



Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC)

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Full Council Quarterly Meeting Minutes August 2, 2023

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

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|------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Jeanette Alexander (P) | Julia Barol (NP) | Lorie Brew (P) |
| Paul Fogle (P) | Joan Goodman (P) | Lynn Heitz (P) |
| Jessica Keogh (NP) | Michele Leahy (P) | Michelle Mitchell (P) |
| Michelle Paonessa (NP) | Andrew Pennington (P) | Kara Donatucci Pham (NP) |
| Susan Tomasic (P) | William Del Toro Vargas (P) | |

Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) Present: Ryan Hyde, Cheryl Novak, James Whitonis, Marci Katona, Danielle Schmidgall, Jill Moriconi, Audrey O'Connor, Randall Loss, Susan Storm, Ralph Roach, Dawn Sokol, Tammy Burke, Doug Rand, Mark Maurer, Jim France, Mike Kirby, Deborah Williams, Sarah Hoch, Hillary Hubbell, Chris Harbert

Stakeholders Present: James Martini, State Workforce Development Board, Dale Verchick, Disability Rights PA, Matthew Seeley, Esq., Pennsylvania Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC), Dr. Lisa Svidron-Stroup, PA Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE), Suzanne Erb, Disability Rights PA, Montrell Fletcher, Office of Long-Term Living (OLTL), Steve Pennington, Esq., Client Assistance Program (CAP)

Guest Speaker: Ms. Juliet Marsala, Deputy Secretary of the Office of Long-Term Living (OLTL)

Project Staff Present: Michelle Gerrick, Christopher Todd

Moderator of Zoom Present: Nichole Wade

CART: Abby Estes

Interpreters: Laura Schupp, Sharon Costa, Christine Adzema, Joshua Baugher

Guests: Alyssa Hoskins, Passle Helminski, Robert Wallington, Twana Jones, Cindy Duch, Theresia Kody

WELCOME & OPENING REMARKS

- Attendees held a moment of silence honoring the life of Ms. Brenda Bowersox, OVR York District Office Supervisor, who tragically lost their life on the Sunday a week prior to the meeting. Mr. Ryan Hyde shared a warm remembrance of Ms. Bowersox as she was a great supervisor, loved by her coworkers, was always supportive and was the go to person for youth programs, and services to those with cognitive disabilities and autism.

MOTION was made by Ms. Julia Barol to approve the meeting agenda. Ms. Susan Tomasic seconded the motion. All were in favor.

MOTION was made by Ms. Lynn Heitz to approve the previous meeting minutes. Ms. Tomasic seconded the motion. All were in favor.

**PaRC FISCAL REPORT (4th QUARTER): Ms. Michelle Mitchell, Member at Large
ACTION: Approval of PaRC 4th quarter Fiscal Report**

- Ms. Michelle Mitchell reported that April 2023 expenses were \$2,778.73, May 2023 expenses were \$4,693.49, and June 2023 expenses were \$4,987.08 with total 4th Quarter expenses at \$12,459.30. PaRC expenses for Fiscal Year 2022-2023 totaled \$19,090.46 and were from October 2022 to June 2023. Travel is the Council's largest expense. Since COVID, the Council's expenses have been lower, however expenses are starting to increase as members begin to attend in person meetings and conferences.

MOTION was made by Ms. Julia Barol to approve the 2022-2023 4th Quarter Fiscal Report. Ms. Jessica Keogh seconded the motion. All were in favor.

**CHAIR REPORT: Mr. Paul Fogle, Chair
Assign committees / chair / vice chair as needed**

- Mr. Paul Fogle reviewed new Bylaws requirements and committees' membership vacancies and needs. Ms. Lynn Heitz and Ms. Barol volunteered to join the CareerLink Committee. Ms. Lorie Brew volunteered to join the Social Media Committee and Ms. Michelle Mitchell volunteered to join the Governance Committee.

