



# 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)

## OVR Policy & State Plan / Customer Satisfaction Committee Minutes for June 1, 2023

### Members Present (P)

### Not Present (NP)

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

Michelle Paonessa (NP)  
Susan Tomasic (P)  
Michele Leahy (P)

Robert Wallington (P)  
Jessica Keogh (NP)

**Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) Staff Present:** James Whitonis, Cheryl Novak, Tracie Maille, Mike Kirby

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

### CALL TO ORDER

This meeting was conducted through Zoom. Ms. Lynn Heitz called the meeting to order at 2:00 PM.

### ADDITIONS TO THE AGENDA

There were no additions.

### APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA AND PAST MINUTES

***MOTION was made by Mr. Rob Wallington to accept today's agenda and past meeting minutes. Ms. Julia Barol seconded the motion. All were in favor.***

### DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION ITEMS:

#### OVR Updates

#### Draft of Description (I) 2024-2028 State Plan

- Mr. Jim Whitonis reported on RSA changes made to the State Plan including a new goal for Supported Employment to be provided at the next Policy Committee and/or Executive Committee meeting. Description B is now a combination of the State Goals and the State Strategies. This new outline has streamlined the State Plan by putting items in more logical order reducing from 17 to 12 Descriptions. According to their new definition PA is no longer on an Order of Selection at all. A state either has one

section closed or if all sections are open by definition, you do not have an Order of Selection. A state may prioritize categories.

## **Discussion of Committee Chair and Vice Chair for Fiscal Year 2023-2024**

- Ms. Heitz reported that currently she is Committee Chair and Ms. Barol is Vice Chair and asked for nominations.

***MOTION was made by Ms. Susan Tomasic to nominate Ms. Lynn Heitz as Chair and Ms. Julia Barol as Vice Chair for the Policy Committee. Mr. Rob Wallington seconded the motion. All were in favor.***

## **Review and Discussion for Draft of Description (a) 2024-2028 State Plan**

- Ms. Lynn Heitz proposed adding a recommendation to number 4 of the Description (a) draft; OVR will provide Innovation and Expansion grant opportunities to entities interested in providing specific Blindness skills training to Pre-ETS as well as customers enrolled in VR services in BBVS.
- Attendees discussed topics to include as a commendation for OVR included within Description (a).
  - Ms. Tracie Maille stated that OVR has waived the Financial Needs Test (FNT) which has been increased to \$100,000 to be more inclusive of those who earned a higher wage and waivers for tuition that has helped a lot of customers receive an education this past year. This information has been shared through social media, public announcements, public reports, and through outreach efforts by each District Office.
  - Ms. Heitz proposed we commend OVR with the concerted efforts it's made in increasing FNT and college policy to enable more individuals to participate in VR.
  - Members agreed to add to that statement, OVR has worked hard to eliminate the Order of Selection (OOS).
  - Members discussed the following commendation: We commend OVR for its diligence in reopening fully the OOS thus providing many more opportunities for people across the Commonwealth.
  - Ms. Mitchell inquired about adding to that statement information about the FNT and college waivers.
- Ms. Maille provide data regarding OVR staffing: Last July 2022: 803 filled; 230 vacant; As of April 30, 2023: 837 filled, 196 vacant and As of May 2023: 846 filled, 187 vacant plus 25 wage positions at this time (annuitants). Since March 2022, OVR has hired or promoted 200 staff.
- Regarding recommendation #5 Ms. Barol stated the issue is at what point or percentage of employees with disabilities versus without a disability does a business become a congregate workplace. Is it 50%, 75%, all supervisors not having a disability, where is the line where it is no longer considered community integrated employment. Understands that some businesses or employers may not disclose disabilities or may have no way of knowing but in workplaces where we know people

with disabilities are being placed to work with a majority of people with disabilities, at what point is it no longer community integrated employment.

- Ms. Maille explained that there is no percentage or ratio included within the definition of Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).
- Ms. Leahy explained that there is no classification of a disability owned business. Other minority or women owned businesses have status and Federal incentives.
- Ms. Barol explained there is a business with almost 75% of employees with disabilities and is looking at only hiring people with disabilities with the concern as at what point is it no longer considered CIE and is a segregated work setting.
- Ms. Mitchell explained that other factors should be considered depending upon the business or workplace than just a number or ratio.
- Ms. Leahy explained that a place such as a Center for Independent Living (CIL) has a minority or community based focus or vision. This would be different than a food service business or other types of businesses that are not viewed in the same context.
- Mr. Whitonis provided WIOA CIE definition:  
The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) defines competitive integrated employment (CIE) as work that is performed on a full-time or part-time basis for which an individual is: Compensated at or above minimum wage and comparable to the customary rate paid by the employer to employees without disabilities performing similar duties and with similar training and experience; Receiving the same level of benefits provided to other employees without disabilities in similar positions; At a location where the employee interacts with other individuals without disabilities; and Presented opportunities for advancement similar to other employees without disabilities in similar positions.
- Attendees also stated that employees and job seekers may choose not to disclose their disability making it impossible to determine specific percentages or ratios.
- Members agreed to include language in the recommendation regarding collecting information for upward mobility of employees with disabilities.
- Ms. Novak asked for clarification if this would be for businesses with OVR placements or businesses in general and has concerns regarding OVR's lack of authority to request this information.
- Ms. Barol stated that it may be to better identify opportunities for advancement when placing customers for employment.
- Ms. Maille shared concerns about the lack of authority to inquire about the number of employees with disabilities from a business, requesting this information does not build rapport with businesses they are trying to encourage to hire people with disabilities, and businesses don't know that number.
- Ms. Barol explained that is not the type of organization they would be concerned about. They are concerned with different organizations that come forward with the intent to staff their organization with all people with disabilities that would not be part of the community.
- Ms. Heitz stated that OVR site visits could be one determining factor to ensure a workplace is integrated.

- Mr. Fogle suggested removing the quantitative aspect of the recommendation and include language about having access to data and ensuring a workplace is CIE. Suggested providing language on ways OVR can help to avoid congregated settings through site visits and data collection.
- Ms. Maille also suggested language about competitive aspects, wages, location with interaction, collaboration, natural supports, advancement opportunity, same pay, and benefits. Those factors are measurable and could be more easily used to decide if a workplace is competitive. Suggested including language from the definition of CIE. OVR wants to focus on measurables such as career advancement, stackable credentials, performance indicators, and education. Suggested including language about providing more outreach and education about integration for employers.
- Members agreed that including the WIOA definition of CIE, focus on career advancement, business services education on best practices, and education on integration would be a good place to start. Shared concerns about businesses taking advantage of On-the-Job Training (OJT) incentives to the detriment of people with disabilities and OVR.
- Ms. Heitz asked staff to provide meeting invitations for the next Policy Committee meeting for July 25<sup>th</sup> from 2:30 PM to 3:30 PM to review Description A and the State Goals.

## **Adjourn**

***MOTION was made by Ms. Susan Tomasic to adjourn. Ms. Jeanette Alexander seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned.***