



# Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC)

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## Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC) 2023 - 2024 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 2021-2022 generated \$38,970,000 in savings<sup>1</sup>, 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.
- **SUPPORT:** [H.R.1263](#) and [S.533](#) *Transformation to Competitive Integrated Employment Act*, [H.R.2708](#) and [S.1193](#) *Latonya Reeves Freedom Act of 2023*, [S.100](#) and [H.R.547](#) *Better Care Better Jobs Act*, [H.R.1616](#) and [S.801](#) *CARE for Long COVID Act*, [H.R.2840](#) and [S.1270](#) *AID Youth Employment Act*, [H.R.2941](#) and [S.1332](#) *Recognizing the Role of Direct Support Professionals Act*, [H.R.4889](#) and [S.2488](#) *Raise the Wage Act of 2023*, [H.R.5408](#) and [S.2767](#) *SSI Savings Penalty Elimination Act*, [S.3076](#) *Disability Employment Incentive Act*
- 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.
- Increase funds for the Older Blind Program to better service the growing aging, blind population.

- Implement changes to the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) to allow for the creation of a bachelor’s level VRC position due to staffing shortages. Maintain the master’s level position and recruit new staff using all available options to maintain highest quality service. Adjust CSPD requirements through the State Plan to include bachelor’s level option as an entry point while retaining a master’s level position, both of which would be considered VRC following designated training period.

## **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** 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 lasting impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic combined with the Great Resignation have resulted in significant changes to our economy, employment, and workforce. Full Funding of OVR will allow for the expansion of programs to maximize opportunity to support our businesses and meet workforce needs through the successful employment of people with disabilities. Furthermore, we have learned that flexibility in relation to the location of a workplace is possible for all Pennsylvanians, especially those with a disability, with so many opportunities to work remotely.

<sup>1</sup> PENNSYLVANIA OFFICE OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION. “PROGRAM YEAR 2021 VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION HIGHLIGHTS”. [parehabilitationcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/2022-OVR-Annual-Report.pdf](https://parehabilitationcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/2022-OVR-Annual-Report.pdf)