NEW BUSINESS: PaRC Committee Chairs

Executive Committee: Mr. Paul Fogle, Chair

Discussion: Call for Papers for NCSRC Fall Conference

Discussion: 50th Anniversary of the Rehabilitation Act

- Mr. Fogle explained that the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC) shared a request for proposal to present during their Fall Conference and that with the short time to prepare it may be a good idea to begin planning for a presentation for their Spring Conference.
- Ms. Leahy inquired what the conference and presentation may be comprised of. Ms. Mitchell explained that she and Ms. Barol attended this year's NCSRC Spring Conference and could envision a joint presentation with OVR on how the Council works together in collaboration with the State Board and OVR. Ms. Leahy stated that it would be important to include that the Board has been established prior to the PaRC which is Federally Mandated.
- Mr. Fogle explained this year marks the 50th anniversary of the Rehabilitation Act of 1972 and thought it would be important to commemorate the work of the Council and many stakeholders in the furtherance of the mission of the Rehab Act. This has been previously discussed with CAP, Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC), and others.
- Mr. Hyde explained that the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) will be providing a theme and materials if the PaRC would like to jointly provide posts or messages to celebrate the Rehab Act together. OVR may also conduct interviews with Mr. Steve Pennington and Dr. Ralph Pacinelli. Ms. Leahy agreed that would be wonderful to share posts on the PaRC Social Media pages including success stories. Mr. Andrew Pennington inquired about an effort to track the many changes of the Rehab Act over the 50 years as it would be interesting to show its progression from inception to current day as there have been a lot of additions and redesignations.

CareerLink Committee: Mr. Andrew Pennington, Chair

- Mr. Andrew Pennington shared that the next CareerLink Committee meeting is scheduled for August 15th. During the meeting PA Workforce Development will be discussing current initiatives and how they intertwine with possible interactions with OVR to assist OVR clients. Discussion will also include ADA Accessibility at CareerLinks, Assistive Technology, and an update on staff trainings.

Governance Committee: Ms. Susan Tomasic, Chair

- Ms. Tomasic explained that the Governance Committee is tasked with making sure Council members are meeting the requirements of the Bylaws, checking on attendance, tracking committee membership, finding, and interviewing new members, making recommendations to the Executive Committee, and reviewing and updating Bylaws and Policy Manuals. The next Committee meeting is scheduled for September 28th.

Legislative Committee: Ms. Jessica Keogh, Vice-Chair

Recommendation / Discussion: MYPLS (PA Legislative Services) for access to government relations contact information database and email blast service.

Recommendation / Discussion: State Position Paper and HB151, HB181, HB1135, H.R.2840, and H.R.2941

- Ms. Keogh explained that the Legislative Committee has recommended the purchase of MYPLS, Pennsylvania Legislative Services. The committee has vetted and provided review of the service.
- Ms. Keogh explained that the Legislative Committee has updated the PaRC State Position Paper and is also recommending support for State and Federal Legislation of HB151, HB181, HB1135, H.R.2840, and H.R.2941.
- Ms. Joan Goodman suggested the following amendment to the Transportation section of the State Position Paper. "Providers of the Rural Shared Ride System should work jointly and collaboratively with Fixed Ride and Commuter Ride Systems to maximize transportation resources for individuals with disabilities."

MOTION was made by Ms. Leahy to purchase the MYPLS, Pennsylvania Legislative Services. Ms. Barol seconded the motion. All were in favor.

MOTION was made by Ms. Heitz to approve the amended State Position Paper and recommended legislation. Ms. Leahy seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Policy Committee: Ms. Lynn Heitz, Chair

Recommendation / Discussion: Description (a) Input of State Rehab Council - Combined State Plan 2024-2028

Recommendation / Discussion: Description (I) State Goals & Priorities - Combined State Plan 2024-2028

Recommendation / Discussion: Final Draft Driving and Vehicle Services Policy, Ms. Danielle Schmidgall, Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist

- Mr. Fogle and Ms. Heitz thanked all of the members and Mr. James Whitonis for their hard work and guidance in the development of the State Plan drafts.
- Mr. Whitonis explained that Description (l) is transforming to the new Description (c) which will incorporate strategies formerly included in Description (o), as the two sections are being combined to streamline The Plan.
- Ms. Barol explained that Goal #2 will have a sub-goal 3 added to it concerning low performing school districts.
- Mr. Whitonis explained that the last-minute addition is being reviewed with the OVR Leadership Team to clarify verbiage to define low performing and whether that is a school or school district. Inquired if language that would identify districts with low Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre ETS) outcomes and assist to increase positive outcomes during transitions would be appropriate.
- Ms. Jeanette Alexander inquired if including the term school districts would still consider charter schools. Suggested the use of school districts and/or charter schools.
- Members agreed to add language including charter schools and verbiage that Mr. Whitonis shared.
- Ms. Danielle Schmidgall thanked everyone for their support with the Driving and Vehicle Services Policy which is up for approval by the PaRC and moving forward to the State Board. Two Public Comment periods were held in February and June of 2023. The Vehicle Modifications Policy was formerly 8 separate policies that is now one comprehensive policy.

MOTION was made by Mr. Andrew Pennington to approve Description (a) Input of State Rehab Council - Combined State Plan 2024-2028. Ms. Barol seconded the motion. All were in favor.

MOTION was made by Ms. Mitchell to approve Description (l) State Goals & Priorities - Combined State Plan 2024-2028. Ms. Keogh seconded the motion. All were in favor.

MOTION was made by Ms. Barol to add language discussed for Goal #2 sub-goal 3 of Description (l) State Goals & Priorities - Combined State Plan 2024-2028.

MOTION was made by Ms. Leahy to approve the OVR Driving and Vehicle Services Policy. Ms. Tomasic seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Social Media Committee: Ms. Michele Leahy, Chair

- Ms. Leahy reported that the committee has during her tenure created a new website, now has a real social media presence, is looking forward to working with the Legislative Committee with the MYPLS service to include more legislation on Facebook and other media outlets. Another goal will be to provide more posts regarding the 50th Anniversary of the Rehab Act and welcomes members to join and provide new ideas for the Committee. This will be her last year before her term ends in July 2024 and welcomes other members involvement to pass the baton to. The Committee also hopes to receive more success stories and launch a LinkedIn page, create more videos, and increase involvement.

Transition Committee: Ms. Julia Barol, Chair

- Ms. Barol reported that the next Transition Committee meeting is scheduled for August 31st. Ms. Lorie Brew will be assisting with a resource table for the Council at the Transition Conference being held on August 9th and 10th. Ms. Mitchell and Ms. Keogh informed attendees they will also be present at that conference.

Ad Hoc Committee - Hiram G. Andrews Center

Member's Report on Tour of Hiram G. Andrews Center on June 20, 2023

- Ms. Brew reported that she was very grateful to be present and meet students and staff at the tour of the Hiram G. Andrews Center (HGAC) in June. She is looking forward to being able to talk to parents and students about that experience.
- Ms. Leahy reported that she believes HGAC is turning a corner to become more results driven. Her only reservation is knowing what the return on investment will be in three to five years.
- Ms. Heitz reported that she was pleasantly surprised by her experience at the HGAC tour, there is conversation about making some programs accessible to individuals who are totally blind and hopes that continues to provide blind students and blind adults an opportunity to participate.
- Ms. Barol reported that she was pleasantly surprised with the opportunity for the integrated setting at Commonwealth Technical Institute (CTI) and provided suggestions on ways to get the word out across the state.
- Ms. Brew explained that there is a push to refer to the school as CTI at HGAC. Suggested that PaRC help by using this name which will help to make the school more integrated.
- Mr. Hyde agreed that is preferred as the Commonwealth Technical Institute (CTI) is the school and the Hiram G. Andrews Center (HGAC) is the facility.

Ad Hoc Committee - OVR Hearing Officers / Mediators: Mr. Andrew Pennington, Chair

- Mr. Andrew Pennington reported that the next Ad Hoc Committee - OVR Hearing Officers / Mediators meeting is scheduled for September 7th and will cover legal and policy definition of an Impartial Hearing Officer (IHO) and discuss what has already begun regarding the PaRC's role in the process.

