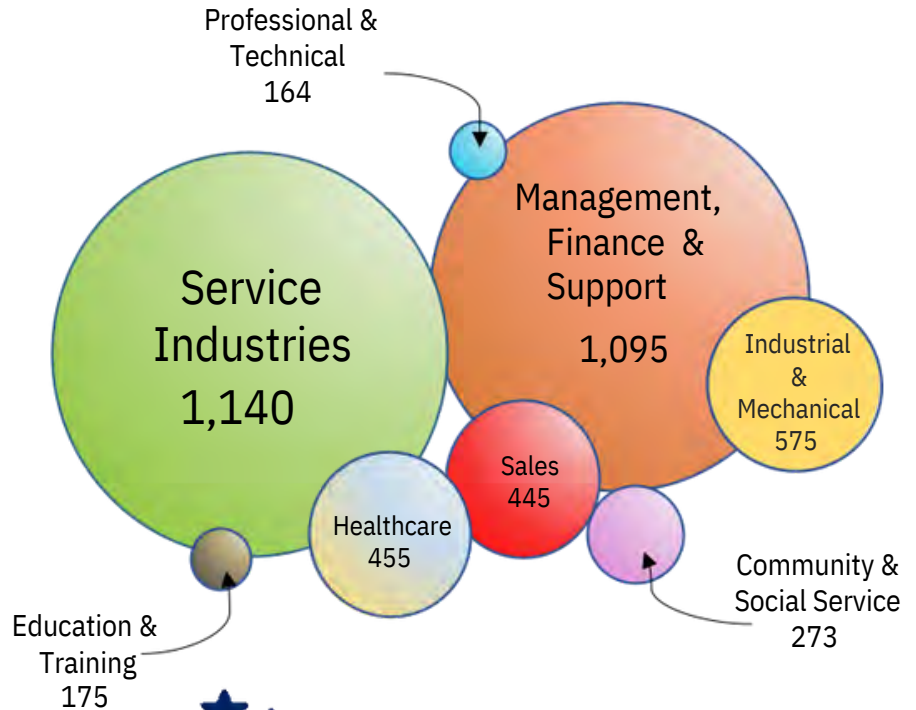
\$9,116 average per-person cost of services for an employment placement



16.7 months projected time to recover investment



Which Occupations are OVR Customers Working In?



Early Reach Initiative



782 Early Reach Outreach Events ⁴



1,875 Student & Youth Attendees



1,566 Parent or Guardian Attendees



7,384 Professional Attendees

¹ Number of OVR customers who had an open VR case as of June 30, 2021, or had their case closed during the Program Year 2020.

² Includes potentially eligible students and students with OVR cases, and both purchased and staff-provided services.

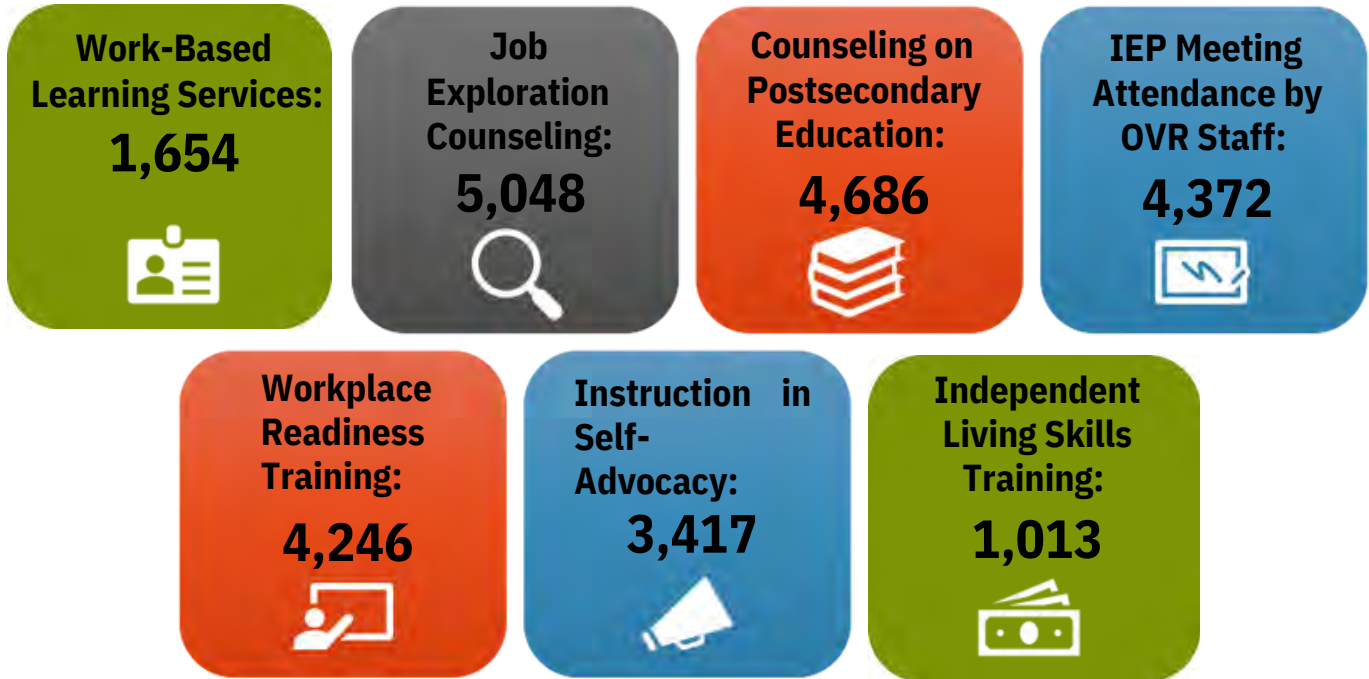
³ Based on estimated income taxes, total average annual SSA reimbursement, and SSA benefits that may decrease or end due to employed individuals achieving SGA levels established by the SSA.

⁴ Early Reach programming promotes successful outcomes for youth with disabilities by increasing awareness of OVR services and the benefits of early career planning.

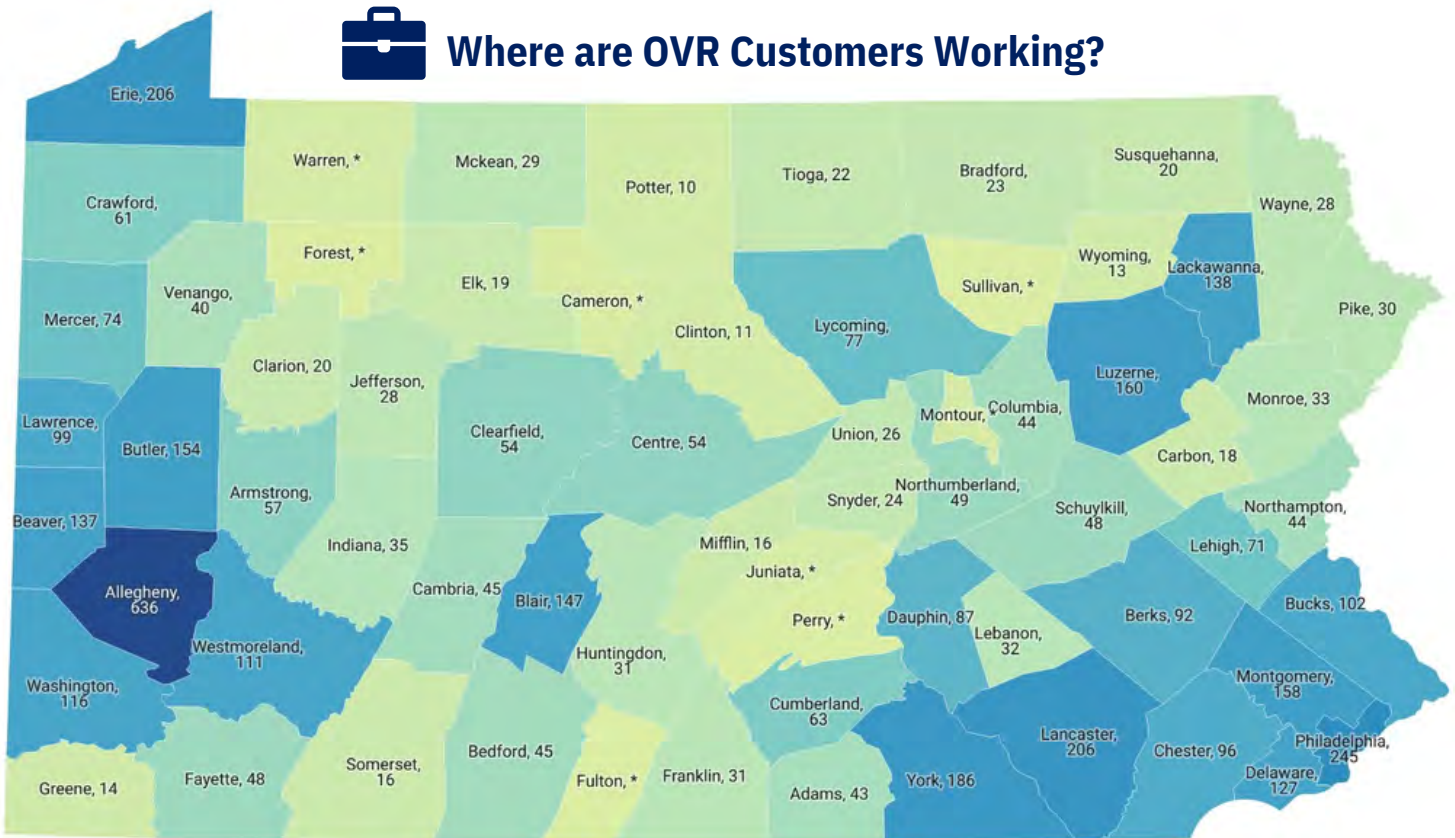
Note: All figures represent program activities during the 2020-21 Program Year (July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021).



