



Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC)

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OVR Policy & State Plan / Customer Satisfaction Committee Minutes for May 8, 2023

Members Present (P)

Not Present (NP)

Lynn Heitz (P)
Julia Grant Barol (NP)
Paul Fogle (P)

Michelle Paonessa (NP)
Susan Tomasic (NP)
Jeanette Alexander (P)

Robert Wallington (NP)
Jessica Keogh (NP)
Michele Leahy (P)

Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) Staff Present: James Whitonis, Cheryl Novak, Mike Kirby, Jill Moriconi

Project Staff Present: Chris Todd, Michelle Gerrick

Interpreters Present: Ashley Shenk

CALL TO ORDER

This meeting was conducted through Zoom. Ms. Lynn Heitz called the meeting to order at 2:30 PM.

ADDITIONS TO THE AGENDA

There were no additions.

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA AND PAST MINUTES

Quorum was not established.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION ITEMS:

Discussion of Description (I) of the 2024-2028 State Plan

- Mr. James Whitonis explained that he looked into past State Plans from 2016 thru 2022 and found that building measurable benchmarks into Description (I), Goals and Priorities, would not allow a plan that could be built upon. Leaving the goals in a more general format has been the standard in past years and in other states including Ohio, Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina. The Ohio State Plan included a statement that could be worded to better fit the Pennsylvania State Plan

as, "Strategic initiatives designed to achieve these goals and objectives that are specific to the VR program are outlined throughout this Combined State Plan."

- Members agreed to leave Description (I) broader and to include a similar statement in the Plan as there are other sections of the State Plan that will be including specific measurable benchmarks including Description (a).
- Members reviewed Description (I) in its entirety and for Goal #1 inquired why the Deaf and Hard of Hearing population was not included.
- Mr. Whitonis and Mr. Hyde explained that this decision was based upon the findings listed under the underserved populations in the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA). The Deaf and Hard of Hearing population was not ranked as other underserved populations that are included in Goal #1.
- Ms. Heitz explained that OVR does an excellent job of hiring VR Counselors that work directly with the Deaf and Hard of Hearing customers in each of the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (BVRS) District Offices. The same is not true of customers with blindness.
- Members discussed the importance of ensuring accessibility and ADA compliance in regard to **Goal 3: Increase Community Education and Outreach.**
 1. Increase outreach to Corrections to establish contact with reentrants and reduce recidivism.
 2. Increase social media and alternative outreach methods.
- Members recommended adding a third objective for Goal #3 as, "3. Inform and educate OVR providers regarding accessibility and ADA compliance."
- There were no changes recommended regarding additional goals included in Description (I).
- Members inquired about next steps moving forward with Description (I).
- Mr. Whitonis explained that additions to Goal #3 and the statement at the end will be added and an updated draft will be shared with the Council.
- Mr. Fogle requested OVR provide a final presentation of Description (I) during the Policy Committee report on the morning of the May 17th Full Council meeting.

Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 3:30 PM.