OVR DIRECTOR'S REPORT, Mr. Ryan Hyde, OVR Executive Director

- Mr. Hyde provided a report on OVR priorities including staffing. Some areas of the Commonwealth are up to their full complement while others such as the Southeast corner struggle to fill some positions. The changes to the Minimum Education and Training Requirements (METs) have been helping to fill positions particularly in the Southeast corner, Norristown, Philadelphia area. There is a continued struggle to recruit social workers, social education, MBAs, Human Services, and similar degrees. There are about 120 positions in flux at any given time out of about 1,000 total positions. OVR recently hired a culture and staff development person.
- Mr. Chris Harbert was introduced as the new OVR liaison for the State Board, PaRC, and Employment First Oversight Commission (EFOC). Mr. Harbert provided his employment, education, and military service background and experience. Mr. Fogle thanked Mr. Harbert for his service to our country.
- Mr. Hyde reported another OVR priority includes finances. As previously reported federal funds are in a carry over process which will continue for the foreseeable future with over 100 million dollars carried over in spite of a substantial increase in spending. Additional funds have been received from Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) and \$7.7 million was received in May for Social Security reimbursement. Spending continues to trend upwards as services, vendors, referrals continue to ramp up.
- Pre ETS offer many services across the state this summer with spending for those services around \$13 to \$15 million from May to September. Financial Needs Test (FNT) was increased to \$100,000 and college changes are paying \$14,122 for college tuition for the year. The cap on spending for independent living, older blind program has been removed.
- Outreach and Partnerships is another OVR priority which includes Rapid Engagement Initiative that began last year. There are new partnerships with summer programs, the Office of Developmental Programs (ODP), Bureau of Special Education (BSE), staff trainings and other initiatives. Targeted outreach for those individuals who are diagnosed with HIV or AIDS through Dr. Conyers and

the Wright Centers across the state has helped to build rapport and relationships with that population.

- Another priority includes focusing on grant writing and implementation. The Sub-Minimum Wage to Competitive Integrated Employment (SWTCIE) grant was received last fall. There has been a lot of administrative work with ODP and finalizing Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs). The procurements have been re-coordinated after no viable response was received. Feedback from proposals requested that it be split between the eastern and western parts of the state. Technical assistance is being provided for the writing of other parts of the grant. The Disability Innovation Fund grant for transition services, Pathway to Partnership has been submitted to RSA requesting \$10 million for expansion and coordination of transition services between BSE, local education entities, ODP, OVR, and Centers for Independent Living (CILs). RSA continues to stress the importance for states to spend their funding and the Rapid Engagement process with timeliness, statistics, compliance, measurable skill gains, credential attainment, and timely eligibility determination.
- There was a lot of stagnation during the pandemic. Customers weren't following up or in contact. OVR has reached out to customers following processes, sending letters, emails, and phone calls. If there was no response their case would be closed. One problem OVR has is the amount of school districts in the state and receiving their credential attainment and measurable skills gains.
- Mr. Andrew Pennington inquired what has been done to alleviate staffing shortages in the largest district offices.
- Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (BVRS) is working to quickly post vacancies with a priority for counselors, changes to METs are providing more applicants, Rapid Engagement is statewide initiative with training provided on how to make eligibility determinations as quickly as possible, overtime has also been made available, and they continue to try to hire and keep more staff.
- CSAVR has stressed the importance of advocacy for the PaRC and Board to provide education and inform the Legislature about VR funding and special topics which makes a big difference for the 40,000 people with disabilities OVR serves each year.
- Summer Programs include MY Work which has 151 locations and serves over 750 students engaged in paid work-based learning experiences in locations such as Longwood Gardens and Humane Societies. Specific My Work programs are focusing on individuals who are blind or visually impaired in Erie and Pittston. There were 28 Commonwealth Internship Programs this year serving students throughout the state seeking degrees in digital marketing, media, accounting, agriculture, and other programs. Through the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, OVR is sponsoring an ASL work crew in the Pittsburgh area

which has about 25 students working at state parks throughout Pennsylvania doing landscaping, trail refurbishment, and bridge construction. Two Summer Academies were held for those with blind or visual impairments and for those who are deaf and hard of hearing which focused on Assistive Technology, social situations, and how to request accommodations. HGAC held their Planning and Strategies Summer Program and their own My Work Program.