Students Who Received Pre-Employment Transition Services



Where are OVR Customers Working?



The 36 CFR 361 regulations implementing the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) require that the employment outcomes satisfy the following criteria under the Vocational Rehabilitation program: (1) competitive earnings, (2) integrated location, and (3) opportunities for advancement.

Counties with non-zero placements less than ten are shown with an asterisk (*) to protect customer privacy.

PaRC Members

Including Category of Representation
July 2021 - June 2022

Ryan Hyde

Ex-Officio Member

Ryan Hyde is the Acting Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR).

"The knowledge and experience that the PaRC offers ensures that the voices of people with disabilities are heard as the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) makes programmatic decisions that impact the lives of our customers and the services that we offer. The PaRC is mission focused and an essential partner of OVR, supporting the agency, our customers and other stakeholders through their advocacy."



Jeanette Alexander

Category of Representation:
State Department of Education

Committees: Legislative/Public Awareness and
Transition/Education

"I joined PaRC as a representative of the Bureau of Special Education to utilize my knowledge and expertise to support students with disabilities during their transition to after school age services."



Deb Arcoleo

Category of Representation:
Intellectual Disabilities

Committees: Legislative/Public Awareness
and OVR Policy/State Plan/Customer
Satisfaction

Julia Grant Barol

Category of Representation:
Community Rehabilitation Provider

Committees: OVR/Policy/State Plan,
Legislative, Transition/Education



Cindy Duch

Category of Representation:
Parent Training and Information Center

Committees: Executive and Chair of
Transition/Education

"As a Director at the Parent Education and Advocacy Leadership (PEAL) Center and the PA Parent Training and Information Center: I felt like I could effectively represent the families of children birth to 26 on the Council. My son uses OVR services and the PTI continually talks to parents and youth who are eligible for OVR services. Being on the Council has been a great experience. Especially satisfying at this time, is seeing firsthand the collaboration between OVR and the PA Department of Education/Bureau of Special Education come together to create better outcomes for transition age students."





Paul Fogle

Category of Representation:
Current/Former OVR Customer

Committee: OVR Policy/State
Plan/Customer Satisfaction

Lynn Heitz

Category of Representation:
Sensory Disabilities

Committees: Executive, Legislative/Public
Awareness, Transition/Education, and Chair of
OVR Policy/ State Plan/Customer Satisfaction

"As a person with a disability, I believe strongly in the phrase "Nothing About Us Without Us". So many times, decisions are made for people with disabilities without their input. I want to be part of this change!"



Passle Helminski, Chair

Category of Representation:
Cognitive Disabilities

Committees: Chair of Executive and
participated in all other PaRC committees

"I want to make our mission statement a living, breathing part of everyday life, which is the reason I wanted to become a member of the PaRC."



Michele Leahy

Category of Representation:
Mental Health

Committees: Executive, Chair of Social Media/
Outreach and Legislative/Public Awareness

"I believe that employment is imperative for people with disabilities to be considered equal in our society. As a person with a disability it's important to me for employers and our community in general to realize our ability to contribute through competitive employment. PaRC's mission truly fits my personal philosophy of saying yes to access."

Juliet Marsala, Vice Chair

Category of Representation:
Rehabilitation Counselor

Committees: Executive, Legislative/Public
Awareness, and CareerLink/WIOA

"Employment is a pathway to posterity and a significant Social Determinants of Health. I joined PaRC to increase equitable access to employment for people living with disabilities and help employers embrace the vast amount of value and talent that people with disabilities offer."



Anthony McCloskey

Category of Representation:
Veteran

Committee: Legislative/Public Awareness

"I joined PaRC because I wanted to ensure there was someone present to represent the unique challenges faced by the community of disabled Veterans. As a disabled veteran, I think I can provide a valuable perspective to the committee."





Michelle Paonessa

Category of Representation:
Sensory Disabilities

Committee: OVR Policy/State
Plan/Customer Satisfaction

Andrew Pennington

Category of Representation:
Client Assistance Program (CAP)

Committees: Transition/Education and
CareerLink/WIOA



Kara Donatucci Pham

Category of Representation:
Business/Industry/Labor

Committee: CareerLink/WIOA

"I joined PaRC because I thought my experience in Human Resources and my experience as a parent of a child with an intellectual disability would complement the mission of the organization. My experience is employment and programs of inclusion would lend insight to other organizations like OVR that support inclusion in the workplace."





Laura Princiotta

Category of Representation:
General Advocacy

Committee: Social Media/Outreach

"I joined as a representative of the employment provider community who has worked with OVR for almost 30 years. I've seen the positive impact made when people who are funded through OVR obtain employment, and I want to support the continuation of those positive outcomes."

John Seely

Category of Representation:
Business/Labor/Industry

Committees: Executive, OVR Policy/State Plan/Customer Satisfaction, and Transition/Education, and Chair of Legislative/Public Awareness



Susan Soderberg

Category of Representation:
Business/Labor/Industry

Committees: CareerLink/WIOA and Transition/Education

"I joined the council as a representative of an organization that both hires many people with disabilities and provides services. The council gives me the opportunity to use my expertise to help ensure that people have the supports they need to move forward on a path toward self-sufficiency."





Susan Tomasic

Category of Representation:
Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC)

Committee: OVR Policy/State Plan/Customer Satisfaction

"I am the Chair of the PA SILC and serve as the SILC representative on the Council."

William Del Toro Vargas, Member at Large

Category of Representation:
Physical Disabilities

Committees: Executive, Chair of OVR Policy/State Plan/Customer Satisfaction, Legislative/Public Awareness, and Social Media/Outreach



Robert Wallington

Category of Representation: Business/Labor/Industry

Committees: Executive, Chair of CareerLink/WIOA

"President Fred Wright of AFSCME Local 1739 informed me of the importance of PaRC and its impact serving people with all disabilities to have a better quality of life. Over 28 years of my introduction professionally to people with disabilities, I believe that everyone, no matter of their ability, should have the right to be treated equally without discrimination or bias. I hope I can serve as well as everyone who have served previously to represent all people with disabilities in their desire for better quality of life."



Past Elected PaRC Officers

Fiscal Year 2021 - 2022

Passle Helminski - Chair
Juliet Marsala - Vice Chair
William Del Toro Vargas - Member at Large

Current Vacancies on the Council:

Business/Industry/Labor (2 positions)
Cognitive Disabilities
State Workforce Development Board (SWDB)
Veteran
Young Adult

Vacancies on the Council, as of July 2023:

Business/Industry/Labor

Newly Elected PaRC Officers

Fiscal Year 2022 - 2023

Paul Fogle - Chair
Susan Tomasic - Vice Chair
Jeanette Alexander - Member at Large

Council Responsibilities

Under the Rehabilitation Act as Amended by WIOA 2014

Review, analyze, and advise the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) regarding the performance of its responsibilities, particularly those related to eligibility (including order of selection); the extent, and scope and effectiveness of services provided; and the functions performed by State agencies that affect the ability of individuals with disabilities in achieving employment outcomes under Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services.

Partner with OVR to develop, agree to, and review State goals and priorities in accordance with the VR State Plan. The Council and OVR evaluate the effectiveness of the VR program and submits reports of progress to the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) Commissioner.

Advise OVR on activities authorized to be carried out under the VR State Plan. Assist in the preparation of the State Plan and amendments to the plan, applications, reports, needs assessments, and evaluations.

Conduct a review and analysis of the effectiveness of Vocational Rehabilitation services and consumer satisfaction regarding functions performed, VR services provided, and employment outcomes achieved.

Prepare and submit an annual report to the Governor and the Federal U.S. Department of Education Commissioner of RSA on the status of Vocational Rehabilitation programs operated within the State. Coordinate activities with other disability related councils within the State. Establish working relationships between the Council, the Statewide Independent Living Council, and Centers for Independent Living. Perform other functions consistent with VR services deemed appropriate by the Council.

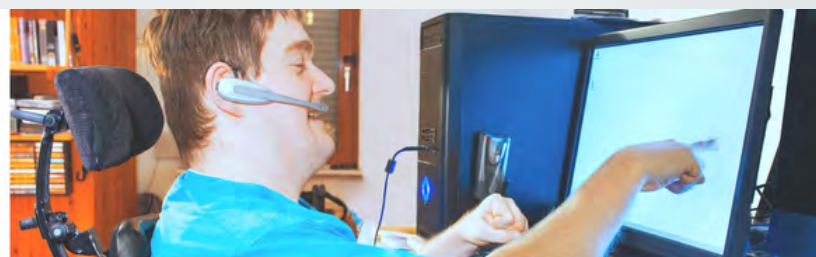


Image Description: Collage of photos including skyline of Pittsburgh, PA, person using assistive technology at a computer, two people attending a meeting in an office, and a PA forest surrounding a river that features an old stone mill and covered bridge.

PaRC Accomplishments for Fiscal Year 2021-2022

COVID-19 has disproportionately affected many who have historically faced significant barriers to employment, especially people with disabilities. Through Full Council meetings and committee work, members of the PA Rehabilitation Council (PaRC) continued to collaborate and facilitate group discussion and the sharing of information to help Pennsylvanians with disabilities re-gain/gain meaningful, sustainable, and competitive employment. The Order of Selection (OOS) was reopened on July 1, 2021 for the category of Most Significantly Disabled (MSD). The Council continued to closely monitor the OOS with regular updates from the PA Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) Executive Director on the number of individuals that OVR was able to provide services to again. The Council continued to assist OVR in evaluating how to further resolve the situation so that services could once again be available to all eligible Pennsylvanians.

Members of the PaRC worked diligently this past year to re-brand their logo and modernize their website to increase outreach and engagement and to serve as a great resource throughout the Commonwealth. The new site highlights the important work the Council does in pursuit of improving and increasing employment opportunities for Pennsylvanians with disabilities made possible through its partnership with OVR and many valued stakeholders. The Council encourages everyone to visit their website and share the following link with colleagues, associates, and fellow Pennsylvanians:
<https://parehabilitationcouncil.org/>

The Council also aspires to grow their network of vital advocates that share in the same mission and asks for support by signing up to receive their PaRC Newsletter. Please send an email to parc@parehabilitationcouncil.org with the contact information of all those interested in receiving the newsletter or fill out the contact form provided on the PaRC website at the following link: <https://parehabilitationcouncil.org/contact/>

In addition to their four mandated public meetings, the Council held thirty-seven committee meetings this past year. This included the establishment of a new committee. In addition to the Executive Committee, members participated and performed duties of the following standing committees: CareerLink/WIOA, Legislative & Public Awareness, Policy/State Plan/Customer Satisfaction, Social Media/Outreach, Transition & Education, and the newly established Governance Committee. An ad hoc committee was also created to revise the PaRC Bylaws during this past year.

The following showcases the major work and activities of each PaRC Committee during FY 2021-2022:

Executive Committee - Main activities and work:

- Members completed and submitted their 2020-2021 Annual Report to their fellow Pennsylvanians, the Governor, Secretary of Labor & Industry, RSA Commissioner, OVR

- staff, State Board of Vocational Rehabilitation, PA Legislators, State Workforce Development Board and other valued Stakeholders in December 2021.
- Members established agendas and held four quarterly Full Council meetings during 2022 calendar year. These meetings were held virtually due to the continued concerns surrounding the impact of COVID-19 and related effects to travel and attainment of other services.
- Members secured informative presentations and reports on topics related to Council responsibilities from the following:
 - Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) Executive Director, provided quarterly OVR Director's Reports.
 - OVR Division Chief of Policy, Staff Development & Training provided quarterly Progress Reports on the State Plan Goals, State Plan's 2-year modification, and updates on the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) and CSNA Statement of Work.
 - OVR Transition and Section 511 Division Chief provided an overview of the 14 (c) Certificates, Transition Services, and Summer Programs.
 - Rehabilitation Specialist (Annuitant), Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Bureau of Central Office, Contracts and Grants provided an update on OVR Counseling Benefits
 - Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation (BVRS) Acting Director provided quarterly update
 - Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services (BBVS) Acting Director provided quarterly update.
 - OVR Central Region Rehabilitation Specialist provided information on an application 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 Institute on Disabilities at Temple University provided reports on the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA).
 - The Office of Equal Opportunity provided a presentation regarding CareerLink accessibility and how the needs of individuals with disabilities are being served.
 - Director of Administration for Community Living's (ACL) Center for Policy and Evaluation provided a presentation on the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and the proposals surrounding increased Medicaid's Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP) funding for Home and Community Based Services.
 - Business Services & Outreach Specialist, OVR and Policy Coordination and PA CareerLink® Finance & Budget Chief, Bureau of Workforce Development Administration (BWDA) provided a presentation on The Collaborative Approach to ADA Accessibility for the Public Workforce System.
 - The PaRC Chair/designee attended and provided quarterly PaRC activities and work to the PA Board of Vocational Rehabilitation, State Workforce Development Board (SWDB), Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC), and other PaRC stakeholders.
 - Members monitored recruitment and membership to ensure a broad range of representation in the required categories as they are named in the Rehabilitation Act. Governor Wolf appointed three new members during this past year to fill the Categories of Representation for the Client Assistance Program, Community Rehabilitation Provider, and Sensory Disabilities.
 - Members continued to strengthen their working relationships with other disability related Councils and agencies established both within the Commonwealth and nationwide including: Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services, Client Assistance

- Program, Department of Education/Bureau of Special Education, Disability Rights PA, Employment First Commission, National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC), Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, OVR Citizen Advisory Committees, PA State Board of Vocational Rehabilitation, PA Transportation Alliance, Parent Education and Advocacy Leadership (PEAL) Center, State and Local Workforce Development Boards, and the Statewide Independent Living Council.
- Council members participated in the National Rehabilitation Association (NRA) 2021 Disability Summit and various NCSRC trainings.
- PaRC members participated in the 'ADvancing States' 2021 Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) Conference.
- Council members participated in the CSAVR Spring 2022 Conference, Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) 2022 Annual Conference, and 2022 National APSE Regional Event.
- Full Council provided a letter of support to include with OVR's application for the Subminimum Wage to Competitive Integrated Employment Grant (SWTCIE).
- The Executive Committee established one Ad Hoc Committee:
- Members reviewed PaRC Bylaws and presented revisions to Full Council in May 2022.
- Members made a recommendation of a Governance Committee and defined its responsibilities to include an annual review of the PaRC Bylaws / provide recommendations and amendments, review and revise the Member Handbook Policies and Procedures, monitor member recruitment, provide onboard trainings for new members, promote best practices for Council member management, and conduct annual nominations and elections of PaRC Officers.

CareerLink / WIOA Committee – Main activities and work:

- Members requested updates on OVR's current involvement regarding accessibility at CareerLink physical locations and how the impacts of COVID-19 have affected that process. Members received quarterly reports on the ADA Accessibility Certifications at each of the 62 Physical CareerLink locations within the Commonwealth by OVR, PA State Workforce Development Board (SWDB), Local Workforce Boards, and the Office of Equal Opportunity (OEO).
- Members received quarterly updates from Bureau of Workforce Development Administration (BWPA), Bureau of Workforce Partnership and Operations (BWPO), with the Department of Labor and Industry, and OVR Business Services.
- Members receive quarterly updates from State Workforce Development Board (SWDB) on what is happening across the state regarding projects, training programs, CareerLinks, employment, and Unemployment Compensation. This committee continued working to ensure persons with disabilities can access the CareerLink sites physically and programmatically.
- The SWDB is a mandated partner on the Council. Members continue to recruit a SWDB member and in the interim, have created a "permanent" position (not specific person) to the Council. Individuals are not appointed; however, names are submitted to the Governor's office for record purposes.
- Members continued to increase their participation/involvement in State and Local Workforce Development boards on behalf of persons with disabilities.
- Members continued to review and provide feedback regarding accessibility training for CareerLink staff, increased accessibility at CareerLink locations, access to Assistive Technology, and their website technology.

Governance Committee - Main activities and work:

- Members held their first committee meeting in June 2022 and developed the following Committee goals:
- Review and revise Council By-Laws annually.
- Review and revise Member Handbook, policies, and procedures annually.
- Review and revise member recruitment procedures annually.
- Recruitment of new members to ensure compliance as stated under the Rehab Act as amended by WIOA 2014 .
- Monitor attendance of Full Council and Committee meetings.
- Oversee the election of Council Officers annually.
- Facilitate the appointment of PaRC members to outside boards, commissions, and committees.

Legislative and Public Awareness Committee - Main activities and work:

- Members identified and followed proposed State and Federal legislation, which affect the VR system and issues impacting the employment of persons with disabilities including legislation pertaining to COVID-19.
- Members disseminated approved position papers concerning full funding for OVR services to match Federal Funds, Expedited Employment, Collaboration of Services for Persons with Neurological Injuries in Pennsylvania, Adequate Funding of the Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH), Centers for Independent Living (CILs), Transportation, and the Disability Caucus.
- Members continued to develop collaborative relationships with other organizations to maximize legislative impact for people with disabilities.
- Members met with approximately thirty State and Federal Elected and Appointed Officials and their staff throughout the year and provided information and education on the following:
- Full funding, services, and their Return on Investment (ROI) for the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) and stakeholders such as the Centers for Independent Living (CILs), Veterans Affairs (VA), Bureau of Special Education (BSE), the Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH), Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services (BBVS), and many others.
- Social Security Income (SSI) program and benefits, Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA) and Asset Limits, Medical Assistance Benefits for Workers with Disabilities (MAWD), PA Act 69 of 2021, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA), Employment 1st, Waiver services, Ticket to Work, Medical Assistance Transportation Program (MATP) brokers, ADA compliance, accessibility, access to public transportation, wages regarding employment services, strengthening disability advocacy, and Disability History Curriculum.
- Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on employment, employment services, Education and Transition Services.