- There were additional procurement issues with a new initiative in collaboration with Mathematica. Viable bids were not received because of misunderstandings with the small diverse business requirements. Pre ETS contracts are posted for work site trainers, financial literacy, and community work site developer. OVR is partnering with Unemployment Compensation for call center support contract. OVR is working on embedded supported employment positions for large or medium sized employers willing to hire multiple people with disabilities that OVR would hire a supported employment entity to embed staff and run work based learning experiences through that employer.
- The Philadelphia Office received an award for Project Search at Drexel. There are 24 Project Search sites across the state. OVR coordinated a bring your child to work day. 50 students participated and the Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services (BBVS) had a blindness awareness program with white cane, special goggles, and braille. Each edition of 'The Story' will be provided on a quarterly basis highlighting employment success stories.
- Mr. Fogle inquired about where the oversight of the State Board begins and where the work of the PaRC begins and where there is overlap of the two. The Board reupped Fiscal policies but the PaRC also considers VR policies. Inquired about the Workforce Innovation Fund and about access to the RSA Dashboard. Inquired if it would be possible to invite a Council member to attend a local event with Mr. Hyde when possible. Inquired at what point do employment settings that are disability centered become segregated employment. Informed attendees that he has been a part of disability simulations and they can go terribly wrong. Disability is a spectrum and not everybody who is blind experiences the same thing and he would caution departments who use simulations that they are led by people with disabilities.
- Mr. Hyde explained that the PaRC is advisory and according to the State VR Act the State Board has policy setting power. If the PaRC would say no to a policy, a state could say we appreciate your advocacy but we're going to proceed. In Pennsylvania if the State Board were to be presented a policy and object OVR could not proceed. The RSA Dashboard is not publicly available and is sent to State Directors directly, but OVR can look into sharing summaries of it. Informed attendees that he will ask staff to help facilitate a local meeting, coordination is challenging. The Rehab Act has a definition of competitive integrated employment.

You must evaluate a location based on those criteria. If there was a question about a location, OVR staff would investigate using those criteria. Wage is the first criteria, followed by interaction, and opportunities for advancement. Harrisburg BBVS held the blindness awareness event, and two of the four staff were either blind or visually impaired.

- Ms. Mitchell stated that she agrees that it would be helpful to have more information clarifying the role of the PaRC and the Board.
- Mr. Hyde suggested looking into an orientation or training with Ms. Cathy Lantzy that would provide those clarifications.
- Ms. Leahy shared concerns that she attended an event run by a State Board member that was not aware of the PaRC and the event was not accessible.
- Mr. Steve Pennington explained that the PaRC is the voice of the community and that the PaRC has an opportunity to present at every Board meeting. If there is an issue with any policy the PaRC members have an obligation to attend that Board meeting and provide that information. Suggested looking at how the groups function rather than looking at how the PaRC is similar or dissimilar to the Board and be a voice of the people. OVR has an obligation to talk to the PaRC about administrative policy and fiscal matters.
- Ms. Heitz shared concerns regarding rapid engagement and case closures. Explained that customers have informed her that they are unable to reach staff or social workers despite calling their District Office daily. Explained that it is not fair to close a case after 30 days as someone may not be able to read their mail in time and/or reach someone by phone in time. Ms. Hyde explained there are so many names she could not list them all and it is a systemic issue.
- Mr. Hyde explained that protocol for case closures is a phone call followed up in writing if nobody returns the call. If there are specific examples those names can be emailed to him and need to be provided to look into each specific case in order to determine the reason protocol was not followed. Mr. Hyde suggested providing 5 names to investigate whether it is a systemic issue, local guidance, or a particular counselor.
- Ms. Leahy inquired if the Council could receive a report on Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) and Benefits Counseling as previously requested in prior meetings. Stated that she owns a women's owned business and the process to register as a small diverse business is very complex. Inquired if there are outlets to help people walk through those specific requirements so that there could be more vendors for OVR.
- Mr. Hyde explained that OVR pays for benefits counseling, and they could provide a report on that and the utilization of WIPA. The Small Diverse Business issue has been discussed with other members, but OVR will need to look into if there is an entity in place to help people with those required steps.

PUBLIC COMMENT

- Ms. Passle Helminski asked members to look into [SB746](#) and explained that it would better enforce dangerous dog laws. A dangerous dog is a dog that interferes with service dogs on a regular basis. The law would increase the dangerous dog registration fees from \$500 to \$1000 a year and would encourage owners to keep their dogs under control.
- Ms. Theresia Kody inquired if OVR will be involved or connected with the Governor's recently signed Executive Order creating the Commonwealth Workforce Transformation program, recently announced \$400 million on-the-job (OJT) training. Inquired why the unique source contract is hiring through Inspiritec rather than hiring directly through the Commonwealth.
- Mr. Hyde explained that they will have to look into the Governor's new program that just came out two days ago. The Commonwealth has initiatives to hire permanent staff. Every organization has a restricted complement, and this particular Unemployment Compensation (UC) program was to supplement the complement. That is why it was done through Inspiritec. OVR continues to work with the Office of Administration on the Summer Internship Program, ongoing recruitment initiatives, one customized employment position, and other initiatives throughout the Commonwealth.
- Mr. Steve Pennington, Esq. inquired what activities is OVR engaged in to address providing customized employment opportunities.
- Mr. Hyde explained that there is just one within the Commonwealth and that they remain in talks with Office of Administration (OA) to expand. These requirements are complex within the Commonwealth as there are Civil Service requirements for specific job descriptions, union requirements and that is why OVR has used non-Civil Service positions. They will have to run the numbers regarding customized employment overall.

OVR UPDATES

QUARTERLY PROGRESS REPORT STATE PLAN

Mr. Jim Whitonis, Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist

- Mr. Whitonis reported that OVR had to update their goals for the State Plan because of new requirements issued by RSA. OVR remains on track to for their target date and provide a rough draft by the August 29th Policy Committee meeting and the September 14th State Board meeting after which a rough draft will go to a 30-day Public Comment period in October. At that point the Plan will be added to the Combined State Plan in November as Workforce Development will

hold their Public Comment period in December. CAP will also have an opportunity to review before that time.

STAKEHOLDER UPDATES

Department of Education, Bureau of Special Education – Ms. Jeanette Alexander

- Ms. Alexander reported that Department of Education (PDE) and Bureau of Special Education (BSE) continues to focus on their Attract, Repair, Attain initiative which has a repository of resources on their website. The PA Disability Inclusive Curriculum grant was released, and recipients will be notified shortly about the pilot program to improve instruction for K-12 students on political, economic, and social contributions of individuals with disabilities. Upcoming conferences include the National Autism Conference, PA Community of Practice Transition Conference and the Expectations for Low Incidence Disabilities.

State Workforce Development Board (SWDB) – Mr. James Martini

- Mr. James Martini reported that the State Workforce Development Board (SWDB) quarterly meeting has been moved to September because of new appointments. There are currently standing six committees and three others preparing to launch. Those include health care, direct care, industry partnership, employee engagement, CareerLinks, re-entry, shortages in manufacturing, educator shortages, agriculture, construction industry, infrastructure, barriers for job seekers, and childcare. Workforce would like to start a committee focused on workforce around individuals with disabilities. Welcomed attendees to reach out if interested in participating with those committees. Currently working on the development of the Combined State Plan with a robust public comment period at the end of the year.
- Mr. Fogle inquired about filling the opening on the Council with a SWDB member as required by the Rehab Act.
- Mr. Martini explained that they are hoping new members joining the Board will be interested in filling that role.
- Mr. Hyde inquired about more information on the Commonwealth Workforce Transformation program.
- Mr. Martini explained that was announced two days ago and has up to \$400 million of funding available. Three percent is being held back for OJT funding with employers being reimbursed with up to \$40,000 per new hire. OVR approved programs are eligible.