OVR Policy/State Plan/Customer Satisfaction Committee - Main activities and work:

- Members continued to participate in OVR workgroups and provide input on the following OVR policies: Audiological, Vehicle Modification, Financial Needs Test (FNT), Early Reach, and Supported Employment.
- Members reviewed the 2020-2024 Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services Portion of the Combined State Plan for the 2-year modification period covering July 1, 2022, to June 30, 2024.

- Members continued to review OVR’s Customer Satisfaction surveys on a quarterly basis and offered recommendations to OVR on any areas of concern including accessibility and rate of return.
- OVR has contracted with Temple University Institute on Disabilities to conduct the current Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA). The purpose of the CSNA is to inform OVR and the PaRC regarding issues and needs of individuals with disabilities in the Commonwealth. The current CSNA research project covers the time period of October 2019 to September 30, 2022.
- Members collaborated with OVR on the CSNA Statement of Work and provided recommendations for the Targeted Goals, inclusive language, and accessibility for the next three-year cycle.

Social Media / Outreach Committee – Main activities and work:

- Members continued to oversee the PaRC Website Design Project and work with web designer to provide direction/input/research on website images, photos, resources, associated documents, timeline items, functionality, layout, design, accessibility, user-interface, copy, content, etc.
- During the development stage of the website project, members worked with web designer on requirements based on Federal Standards and regulations to ensure the PaRC website is fully accessible as well as created project guidelines to establish a refresh of the PaRC digital brand and update the use of its web technology. The new website includes the following key features:
 - Full accessibility to all users and compliance with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) international standard and Section 508 of the Rehab Act.
 - New logo and branding that features a new color scheme, images, and more intuitive layout and responsive design that is visually pleasing and easy to navigate.
 - Provides repository for PaRC Newsletter, news, OVR Success Stories, and other updates.
 - Platform that is responsive to maximize mobile functionality.
 - Provides ease of content management.
 - Integrates with social media platforms.
 - Incorporates search engine optimization (SEO).
 - Captures traffic data through Google Analytics.
 - Increase and promote more information on state and federal initiatives surrounding employment for persons with disabilities.
 - Provide the public with information on PaRC meetings and events.
- Members continue to monitor the website since going live in April 2022 and encourage others to visit and share the link: <https://parehabilitationcouncil.org/>
- Members continue to promote and increase awareness of the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) and the Council’s mission through the PaRC Facebook page and other social media platforms as deemed appropriate.
- Members continued to increase PaRC Social Media activity through posts relevant to the PaRC Mission that engage followers and other users.
- Members developed a strategy for expanding their data base of contacts and drafted a letter to send to other organizations, agencies, etc. throughout the Commonwealth that share in the same mission with a request to sign up to receive the PaRC Newsletter and other outreach initiatives.

Transition and Educational Services Committee – Main activities and work:

- Members attended the 2021 PA Community of Practice Transition Virtual Conference

- and the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) Annual Conference held in March 2022 both virtually and in person in Hershey, PA.
- Members continue to monitor OVR and the Department of Education's efforts to implement the best practices regarding transition throughout the State.
- The committee continues to improve communication with the Bureau of Special Education (BSE) regarding transition. Current Council member representing PDE/BSE, provided quarterly updates. Members continue to look forward to a greater focus from PDE on Transition activities and activities that are being provided to students in PA as a result of the PDE/OVR MOU and the MOU Toolkit.
- Members continued monitoring the increase of competitive integrated employment options through the Employment First Act. The Employment First Oversight Committee (EFOC), which includes a PaRC representative, is working with other agencies to collect data that is relevant to the implementation of Employment First.
- Members continue to review and provide input to OVR on accessibility and the importance of improving data collection to work to increase the return rate of the Customer Satisfaction and Transition Surveys.
- On a quarterly basis, the committee also reviews information collected for Act 26 (Work Experience for High School Students with Disabilities Act of 2016) provided by OVR.
- Members continued to engage with Hiram G. Andrews' (HGAC) staff on how they evaluate their policies and training programs to assure that students are receiving top technical training and certifications in an integrated setting so that graduates are job ready.
- Members advised OVR on issues concerning funding and transportation for students that are utilizing transition and other services.
- Members continued to receive updates on the MOU toolkit that was developed with PaTTAN and PDE with OVR staff and provided feedback and information regarding concerns and challenges that the pandemic is having on the employment opportunities of students.
- Members continued providing feedback, research, and discussion with OVR regarding the continued integration and recruitment of HGAC and the compassionate responses to students reported for truancy during COVID-19 pandemic.
- Members requested updates on OVR Transition Services which include PA Secondary Education Website, a Newsletter containing a Toolkit for Social Security Benefits, Summer Programs, My Work Initiative, General Paid Work Experiences, Professional Connection Experience, Summer Post-Secondary Experience, College Resources for Success programs, Youth Ambassador programs, Team Navigator programs, and Project Search.
- Members received quarterly reports from the Bureau of Special Education on their Attract, Prepare, Retain Initiative.

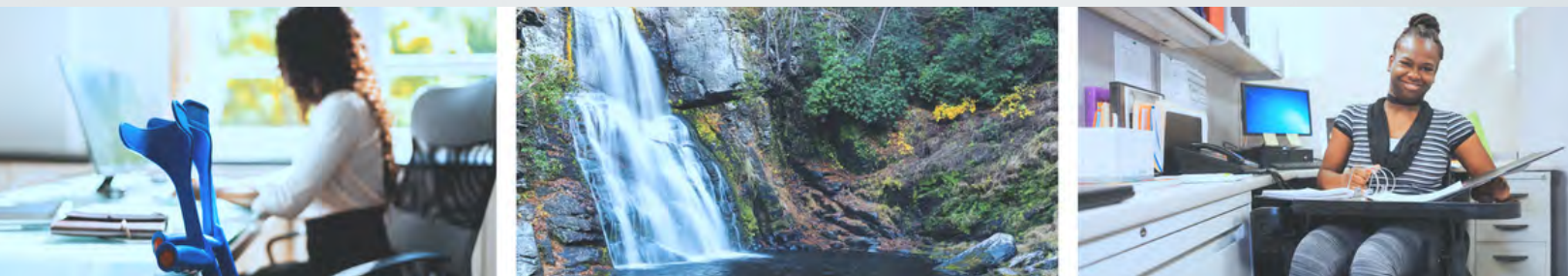


Image Description: Collage of photos including person working at their desk with crutches in the foreground, a PA waterfall surrounded by trees, and a person working in an office and smiling.



PaRC Member Story

Michele Leahy, MS, CPWIC

Ms. Leahy is the founder and CEO of Leahy Life Plan, a firm dedicated to life planning for those with disabilities as well as their families. She understands disability challenges from both a professional and personal perspective. Her goal is to assist in developing strategies of funding special needs trusts and creating a roadmap to meaningful adult supports. In 2009, Michele started her journey by obtaining her Certification in Work Incentive Planning through an approved Social Security Administration (SSA) program established through the SSA Ticket To Work Program. Ms. Leahy has a M.S. in Non-Profit Management from Eastern University and an B.A. in Communications, Division of Humanities, from Penn State. She has 15+ years of varied professional work experiences before she established her own company 10 years ago.

Ms. Leahy was the first non-veteran Executive Board Member of the United Spinal Association, a national disability rights organization, where she served for over 8 years. She has been a key player in organizations such as AHEDD (a specialized human resource organization), the Epilepsy Foundation of Eastern PA, assisted in the establishment of the Bucks County Center for Independent Living and has served on many advisory boards advocating for individuals with disabilities. Ms. Leahy has spoken both nationally and locally on disability at PBI's Exceptional Children Conference, PaTTAN, Spina Bifida National Conference, VoiceAmerica and on the floor of the Pennsylvania Senate. In 2018, she spoke on disability issues at the Philadelphia Women's March on the steps of the Art Museum. Ms. Leahy's commitment to cross disability has led her to being involved with physically disability, intellectually disability, autism and mental illness organizations including the Spinal Cord Injury USA, National Down Syndrome Congress, NAMI as well as many local and statewide Autism organizations.

During Ms. Leahy's tenure on the PaRC Advisory Board as Social Media Chair she assisted in creating a new website and Social Media presence that continues to grow. She has been very active on the Legislative and Bylaws committees as well as attending other committee meetings such as the Education. It's important to Ms. Leahy to be knowledgeable about all aspects of PaRC as well as collaborating with other PaRC members who share the same common mission, promoting competitive employment for people with disabilities.

As a former OVR client from her time when she transitioned from high school to college. OVR was there for Ms. Leahy in providing college funding. Years later, Michele reengaged with OVR to assist her with exploring employment opportunities through the Schedule A program, Ticket To Work as well as helping with ADA accommodations with her employer. Later, Ms. Leahy's connection was also as a provider of OVR clients through her work at several nonprofits.

OVR services the diversity of our Commonwealth with real measurable outcomes including getting people competitively employed to testing and getting the proper accommodations at the workplace. OVR has not only helped me but so many people with disabilities and Veterans to be successful, competent and contributing members of our community.



PaRC 2021-2022 State Position Paper

The Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC) is mandated by the Rehabilitation Act of 1998, as amended by Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) 2014, to review, analyze, and advise the Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) regarding the performance of its responsibilities, particularly those related to eligibility (including order of selection); the extent, scope and effectiveness of services provided; and the functions performed by State agencies that affect the ability of individuals with disabilities in achieving employment outcomes under Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services. The PaRC's Legislative Committee respectfully submits, with approval by Executive Committee and/or Full Council, the following Position Paper for your review and consideration:

Sustain Full Funding for OVR Services to match all available Federal Funds, Action Requested:

- Funding for the "Transfer to the Vocational Rehabilitation Fund" needs to be at least \$50 million for non-profit commonwealth organizations especially since the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) requires that 15% of funds must be spent on Pre-Employment Transition Services. This will allow OVR's level of funding to remain constant with previous years and ensure that OVR is able to draw down all available Federal funds.
- Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has challenged our economy, especially people with disabilities, who, under normal economic conditions, have lower rates of employment than those without disabilities. State governments must work to prioritize and address the needs of people with disabilities and the impact their decisions about COVID-19 can have on OVR and most importantly the state's economy and workforce. Full funding of OVR, legislation and disability related efforts related to COVID-19 is imperative to ensure that individuals with disabilities can continue to work or return to work following a pandemic.

Expedited Employment, Action Requested:

- The PaRC recommends, through legislation or regulatory action, for the State to establish an Expedited Hiring System so that people with disabilities in Civil Service, Non-Civil Service, and State Contractor hiring positions have an alternative path to employment similar to Schedule A on the Federal level.

Collaboration of Services for Persons with Neurological Injuries in Pennsylvania, Action Requested:

- Collaboration is needed between all state agencies working with persons with neurological injuries to ensure that there is no break in services from in home services to employment services. Additional dedicated funding is needed for this population.

Adequate Funding of the Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH), Action Requested:

The PaRC agrees with the Disability Budget Coalition's recommendation as follows: To the extent feasible, increase the state appropriation for the ODHH to \$650,000; authorize ODHH to increase its staff for all its offices or its contracting, or both, at its discretion, within the increased budgetary allocation; move ODHH's budget from the Labor and Industry General Government Operations line item to a separate line item within the overall Labor and Industry budget.

PaRC supports the following regarding Centers for Independent Living (CILs), Action Requested:

Line-item appropriation of \$2.7 million which will enable the CILs to: maintain quality staff and a stable location, effectively deliver services that facilitate transition from nursing homes and other institutions to the community, provide assistance to those at risk of entering institutions, and facilitate transition of youth to postsecondary life (the fifth IL Core service) and provide reasonable benefits; increase the number of individuals served; and lower the cost per individual.

Disability Caucus, Action Requested:

The PaRC encourages both the House and Senate to establish a bi-partisan and bi-cameral caucus to review and support legislation that would enable people with disabilities to have equal opportunity in all aspects of their lives and to be productive and contributing members of their communities.

Transportation, Action Requested:

Transportation Network Providers, like Uber and Lyft as well as all taxi service providers must be required to provide accessible vehicles on demand to people with disabilities. In addition, they should likewise be required to show that all drivers have been educated/trained on the requirements of the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act; especially with respect to the provision of service to individuals who use service or guide dogs. The State must work with Amtrak and the Federal Government to ensure that all train stations in the Commonwealth are physically and programmatically accessible, which is not the case today. The Rural Shared Ride System should be regionalized to enable transportation providers to cross County lines to assist people with disabilities who use these rides to obtain, maintain, and/or regain employment.

The Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council's Legislative and Public Awareness Committee support the following State Bills: **HB85** An Act amending the act of March 10, 1949 (P.L.30, No.14), known as the Public-School Code of 1949, providing for students with disabilities at institutions of higher education, **HB87** An Act amending the act of December 12, 1994 (P.L.1023, No.139), known as the Independent Living Services Act, further providing for legislative findings and declarations, for definitions, for Statewide Independent Living Council, for powers and duties, for State plan, for grants and funding and for compliance with standards; repealing provisions relating to assurances of centers for independent living; further providing for allocation of funds by designated State agencies; and making an appropriation, **HB92** An Act amending the act of June 13, 1967 (P.L.31, No.21), known as the Human Services Code, in public assistance, providing for intellectual disability and autism fee schedule rates, **HB96** An Act amending Title 75 (Vehicles) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes, in registration of vehicles, further providing for person with disability plate and placard; in fees, further providing for exemption of persons, entities and vehicles from fees; and, in powers of department and local authorities, further providing for specific powers of department and local authorities, **HB114** An Act amending Title 71 (State Government) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes, in civil service reform, providing for excepted service hiring and promotion authority; and imposing duties on the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, **HB250** An Act amending the act of March 10, 1949 (P.L.30, No.14), known as the Public School Code of 1949, in terms and courses of study, further providing for subjects of instruction and flag code and providing for mental health, physical disabilities and developmental disabilities education, **HB547** An Act amending the act of April 9, 1929 (P.L.177, No.175), known as The Administrative Code of 1929, establishing the Department of Accessibility and Inclusion; in administrative organization, further providing for executive officers, administrative departments and independent administrative boards and commissions, for departmental administrative boards, commissions, and offices, for department heads and for gubernatorial appointments; providing for powers and duties of the Department of Accessibility and Inclusion, **HB726** An Act amending the act of March 10, 1949 (P.L.30, No.14), known as the Public School Code of 1949, providing for disability inclusive curriculum, **HB1313** An Act amending Title 75 (Vehicles) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes, in special vehicles and pedestrians, providing for equipment for self-propelled wheelchairs and electrical mobility devices, **HB1567** An Act amending the act of July 2, 2004 (P.L.492, No.57), known as the Sign Language Interpreter and Transliterator State Registration Act, further providing for State registration required and for provisional registration, **SB150** An Act amending Title 51 (Military Affairs) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes, in veterans' pensions and benefits, further providing for blind veteran's pension and for amputee and paralyzed veteran's pension, **SB244** An Act amending Title 51 (Military Affairs) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes, in disabled veterans' real estate tax exemption, further providing for duty of commission, **SB365** An Act amending Title 71 (State Government) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes, in selection of employees for entrance to or promotion in classified service, providing for additional points in grading civil service examinations of applicants with disabilities, **SB367** An Act relating to the delivery of services and programs to individuals with disabilities; conferring powers and duties on the Office of the Governor; establishing the Office for Individuals with Disabilities and the Advisory Committee for Individuals with Disabilities; and providing for the powers and duties of the office and the committee and for funding of the office and the committee, **SB455** An Act amending Title 51 (Military Affairs) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes, in veteran-owned small businesses, further providing for definitions; providing for miscellaneous provisions; and imposing a penalty, and **SB742** An Act providing for the exclusion of veterans' disability benefits as eligible income.



PaRC 2021-2022 Federal Position Paper

The Council is mandated by statute with informing and advising the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, the State Board of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Legislature, and the Governor in PA on the diverse issues affecting employment of people with disabilities. This document summarizes the Council's position on key federal laws and policy issues.

The Rehabilitation Act, as amended by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) provides for programs that help people with disabilities achieve employment and independence, such as vocational rehabilitation (VR). In order to access federal funding for these programs, states must appropriate some funding. This investment is good for taxpayers, for example, VR customers in PA who found competitive employment in state fiscal year 2020-2021 generated \$49,140,000 in savings, both from taxes paid and fewer benefits used.

WIOA can be strengthened if you support certain policy positions:

- Keep VR a mandatory program with single source funding.
- Increase funding substantially for providing VR services to veterans with disabilities returning to civilian life as well as continuing to screen injured veterans for traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder.
- Reverse changes to the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) that reduced the standards/requirements to be a qualified rehabilitation counselor working with business or customers.
- **SUPPORT: H.R.1106** Help Extend Auditory Relief Act of 2021, **H.R.2373** Transformation to Competitive Integrated Employment Act, **S. 53** and **H.R.603** Raise the Wage Act 2021, **S.331** and **H.R.1219** ABLE Age Adjustment Act, **S.630** and **H.R.3765** Disability Employment Incentive Act, **S.2065** and **H.R.3763** Supplemental Security Income Restoration Act of 2021 (**S.2065** and **H.R.3763** are only supported as a stop gap), **S.2210** and **H.R.4131** Better Care Better Jobs Act, **S.2481** Disabled Access Credit Expansion Act of 2021
- Require all commercial health insurance providers to cover brain injury rehabilitation.
- Promote career development and job advancement by expanding the definition of post-employment services to include training and other services necessary for career advancement.
- Clarify when to advise customers of their right to request mediation or due process through the Client assistance Program to review a decision made by VR.
- Require legal training for all impartial due process hearing officers and staff.
- Increase funds for the Older Blind Program to better service the growing aging, blind population.

Transportation

Accessible, affordable, and safe public transportation is critical for ensuring that people with disabilities can participate in the workforce. Unfortunately, many communities (especially rural ones) lack disability-friendly and accessible public transportation options, even when states are required by law to provide them. Consequently, we encourage you to support changes to the public transportation system that promote and enforce equal access for people with disabilities.

The Achieving a Better Life Experience (Able) Act

The Achieving a Better Life Experience (Able) Act provides for the creation of savings accounts for those who experience a significant disability before age 26. Money in these accounts can pay for disability related expenses and are not subject to taxes or considered for means-tested benefits. We encourage you to support an amendment to the Able Act that would allow all people with significant disabilities (regardless of onset age) to have such accounts.

COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged our economy, especially people with disabilities, who, under normal economic conditions, have lower rates of employment than those without disabilities. Federal and state governments must work to prioritize and address the needs of people with disabilities and the impact their decisions about COVID-19 can have on vocational rehabilitation and most importantly the economy and workforce. Funding, legislation, and disability related efforts related to COVID-19 is imperative to ensure that individuals with disabilities can continue to work or return to work following a pandemic.



Image Description: Collage of photos including person working on fabric project with their service dog at the foot of their desk, U.S. Capitol, Gettysburg Battlefield monument, Penn State University clock tower, and person holding a sign that says Disability Matters in front of the Capitol.

PaRC 2022-2023 Committee Goals

CareerLink/WIOA Committee Goals

- Work with OVR to help the Workforce Development Board (WDB) to ensure each CareerLink is physically and programmatically accessible at all its locations.
- Identify, review, and monitor the CareerLink reportage system for both the Department of Labor and Industry and Equal Opportunity.
- Increase the PaRC's participation in State and local WDB meetings.
- The committee will review quarterly reports from the SWDB and inform the Council on issues related to WIOA.

Executive Committee Goals

- Continue to improve relationships and collaboration with the PA State Board of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Citizen Advisory Committees and other stakeholder organizations in the Commonwealth to avoid duplication of efforts and enhance the number of individuals served.
- Continue to provide leadership and guidance to new and all members and committees in accordance with the mission and bylaws of the Council and the Rehabilitation Act as amended by WIOA 2014.
- Continue to increase public awareness in Pennsylvania about OVR services and the Council's mission and responsibilities through increased attendance and participation by council members at stakeholder meetings, youth organization and disability and civic organizations.
- Continue oversight of the following: PaRC budget, quarterly meeting agendas, annual report, strategic planning, annual retreat, member recruitment, election of officers and annually review bylaws with any revisions with the members.

Governance Committee Goals

- Review and revise Council By-Laws annually.
- Review and revise Member Handbook, policies, and procedures annually.
- Review and revise member recruitment procedures annually.
- Recruitment of new members to ensure compliance as stated under the Rehab Act as amended by WIOA 2014.
- Monitor attendance of Full Council and Committee meetings.
- Oversee the election of Council Officers annually.
- Facilitate the appointment of PaRC members to outside boards, commissions, and committees.

Legislative & Public Awareness Committee Goals

- Increase the PaRC's advocacy on behalf of persons with disabilities in regard to obtaining and maintaining employment.
- Increase advocacy on behalf of the returning disabled veterans who are seeking employment and employment supports through Pennsylvania state services.
- Develop collaborative relationships with other organizations, which have similar missions and mutual legislative goals, to maximize our combined legislative impact for people with disabilities.

OVR Policy/State Plan/Customer Satisfaction Committee Goals

- Maintain a positive working relationship with the Department of Labor and Industry, OVR and Bureau of Workforce Partnership & Operations.
- Support the development of the Plan.
- Monitoring of OVR policies and procedures.
- Partner with OVR to review, evaluate and make recommendations based on results on the combined Customer Satisfaction Survey.

Social Media/Outreach Committee Goals

- Maintain and update the PaRC Social Media Handbook that includes guidelines and best practices for effectively using Social Media.
- Promote and increase awareness of OVR and the Council's mission through the PaRC webpage and Facebook.
- Promote PaRC and OVR at various events across the State.
- Publish Success Stories from consumer and business customers to inform the public about OVR services.
- Revamp the PaRC Website to update the appearance.

Transition & Education Committee Goals

- Participation at the Transition Conference and the PA Department of Education's (PDE) PADES annual conference for outreach and awareness to the public about what the PaRC does and the purpose.
- Improve communication with Bureau of Special Education (BSE) regarding transition.
- Monitor the increase of competitive integrated employment options through the Employment First Law.
- Committee will monitor OVR and the Department of Education's efforts to implement the best practices regarding transition throughout the State.
- To have OVR evaluate their policies and training programs at Hiram G. Andrews to assure that students are receiving top technical training and certifications in an integrated setting, so that graduates are job ready.



Image Description: Collage of photos including autumnal scene of a PA farm landscape with trees, fields, barns and silo, person who is visually impaired using white cane and device to read, person working at a postage machine wearing ear buds, and bird's eye view of Philadelphia, PA with City Hall in the foreground.



State Plan Attachment (2020 – 2024)

The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services Portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan must include the following descriptions and estimates, as required by section 101(a) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by WIOA:

(a) Input of State Rehabilitation Council.

All agencies, except for those that are independent consumer-controlled commissions, must describe the following:

- (1) input provided by the State Rehabilitation Council, including input and recommendations on the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, recommendations from the Council's report, the review and analysis of consumer satisfaction, and other Council reports that may have been developed as part of the Council's functions;
- (2) the Designated State unit's response to the Council's input and recommendations; and
- (3) the designated State unit's explanations for rejecting any of the Council's input or recommendations.

The Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC) used the following sources to develop its recommendations to the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR):

1. the PaRC annual report (Federal Fiscal Year 2018 - 2019);
2. OVR Customer Satisfaction Surveys;
3. review of items in 2018 State Plan Attachment (description a);
4. comments received at 2018 and 2019 Public State Plan Meetings;
5. participation in the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) monitoring (2019);
6. Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) FFY 2016 - 2018 OVR/Institute on Disabilities at Temple University;
7. local Citizen Advisory Committees (CAC) meetings and/or minutes; and
8. quarterly reports received from OVR at PaRC Council meetings.

Commendation: The Council supports OVR in their efforts to open the order of selection as soon as possible for the benefit of Pennsylvanians with disabilities seeking employment services through OVR.

1. The Closure of the Order of Selection (OOS) for All Categories

Issue: The closure of the Order of Selection (OOS) for all categories represents a significant challenge to people with disabilities having access to employment services when they are needed. OVR must develop appropriate internal controls and other adjustments in order to re-open the OOS as soon as possible and update the PaRC regarding progress on at least a quarterly basis.

RECOMMENDATIONS/MEASURABLE GOALS:

A. OVR provides quarterly reports (at a minimum) to the PaRC on how many people were added to and removed from the waiting list in each category each quarter.

- B. OVR provides quarterly reports (at a minimum) to the PaRC and the State VR Board on new application response times.
- C. OVR establishes a clear deadline for reopening the OOS with intermediate steps and goals to re-open the OOS on time. OVR provides quarterly reports (at a minimum) to the PaRC on progress and factors affecting progress toward achieving the goal of re-opening the OOS on a permanent basis by the deadline.
- D. Identify resources and opportunities outside of OVR for organizations to provide employment services to OVR customers on the waitlist.

2. Hiram G. Andrews Center (HGAC)

Issue: OVR's current fiscal problems require a review of HGAC's return on investment.

RECOMMENDATIONS/MEASURABLE GOALS:

A. OVR should conduct a study at a minimum of every 3 years and report on the return on investment (compared to community-based VR services) for students attending HGAC. HGAC's yearly budget averages approximately \$23 million, which includes staff, operations, brick and mortar and other costs. Overall, the cost per customer is reported as significantly higher at HGAC than that of non-HGAC customers. The report must include:

- (1) an analysis on return on investment.
- (2) an impact statement on customer choice.
- (3) a review of the extent to which its programs are provided in an integrated setting.
- (4) an assessment of the availability of HGAC programs in the community; and
- (5) a determination of what other partners like the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) should be paying/contributing.

3. Conduct a review of OVR's statutory and regulatory obligations to obtain public comment and/or consult with stakeholders, providers, VR staff, and individuals with disabilities in the development, implementation, and amendment of OVR's policies and procedures.

Issue: Pursuant to 34 CFR 361.20, OVR is required to solicit public participation when it proposes to develop, amend, or otherwise modify substantive policies/procedures affecting OVR services.

RECOMMENDATIONS/MEASURABLE GOALS:

A. OVR should provide quarterly information on the number and names of new/amended policies, such as a college policy or vehicle modification policy, being developed or in consideration for future development/modification, including how they differ from any existing policy and the potential number of customers impacted by the policy.

B. Inclusion of the Council in the development/amendment of the policy/procedure, the proposed timeline of implementation, including schedule of public comments and plans to educate stakeholders on the new/amended policy/procedure.

4. Strengthen Collaboration and Partnerships with Stakeholders.

Issue: OVR has made significant changes to services without including key stakeholders

throughout the change development process. OVR needs to make sure that those changes will not unnecessarily reduce the achievement of outcomes in terms of quantity and quality.

RECOMMENDATIONS/MEASURABLE GOALS:

A. Before OVR makes any substantive changes, the PaRC will be informed of what needs to change and why, and what affected stakeholder representatives are being included in the change development process.

B. OVR provides (at a minimum) quarterly reports to the PaRC on all substantive changes either anticipated or currently in development with information on progress, including key stakeholder representative involvement and contributions to the process.

C. OVR provides annual reports (at a minimum) on feedback survey information from key partners.

D. OVR provides quarterly progress reports with measures of quality and quantity of outcomes for partnerships, programs, and services including pre-employment transition services, local workforce development boards, supported and customized employment, business services and PA CareerLinks®.

5. Review of OVR Policies and Procedures.

Issue: Clarification is required regarding public participation in the adoption or amendment of OVR policy, and OVR’s obligation to consult with the PaRC, among others, on matters of general policy arising in the administration of the VR services portion of the State Plan.

RECOMMENDATIONS/MEASURABLE GOALS:

A. OVR reports to the PaRC on a quarterly basis substantive policies and procedures under review which are subject to public meetings, non-substantive administrative changes, and policies on matters of general administration of the VR program which require consultation. Additionally, include quarterly reports on workgroups.

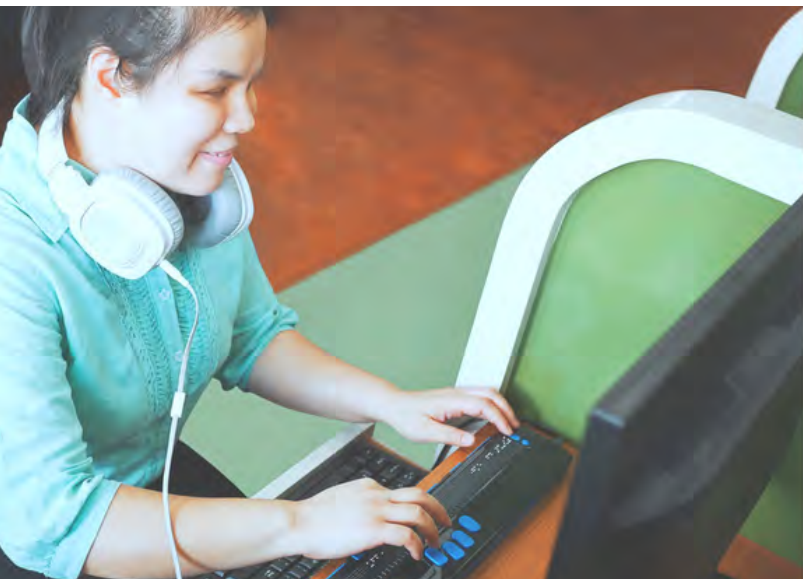


Image Description: Collage of photos including person who is visually impaired using assistive technology at a computer, close up view of a yellow Pittsburgh, PA bridge, and an autumnal scene of a red covered bridge surrounded by trees and road signs.



Image Description: Photo collage of Kayla including one photo of Kayla smiling and holding her work badge and 3 photos of her preparing coffee drinks.

OVR Success Stories

Project SEARCH is a collaboration between PA Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR), schools, businesses, Community Rehabilitation Providers and Developmental Disability Offices to provide education and training to youth and young adults with various disabilities through an innovative workforce and career development model that benefits the individual, the workplace and the community. The primary goal is to secure competitive employment for each of the student interns.

Kayla Day had her first work experience at West York Area High school. She was president of the student operated snack bar, Bone Appetit. Through that experience, Kayla learned to make decisions as well as make and serve coffee drinks. At the end of her senior year at West York, Kayla's dream job was to become a barista.

When Kayla was a sophomore, her class toured and learned about the Project SEARCH program. Project SEARCH is a one year, community based, work experience program affiliated with OVR, a community host business, and a local educational partner. The program is designed for young adults with disabilities to learn transferable job skills to gain employment.

Kayla applied to the Project SEARCH program during her senior year and was accepted into the Project SEARCH class of 2022-2023. One of Kayla's internships through Project SEARCH has been at the Starbucks in York Hospital. Kayla acquired many job skills during her internship: stocking, cleaning procedures, preparing drinks, and customer service. Her favorite thing to do was to make the drinks. Her least favorite thing to do was to clean up after people. Through this experience and training, Kayla has made great strides towards achieving her dream job.

Recently, when asked what her goals were for the future, Kayla's responses were:

- 1) To own my own coffee shop someday.
- 2) To have a family house with fancy stuff in it.
- 3) To own a dream car: a Tesla, a Camaro, or Mustang.



Photo Description: Marlene Sanchez (left), pictured with her manager Tracy, is enjoying her new role as a Bath & Body Works Associate.

A Hiring Sign That Felt Like Fate

Marlene Sanchez moved to Pittsburgh from Mexico City when she was five years old. She feels affection for Mexican-inspired events and activities reminiscent of her birthplace. She cherishes large family gatherings to celebrate life events and continue family traditions. As a bilingual communicator, she is deliberate in maintaining her Spanish-speaking skills and relishes opportunities to do so.

So, after a long search for a competitive-integrated job, the recruitment sign within the Mall at Robinson Bath and Body Works felt a bit like fate. Not only did the sign appeal to English job seekers, but it also read, “Contradando Ahora” or Now Hiring. Marlene didn’t hesitate to inquire about the position and eagerly applied. She was soon hired and was pleased to use her Spanish to help a customer on her first day of work.

Marlene experienced the “Discovery” process with Achieva Employment Supports. Discovery enables youth and adults with disabilities to find a job that is a good fit with an employer who values and needs the talents they have to offer. With the help of John Kuhn, Achieva’s Lead Employment Specialist, Marlene is becoming acclimated to her new role. “She gets very nervous but she’s so capable. She’s capable of a lot more than she lets on,” said John. “A lot of things are just a matter of her feeling comfortable.” The “Discovery” process revealed Marlene’s finest qualities. She has a positive attitude and infectious personality that would be an asset to any employer. Everyone who works or interacts with Marlene describes her as intelligent, socially oriented, and fun to be around.

Marlene is learning to be assertive and insightful when it comes to her customer’s needs; helping others comes naturally to her. She shares what the specials are, provides demo cards of new scents, and ultimately provides a friendly experience to shoppers whether in her native tongue, English, or perhaps, even a little “Pittsburghese.”

Robert Mecca, Executive Director of Life and Independence for Today (LIFT)

During the summer of 1986, I arrived at the Hiram G. Andrews Center (HGAC) to undergo a two-week comprehensive vocational evaluation. I was interested in enrolling in their Associate Degree Accounting program available at the time; however, testing did not support that goal. I proceeded to participate in academic remediation programming, at the suggestion of my guidance counselor I entered a Bookkeeping Certificate program offered at that time. After one term of Bookkeeping, having done so well, I was recommended to enter the Associate Degree Accounting program.

I sailed through my Accounting I course, however, upon entering Intermediate Accounting, experienced some difficulties which resulted in me having to repeat a term. All went well in my third accounting term; however, during the fourth term, I required surgical intervention which created the need to leave school and return to complete that term.

Prior to my medical leave, I was dating a young woman; unfortunately, I learned that relationship did not withstand the test of separation. When I returned to HGAC, the first person I saw was, Dawn Foor, a young woman with whom I was friends. Dawn was also an Accounting student and had helped me through some rough spots academically. Dawn and I dated and were eventually married on November 3, 1990.

While a student at HGAC, I had a brief stint on the wheelchair racing team. I also became very involved in the wheelchair basketball team which was active at that time. This was the first time in my life I ever had an opportunity to play organized sports. I ended up playing

basketball for 27 years in St. Mary's, Erie, and Pittsburgh. I organized my own wheelchair basketball team, "Allegheny Mountain Rolling Thunder" which remained active for 17 years. I also played on the Bay City Lightning, in Erie and the Pittsburgh Steelwheelers.



Photo Description: Robert Mecca smiling.

After graduating in 1989, I began my job search by applying for Accounting positions. Unfortunately, when I arrived for my first interview, I found that the firm was located in an inaccessible building, on the second floor, up a flight of steps, with no elevator.

My OVR counselor suggested that I check out an opening at the local Center for Independent Living (CIL). They had a part-time job available as an advocate. The CIL was on the verge of hiring someone else for that position. Fortunately, for me a half hour after I arrived home following my 3-hour interview, I received a phone call offering a second interview, during the second interview I was offered the position, for 10 hours per week. After one year I was made fulltime, and during the next eight years I worked in every position the CIL had to offer. I was an advocate for LIFT, worked with the CSPPPD program, taught independent living skills and performed information and referral duties, etc.

When the CIL's Executive Director resigned and I interviewed for the position before the Board of Directors, I was asked to describe the job duties of every position within the CIL; of course, I had no difficulty answering this question because I had performed all of them!

I assumed the duties of the CIL's Executive Director and have been very devoted to the organization over the years. My wife, Dawn, who also graduated from HGAC in Accounting, has worked as a secretary for the medical-surgical department of a local hospital for the last 23 years before moving on to work for the Area Agency on Aging in Clearfield in the financial department.

All seemed well, but on December 24, 2012, I faced yet another obstacle, this time with potentially grave consequences. A subarachnoid

hemorrhage due to a brain aneurism left me unresponsive. I was rushed to the local hospital. Since Life Flight was not running due to inclement weather, I was transported by ambulance to a hospital in Pittsburgh, where I remained on life support and in a medically induced coma for a few days. I was removed from the breathing machine while Dawn was at lunch. When she returned, shockingly, I was awake, and upon seeing her, told her "I know you!" if not for her mother standing behind her, she probably would have hit the floor."

The three most important things in my life happened at Hiram G. Andrews Center; I obtained my degree, I was given an opportunity to play organized sports for the first time in my life, and most importantly, I met my wife Dawn to whom I have been married for 32 years.



Photo Description: Robert and his wife Dawn smiling together.

The Commonwealth Technical Institute (CTI) at the Hiram G. Andrews Center (HGAC)

The Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) provides a wide range of services to eligible individuals with disabilities, both directly and through a network of approved vendors.

The Commonwealth Technical Institute (CTI) at the Hiram G. Andrews Center (HGAC) prepares Pennsylvanians with disabilities for the careers they want with individualized, affordable education and training to contribute to our workforce in a meaningful way.

The mission of the Hiram G. Andrews Center is to offer quality individualized post-secondary education, pre-employment transition and support services to customers as they determine and pursue individualized goals of employment and independence.

An individual's program may include pre-employment transition services, vocational evaluation, educational programming, cognitive therapies,

physical restoration, career exploration, work-based learning experiences, work readiness and self-advocacy activities, assistive technology assessment and intervention. To learn more about CTI at the HGAC visit:

<https://www.dli.pa.gov/Individuals/Disability-Services/CTI-HGAC/Pages/Home.aspx>

Many Special Thanks!

We express our appreciation to the PaRC Social Media Committee, Jeanette Alexander, (Bureau of Special Education), Traci Stauffer (Director of Special Education and Pupil Services at West York Area School District), Ruth Moore (Project Search Coordinator / Instructor at Lincoln Intermediate Unit #12), OVR's Project Search team, along with Lisa Razza and the entire team at Achieva for providing the PaRC with OVR Success Stories this year.

We especially thank Kayla and family, Marlene, and Bob for graciously sharing their stories.

Spotlighting the important work and successful attainment of employment through OVR services is the foremost mechanism for the PaRC to fulfill its mission. In short, this is what it's all about.



Image Description: Photo collage of Lake Erie, closeup of a handshake, Delaware River and Philadelphia skyline.



If you are interested in becoming a PaRC member, please review the standards below that members have developed.

PaRC Member Expectations

Active Participation:

In order to fulfill its federal requirements, the Rehabilitation Council must have active participation by its members. Active participation is defined as:

- Attend all four (4) of the scheduled full Council meetings in any fiscal year. Severe weather and personal emergencies are understandable exceptions.
- Participate on at least one standing committee or ad-hoc committee during the fiscal year.
- Respond to action items during or between Council meetings. Examples may include, but are not limited to:
 - Review of support documents for meeting action items.
 - Review and return of surveys, draft documents, etc. when requested.
- Attend Office of Vocational Rehabilitation public meetings, State Board meetings, Consumer Advisory Committee meetings, etc. when feasible.

Represent the Rehabilitation Council in Meeting and Work Groups:

Although members represent diverse constituencies and points of view, it is important for the Rehabilitation Council to speak as a single entity in meetings and work groups. The Council recognizes that individuals may also wish to convey additional opinions or information during discussions. In order to assure consistency without restricting members' actions, the following guidelines were adopted on April 14, 1999:

If a Rehabilitation Council member is serving on a rehabilitation related work group, committee or is giving testimony as a **designated and official spokesperson of Council**, the following guidelines will apply:

- The Council member shall state that they are representing the Rehabilitation Council.
- The Council member shall state the Council's official position on the subject being discussed if one exists or is known. If the Council's official position is unknown or has not been developed, the Council representative shall indicate that they will request the Council's office to forward the position or ask the Council to review the subject and render an official position if one is needed.
- The Council member may have a different, personal opinion on the subject being discussed. If this is so, the Council member should state that it is a personal opinion and not the official position of the Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council.
- The Council member shall not commit financial support and/or other resources of the Council to any non-RC committee, workgroup, function, etc., without the previous authorization of PA-Rehabilitation Council.
- In order to receive reimbursement for expenses occurred while acting as a designated Council spokesperson, the member shall follow established procedures for obtaining reimbursement.

These objectives are meant solely to improve and expedite the accomplishments of the Rehabilitation Council, so as to, better the lives of persons with disabilities. Your cooperation and time are appreciated.

If you are interested in becoming a member and can meet the expectations, please complete the Appointment Request Form on the next page and return to: Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council Office, 55 Utlely Drive, Camp Hill, PA, 17011. Also, forward a word document of your resume and two references familiar with your disability related work/experiences to parc@parehabilitationcouncil.org

When the appointment request form, resume and references have been received in the office, the PaRC members review them and make recommendations to the Governor's Office.

The Governor appoints all members.



Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council

Mailing Address: 55 Utley Drive, Camp Hill, PA 17011

Voice: (888) 250-5175 TTY: (717) 737-0158 Fax: (888) 524-9282

Email: parc@parehabilitationcouncil.org Web: parehabilitationcouncil.org

APPOINTMENT/REAPPOINTMENT REQUEST FORM

NAME

HOME ADDRESS

HOME PHONE/CELL PHONE

EMAIL

EMPLOYER (if applicable)

EMPLOYER ADDRESS

EMPLOYER PHONE

EMPLOYER EMAIL

Check the category/categories that you could represent on the council (check as many as apply):

- Representative of the PA Statewide Independent Living Council.
- Representative of a parent training and information center established pursuant to Section 671 of the individuals with Disabilities Education Act.
- Representative of the Client Assistance Program (CAP).
- Qualified vocational rehabilitation counselor with knowledge of and experience with vocational rehabilitation programs.
- Representative of community rehabilitation program service providers.
- Representative of business, industry, and labor.
- Representative of disability advocacy groups representing:
 - (I) Individuals with physical, cognitive, sensory, and mental disabilities, and
 - (II) Individuals' representatives of individuals with disabilities who have difficulty in representing themselves or are unable due to their disabilities to represent themselves.
- Current or former applicants for, or recipients of, vocational rehabilitation services.
- Representative of the State educational agency responsible for the public education of students with disabilities who are eligible to receive services under this title and Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.
- Representative of the State Workforce Development Board.
- Young Adult
- Veteran
- Other – Please Specify _____

KEY AFFILIATIONS AND ORGANIZATION REPRESENTATION

BRIEFLY DESCRIBE HOW YOUR SKILLS, EXPERIENCE, ETC. MATCH THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REHABILITATION COUNCIL.

SIGNATURE

DATE

Form revised 10/21

**Please attach a resume or brief biography and two written references. Documents should be emailed to parc@parehabilitationcouncil.org in word document format.*

FOLD

RETURN ADDRESS

**Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council
55 Utley Drive
Camp Hill, PA 17011**

FOLD

Meeting Schedule for Calendar Year 2023

- **February 15, 2023 (Wednesday)**
- **May 17, 2023 (Wednesday)**
- **August 2, 2023 (Wednesday)**
- **October 18, 2023 (Wednesday)**

PaRC Full Council meetings are open to the public. The location of the meetings is to be determined.

For more information or for persons who require reasonable modifications or accommodations including a sign language interpreter, real time captioning, or alternate format, please contact the PaRC Office at:

Phone: (888) 250-5175

TTY: (717) 737-0158

Email: parc@parehabilitationcouncil.org

We welcome any questions or comments you may have and appreciate your interest in the work of the Council.



The PaRC is a member of the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils, Incorporated (NCSRC).

PaRC

Back Cover Photo Description: Well-dressed server in shirt and black tie, working in a kitchen, holding a tray of pastries and smiling.

Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC)

55 Utley Drive, Camp Hill, PA 17011

Voice: (888) 250-5175 • **TTY:** (717) 737-0158

Email: parc@parehabilitationcouncil.org • **Website:** www.parehabilitationcouncil.org

Submitted To:

The Pennsylvania Legislature

The Rehabilitation Services Administration

Tom Wolf, Governor of Pennsylvania

The State Board of the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

The Pennsylvania Workforce Development Board

The Pennsylvania Department of Education

In compliance with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended by WIOA 2014.



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