Client Assistance Program (CAP) – Mr. Steve Pennington, Esq., Executive Director

- Mr. Steve Pennington, Esq. reported that his interest in customized employment is related to the work he did while on the Employment First Oversight Commission (EFOC). The Council may want to look into providing recommendations to changing language which includes entry level knowledge, skill, and abilities, ability to follow instructions, abilities to establish and maintain effective working relationships, and ability to communicate effectively. This raises concerns for people who may have difficulty communicating including those who are deaf or hard of hearing. Recommends a focus on this topic, providing report to the Board, and inviting OA to discuss efforts to hire people that require customized work. As discussed, OVR has been placing customers in customized work positions outside of state agencies but only one within OA.
- In 2018 Mr. Pennington stated that he assembled a group to look into a civil service reform bill that Senator Fulmer was introducing. They focused on a pathway to increase the number of people with disabilities that could be hired within state agencies. During that time OVR placed 27,000 people with only 200 placed to work in state agencies. During that process the Legislators were not willing to provide an amended bill but did include an amendment with the word disability within the civil service act that talks about discrimination. Disability is not included within the 2018 bill.
- Mr. Pennington informed attendees that he will be meeting with OA to inquire if they would be willing to support such amendments that would provide this pathway. If there is interest in this it could lead to contacting legislators to work on an amendment, create a workgroup, and invite Council members to join in this effort. There is currently a House Bill that would most likely not garner support in the Senate. The plan is to have a Senator introduce the amendments under a new bill with bi-partisan support by those who have been supportive of disability related issues in the past.
- The pathway created would look at the classified merit section of civil service where a person with a disability can go right to an agency and begin a discussion on whether they are qualified for a specific job rather than be forced to fulfil multiple requirements prior to contact with an agency.
- Mr. Pennington stated that he has been with CAP since 1985, is currently CEO of the Center for Disability Law and Policy (CDLP). CDLP is a federally mandated program that administers CAP. CAP used to have an advisory committee that was later disbanded because of financial concerns due to travel. However, with virtual meetings now possible, the committee has been reconstituted and several PaRC members attend those quarterly meetings. Recently Senator Casey's minimum

wage bill was discussed and hopes to continue similar discussions with people at the state and Federal level during those meetings.

Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) – Mr. Matthew Seeley, Esq., Executive Director

- Mr. Matthew Seeley, Esq. reported that the next Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) meeting will be held August 10, 2023. The SILC will be working on the State Plan at the end of the year with the assistance of Mr. Hyde.
- Mr. Fogle inquired if the CILs are being affected by the current budget impasse at the State Legislature and that the Council be kept up to date on this situation.
- Mr. Seeley reported that is a possibility and that he plans to follow up with questions during tomorrow's meeting with the Pennsylvania Council on Independent Living (PCIL).
- Mr. Fogle inquired if there were any suggestions for speakers during the PaRC Quarterly meeting scheduled for October 18, 2023. Suggested Mr. Michael Gamel-McCormick as a speaker and someone from the local OVR District Office.
- Ms. Leahy suggested Ms. Kristen Ahrens as a potential speaker regarding waivers and being able to navigate benefits and employment. Another suggestion would be a speaker from income and maintenance to discuss how government programs impact services and how employment is seen.

PRESENTATION

Ms. Juliet Marsala, Deputy Secretary of the Office of Long-Term Living (OLTL)

- Ms. Juliet Marsala informed members that she looks forward to engaging with the Council regarding opportunities for the Office of Long-Term Living (OLTL), especially in the shared goal of providing individuals with disabilities every opportunity possible to gain competitive employment. Community health choices supported employment is one of the innovations that OLTL requires of their managed care organization to focus on. All Supports Coordinators (SCs) are required to inquire about individuals' interest in employment, ensure they are aware of employment supports, and use best practices or evidence-based practices. SCs must approach conversations in a person-centered manner.
- Benefits Counseling may be provided up to 20 hours and may be authorized no more than once every two years. Initial Benefits Counseling may only be provided if it is documented in the service plan that a WIPA Community Work Incentives Coordinators (CWIC) was unable to provide these services. The services may not have been provided due to ineligibility, wait lists, or other guidelines that resulted in services not being available within 30 calendar days.

- Ms. Barol inquired if the individual has to have employment written into the plan to access Benefits Counseling. Stated they still have to access WIPA first and inquired if that is a 30 day turn around.
- Ms. Marsala explained that it can be accessed without being employment related, just considering employment, understanding benefits, or to manage resources more wisely. OLTL wants to ensure that there is access to timely services, there is an extended waitlist, and they can get services from the waiver.
- Ms. Leahy inquired about requirements for the proof of that timeline.
- Ms. Marsala explained verification can occur with a WIPA office if necessary.
- Mr. Fogle inquired if OLTL has their own set of providers.
- Ms. Marsala explained that there might be overlap in providers and would not exclude OVR providers if they met the criteria.
- Career Assessment is an individualized employment assessment used to assist in the identification of potential career options based on the interests and strengths of the participant. This also includes "Discovery" for individuals whose potential contributions cannot be best captured through traditional, standardized means. Discovery involves a comprehensive analysis of the person in relation to interests, skills, strengths, contributions to community or employer, conditions necessary for successful employment or self-employment. The information developed through Discovery allows for activities of typical life to be translated into possibilities for competitive integrated employment or self-employment. Employment Skill Development offers support services to attain work, acquire skills, develop and teach skills, enable CIE, and address employment goals. Additional services, requirements, authorizations, and recommendations were reviewed for Job Finding, Job Coaching, Intensive Job Coaching, Extended Follow Along, Service Coordinator Roles, and OLTL Employment Data.
- Ms. Barol inquired about the timeline requirements of support services.
- Ms. Marsala explained that skill development or other services could be broken down into smaller goals if necessary to create short-term goals, SCs receive training on employment and skills training on how to reach long-term goals, each situation is on a case by case basis.
- Mr. Andrew Pennington inquired what parties are involved in discussion for employment goals. Inquired what information is available to SCs regarding OVR and if there is an MOU in place with OVR. Mr. Fogle inquired about obstacles for sharing customer data with OVR. Ms. Leahy shared concerns about customers unable to keep their waivers due to employment and having 401K or 403B investments or other resources and inquired if SCs are looking to assist with these concerns. Mr. Fogle inquired if OLTL services can be done virtually.
- Ms. Marsala explained that participants are the driver of the service plan, no decisions are made without the participant including whether to involve providers

or SCs within each of their meetings. Providers may be changed by the participant at any time. Services can be provided because of a change in a participant's manager or coworkers. SCs may provide information or brochures about OVR but that would have to be asked directly by those organizations. An MOU would look different with ODP because there is a different funding structure. OLTL is working at a department level on improving data sharing and strengthening partnerships. Ms. Marsala explained that individuals with ample 401K or 403B resources may access the Act 150 Program for attendant services. The Office of Income Maintenance may better answer questions regarding eligibility of Medicaid programs and financial eligibility. Benefits Counselors may be able to assist with financial, retirement, PA ABLE resource concerns as SCs are not going to be advising on how to reallocate resources. [The Pennsylvania Assistive Technology Foundation \(PATF\) Cents and Sensibility Booklet](#) and PA ABLE account information may be good resources to advise customers with financial concerns. OLTL ended the Appendix K which gave authority to allow for virtual services. Currently waiver services are in person. Welcomed the Council to provide recommendations, comments, and feedback related to employment moving forward. Ms. Marsala is looking forward to working with OVR to increase awareness, excitement, and engagement toward helping folks get competitively employed.

ADJOURN

MOTION was made by Ms. Tomasic to adjourn. Ms. Leahy seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned.