



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 Website: parehabilitationcouncil.org

Full Council Quarterly Meeting Minutes February 14, 2024

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

Julia Barol (P)	Lorie Brew (P)	Sylenthia Dent (P)
Paul Fogle (P)	Joan Goodman (P)	Lynn Heitz (P)
Passle Helminski (P)	Twana Jones (P)	Jessica Keogh (P)
Michele Leahy (NP)	Michelle Mitchell (P)	Michelle Paonessa (P)
Andrew Pennington (P)	Kara Donatucci Pham (NP)	Susan Tomasic (P)
William Del Toro Vargas (P)		

Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) Present: James Whitonis, Ryan Hyde, Shari Brightful, Russ Goddard, Denise Verchimak, Alexander Shay, Jim France, Ralph Roach, Mara Wolfe, Melissa Wert-Thrush, Audrey O'Connor, Hillary Hubbell, Chris Palmer, Kim Robinson, Chris Cowan, Dawn Sokol, Chris Zakraysek, Susan Storm, Tammy Burke, Marci Katona, Jessica Crum-Lasko

Stakeholders Present: James Martini, PA Workforce Development Board, Melissa Hawkins, Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH), Natalie Herberg, PA Developmental Disabilities Council, Catherine Bogdanski, Lehigh Valley Center for Independent Living (LVCIL), Angel Torres, Reading BVRs Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC), Chris Hunsinger, Pennsylvania Council of the Blind, Jeff Iseman, Pennsylvania Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC), Cara Krchnar, Commonwealth of PA, Michael Vore, Commonwealth of PA, Matthew Seeley, Esq., Pennsylvania Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC), Linda Mackey, PA Department of Education (PDE), Zulqarnain Nasir, Pennsylvania Office of the Budget

Project Staff Present: Michelle Gerrick, Christopher Todd

Moderator of Zoom: Nichole Wade

CART: Abby Estes

Interpreters: Jill Buracker, Laura Schupp

Guests: Anissa Brown, Julianna Rodrigues, Deborah Anderson

WELCOME & OPENING REMARKS: Mr. Paul Fogle, Chair

- Mr. Paul Fogle informed attendees that the agenda item listing an action item for the PaRC Member's Only webpage will not be taking place since the webpage requires additional work.

MOTION was made by Ms. Passle Helminski for approval of today's meeting agenda. Ms. Julia Barol seconded the motion. All were in favor.

MOTION was made by Ms. Passle Helminski for approval of the past meeting minutes. Mr. William Del Toro Vargas seconded the motion. All were in favor.

PaRC FISCAL REPORT (2nd QUARTER): Ms. Michelle Mitchell, Member at Large

- Fiscal Report for second quarter 2023-2024 included the following amounts: October \$2535.94, November \$3530.59, and December \$750.00 with a total spend of \$6816.53 and remaining balance of \$54,075.50. The total budget for FY 2023-2024 is \$80,000.

MOTION was made by Ms. Passle Helminski for approval of PaRC 2nd quarter Fiscal Report. Mr. William Del Toro Vargas seconded the motion. All were in favor.

CHAIR REPORT: Mr. Paul Fogle, Chair

- Mr. Fogle reported that the date for the PaRC Full Council meeting in May was changed from May 15th to May 8th due to a scheduling conflict with the Pa Employment Oversight Commission (EFOC) meeting. This meeting will be a hybrid format of both virtual through Zoom and on-site at the Harrisburg Hilton Hotel.
- Ms. Passle Helminski and Ms. Sylenthia Dent were welcomed as newly appointed members and provided their introductions to the Council.

NEW BUSINESS

CareerLink Committee: Mr. Andrew Pennington, Chair

- Mr. Pennington reported that the committee plans to continue their discussion of the Temple Institute on Disabilities grant, feedback on internship programs, Workforce Development updates, and CareerLink accessibility updates from OVR.

- Next scheduled meeting is February 20, 2024, at 1:00 PM.

Governance Committee: Ms. Susan Tomasic, Chair

- Ms. Tomasic reported the Committee's recommendation of two new applicants for Council membership.
- The Committee continues to review Bylaws and will conduct the elections of PaRC Officers during Full Council meeting on May 8, 2024. Ms. Tomasic opened the nomination process and instructed members to submit recommendations to her by email or phone. A slate of nominees will be provided prior to the May meeting.
- Next scheduled meeting is February 22, 2024, at 2:30 PM.

MOTION was made by Ms. Julia Barol for approval of forwarding Ms. Christie Cyktor's application, resume, and letters of reference to the Governor for consideration of appointment to the PaRC representing the category of Former/Current OVR Customer. Ms. Passle Helminski seconded the motion. All were in favor.

MOTION was made by Ms. Twana Jones for approval of forwarding Ms. Julianna Rodrigues' application, resume, and letters of reference to the Governor for consideration of appointment to the PaRC representing the category of Community Rehabilitation Provider. Ms. Passle Helminski seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Legislative Committee: Mr. William Del Toro Vargas, Chair

- Mr. Del Toro Vargas reported that the Committee recommended updates to the State and Federal Position Papers including the addition of PA House Resolution 174 regarding a transportation study.
- The Committee is working with Legislators, Council members, and OVR on the Schedule A definition.
- The Committee is educating Legislators on Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) and the Fair Labor Standards Act. The Committee is building a proposal to present to OVR, working on a list of recommendations, and will be collaborating with OVR on the Council's Legislative agenda.
- Next scheduled meeting is February 23, 2024, at 2:30 PM.

MOTION was made by Ms. Passle Helminski for approval of the updated State and Federal Position Papers including the addition of HR174. Ms. Lynn Heitz seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Policy Committee: Ms. Lynn Heitz, Chair

- Ms. Heitz reported the OVR Audiological Policy draft will be reviewed and voted on during the upcoming meeting.
- Next scheduled meeting is February 27, 2024.

Social Media Committee: Ms. Michele Leahy, Chair

- Mr. Fogle reported that the Member's Only portal on the PaRC website is not completed and has been removed from the agenda.
- In Ms. Leahy's absence, Mr. Chris Todd, PaRC Staff, reported on the Social Media Committee's Outreach efforts and analytics captured since October 2023. Shares on Facebook are up 100%. Page engaged users on Facebook are up 44%. Facebook page reach and post reach are up 20%. Instagram impressions are up 24% and reach is up 244% on Instagram. LinkedIn post impressions are up 55% and unique post impressions are up 47%.

Transition Committee: Ms. Julia Barol, Chair

- Ms. Barol reported that the Transition Committee met in November 2023.
- Next scheduled meeting is March 5, 2024.

Ad Hoc Committee - Hiram G. Andrews Center: Mr. William Del Toro Vargas, Chair

- Mr. Del Toro Vargas reported that the Committee reviewed data from Hiram G Andrews Center (HGAC) in January, which suggests that outreach and enrollment continued to increase.
- Next scheduled meeting is March 13, 2024, at 2:00 PM.

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

- Mr. Pennington reported that the Committee received confirmation that OVR agreed to allow a PaRC member to be part of the application review process of Impartial Hearing Officers (IHO) / Mediators.
- The Committee plans to review training materials and process for IHO/Mediators.
- Next scheduled meeting is February 28, 2024, at 2:30 PM.

OVR REPORTS

Quarterly Progress Report on State Plan goals - Mr. Jim Whitonis, Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist

- In response to Mr. Paul Fogle's request to provide an overview of the State Plan and data benchmarks, Mr. James Whitonis reported the following:
 - The State Plan is a requirement of the Rehab Act and WIOA.
 - The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) is required to take part in development of the plan and has a dedicated section to SRC recommendations.
 - The SRC is also an integral part of the review of OVR's development of the 4-year goals sections.
 - The 4-year plan is reviewed at the 2-year mark. This 2-year modification period may be discontinued.
 - Beginning Spring 2023 OVR met with PaRC in development of the Description (a) and the goals.
 - Throughout the summer OVR finished its draft which outlines performance for all programs planned for the next 4 years.
 - In December the draft was submitted for Public Comment and minor adjustments were made with the addition of about 4 sentences as a result of the Public Comment period.
 - The PA Workforce Development Board was provided OVR's draft, and the Combined State Plan was open to Public Comment in January 2024.
 - Additional Public Comments were received during this period which were reviewed and responded to but did not result in any changes to the VR plan.
 - Workforce Development Board approved the Combined State Plan at their most recent meeting held yesterday.
 - The Plan will be submitted to the State Portal by March 4, 2024, which is the Commission's deadline.
 - Once submitted to the State Portal, notification will be provided within 30 days on the negotiated levels of performance followed by the negotiation process for levels of performance.

Audiological Services Policy Update - Mr. Russ Goddard, Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist

- Mr. Russ Goddard reported that the OVR Audiological Services Policy draft is currently in the Public Comment period which ends on February 16, 2024.
- Following public sessions on February 7, 2024, public comments will be analyzed, and changes will be made to the draft by the end of April 2024 prior to being provided to the PaRC for review.

- There are 5 key changes to the current policy to include: expanded types of qualified medical staff that may complete an audiological evaluation, removed requirement of consideration of comparable benefits for hearing aids, simplified purchasing of audiological evaluations from 4 codes down to 1 code, additional guidance on new hearing aid technologies and over the counter hearing aids, and documentation requirements with audiology clinics.
- A link was provided to the Audiological draft policy for members to review.
- Ms. Michelle Paonessa is the PaRC representative on the OVR Audiological workgroup.

Philadelphia District Office

- Ms. Shari Brightful, District Administrator, Philadelphia Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (BVRS) District Office, reported that they recently held on-site hiring events in the Fall of 2023 that resulted in 40 applications received with 13 applicant interviews, 3 applicants accepted positions as Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRCs) and 3 applicants declined conditional offers.
- New applicants will begin onboarding process in February 2024.
- In December, 13 additional applicants were interviewed and of those, 5 are working through the Human Resources process.
- Mr. Andrew Pennington inquired about Philadelphia District Office counselor vacancies and the hurdles to acquiring new talent.
- Ms. Brightful explained that many applicants want to work from home, there is a lack of interest in moving from out of state, and applicants interested in higher pay. The current rate is considered a livable wage within Philadelphia.
- Mr. Paul Fogle inquired how flexible local wages are for potential hires.
- Mr. Ryan Hyde explained that these positions are civil service and are structured with a pay bump in Philadelphia due to cost of living. OVR continues to work with the Office of Administration (OA) to determine satisfactory wages but does not have the ability to negotiate salary as it is structured by civil service contracts.
- Mr. Andrew Pennington explained that the Southeast part of the state has seen an unprecedented number of counselor vacancies and inquired what is being done to keep counselor morale up during these times.
- Ms. Brightful explained that the Philadelphia District Office continually highlights stories from families and individuals that become successfully employed after receiving OVR services, gathers feedback from staff on how to best support them, highlights the work staff is doing during meetings, ensures staff has the necessary tools they need to complete their work, provides opportunities to communicate needs with management, and provides customer service training, trauma informed training, and mental health first aid training.

- Mr. Fogle inquired about the case load numbers.
- Ms. Brightful explained that they try to keep the caseloads between 135 to 150.
- Ms. Sylenthia Dent inquired if the recent hiring decisions for the positions previously mentioned require a degree or are experience based.
- Ms. Brightful explained that master's degree is required in a related field which was expanded in an effort to allow more individuals to apply for these vacant positions.
- Ms. Passle Helminski inquired if members must join 2 PaRC Committees.
- Mr. Fogle explained that is correct and that more information will be covered regarding Committees once a new member orientation is scheduled.
- Ms. Lorie Brew inquired about OVR with High Schools or if this remains difficult due to lack of staff.
- Ms. Brightful explained that OVR holds monthly meetings with the Transition Coordinator for the School District of Philadelphia and the Mayor's Office, visits High Schools and cyber schools regularly, and holds an annual Transition Fair in Philadelphia which CTI at HGAC attends. This event has been extremely successful in making families, teachers, and students aware of OVR and the joy of being a counselor.
- Ms. Passle Helminski suggested members consider joining their local Citizen Advisory Committees (CACs).
- Mr. Alex Shay, Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services (BBVS) said they were pleased to learn that all offices are getting a business services representative. This role is to assist counselors with placement efforts and job search activities.
- Each office has been tasked with replicating the Lancaster project which provides students with Pre-ETS opportunities for job related skills and paid work experiences.
- The office continues to work with Overbrook School for the Blind and plans to open a program in the Fall.
- BBVS Summer Academy will be held from June 19 to 28, 2024 - 7 students have applied for that program which provides orientation mobility, assistive technology, independent living skills, low vision, and vocational development to ensure they are able to transition successfully into the world of work.
- Mr. Andrew Pennington inquired about the details of the Lancaster project previously mentioned as being replicated across all District Offices.
- Mr. Shay explained the project was initially developed in the York District Office which provides funding to school districts to develop customized curriculums to help students with soft skills, job readiness, and pays teachers or other staff to impact students' trajectory toward a first job and finding a good career.
- Mr. Ryan Hyde explained that the idea is that OVR through intergovernmental agreements with schools, can transfer funds to hire staff to coordinate, create, and

support work-based learning experiences during the school day. Students might start in the school and move into OVR's community partners locations. In Lancaster those partners included Lancaster Marriott Convention Center, Lancaster General Health Hospital, and Thaddeus Stevens College. The funding goes to hire staff at the school to coordinate and create different opportunities and then support the students throughout the day. Some of these entities continue to hire graduates for seasonal or permanent positions. The other component involves working with students interested in attending college to provide an understanding of the college experience including providing disability services, auditing classes, and exploration of college-level careers.

- Ms. Lynn Heitz asked if OVR may address the complement situation for VRCs in the Philadelphia BBVS Office and inquired what the caseloads currently are.
- Mr. Shay explained that they currently have 3 counselors and that they will be posting for 2 positions. They are holding a hiring event in Norristown. Caseloads are at about 800 for VR with roughly 100 to 150 for each counselor.

OVR DIRECTOR'S REPORT - Mr. Ryan Hyde

- Mr. Ryan Hyde re-introduced Ms. Denise Verchimak who has worked for OVR for 26 years and has returned as the Bureau of Central Operations Director after having been with the Department of Education for the past 4 years.
- Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) conference themes included rapid and sustained engagement. OVR has been working on that for 2 years, numbers are improving with continued coaching and training for staff using existing records to move customers into plan status as quickly as possible.
- Performance Indicators is another big theme from CSAVR reinforcing the purpose of WIOA, re-authorization of the Rehab Act under Title 4. Two of the five indicators were stressed which include skills gains and credential attainment which directly relate to education or post-secondary education.
- Ms. Michelle Mitchell inquired if OVR is doing more to help pay for master's and Doctorate level education.
- Mr. Hyde explained that OVR's college policy does allow for those options, but the customer would have to demonstrate the impediment to employment and why employment isn't possible with existing degrees. An impediment would have to be a disability-related reason why more advanced degrees were needed to become employed.
- Mr. Pennington explained that the Rehab Act states the services are for the retention, advancement, or maintenance of achieving competitive integrated employment and an argument could be made since that option is not provided in the policy. The individual needs to be determined eligible first for the service and

then through discussion and counseling, it is determined what is necessary and if assessments are needed to determine a job goal. Once a job goal is declared, if that level of education is required, then OVR can provide the service.

- Mr. Hyde explained that OVR has paid for advanced degrees. Sometimes it is the result of an accident, or someone was working in this field and changed fields.
- Mr. Hyde provided the following statistics, 53% of OVR customers are under the age of 25. Over 10,000 Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) activities were provided to 7,000 unique customers in the first 2 quarters of the year. 66% of OVR total cases have a diagnosis of a cognitive, psychological, or psychosocial disability. Numbers in Pre-ETS have climbed over the past few years and plateauing of those numbers is expected in 2024.
- Staffing: There is about 120 positions across the Commonwealth in the Human Resources process. There have been a lot of position promotions and back fill. Hiring events are planned for the Philadelphia and Jonestown regions. State Plan is in the approval process which includes exploring bachelor's level positions, which continues to be developed with the Office of Administration HR staff.
- Mr. Fogle inquired if there is an average of statewide caseloads.
- Mr. Hyde explained they try to keep caseloads under 150.
- Ms. Dent inquired if OVR is conducting exit interviews for staff.
- Mr. Hyde explained that the Commonwealth conducts optional exit surveys, but OVR does not receive a lot of data from those and that there are rules against making them mandatory. Themes for those leaving OVR include telework, wages, competing with other entities including the Veteran's Administration and colleges. Younger staff have stated they are not necessarily looking for 20-year careers.
- Mr. Fogle inquired about case load management due to position vacancies.
- Mr. Hyde explained that vacant caseloads are managed on an overtime basis, supervisors are responsible for creating overtime opportunities based on the needs of case load which could be a couple hours a week that staff volunteer for. If there aren't enough volunteers OVR goes to a mandatory process and the established protocol.
- Finances: Mr. Hyde explained that he wanted to thank Governor Shapiro regarding the increase in the budget in the amount of \$785,000 requested to draw down the match and help with the federal grant increase over the last 2 years because of the inflationary index. OVR expects a budget of around \$150 million in Federal dollars. OVR has been carrying over large amounts of Federal money as the grant continues to increase and the increase in the State budget helps to reach the Federal match. The carryover of Federal funds for this past year was \$100 million. That amount may be lower for the next Fiscal Year depending upon Pre-ETS spending.

- Ms. Heitz inquired if there is a plan to ensure there is enough funds available to serve all OVR customers as the number of customers increases in the years to come.
- Mr. Hyde explained that is discussed on a weekly basis, the carryover will continue for next year and possibly the next 2 years. OVR continues to project Pre-ETS spending, is discussing reviews of the increase to college funding which may be rolled back in the next year and continues to discuss reinstating the Financial Needs Test as needed. These measures would be considered before anything related to the Order of Selection.
- Mr. Pennington inquired if OVR was able to spend the first year of the carryover funds.
- Mr. Hyde reported that the full carryover was spent with the exception of a couple thousand dollars.
- Pre-ETS: OVR met its 2022 Pre-ETS reserve easily, is in the process of meeting the 2023 reserve by mid-summer and will be spending the 2024 reserve. Each year this amount is about \$21 million. OVR is working on Psychological Service rate increases, there are currently 20 Project Search sites across the State for students and 3 for adults, with an additional 5 sites in the development stage including two in the Altoona and Johnstown areas.
- Grant writing and implementation: A vendor was selected for the Sub-Minimum Wage to Competitive Integrated Employment (SWTCIE) grant / Integrated Vocational Engagement & Support Team (InVEST) Project for the western part of the State that will be working directly with employers to support OVR customers on Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE). A viable bid was not received for the East and the bid procedure will need to be re-posted. Pathways to Partnership grant was awarded in September 2023 for \$9.9 million to implement training and coordination between OVR Local Education Agencies, Bureau of Special Education (BSE), Office of Developmental Programs (ODP), and the Federal Centers for Independent Living.
- Ms. Dent inquired about the employer for the Project InVEST in the southwest of the State.
- Mr. Hyde explained that OVR is working with Sheetz Corporation distribution center in Blair County. OVR customers may inquire with their counselor or reach out to him to be put in contact with the grant managers.
- Ms. Mitchell inquired about what other employers, businesses, or business types OVR works with.
- Mr. Hyde explained the OVR business services continues to work to match and create partnerships with employers. Some examples include manufacturers, Bath and Body Works, distribution centers, Starbucks, Lowe's, hospitals, factories, and small businesses.

- Summer Programs: Preparation for Summer Programs is year round. OVR set a goal of 1,000 students participating in MyWork. Commonwealth internships is in the process of selecting college students. DCNR Outdoor Corp program is underway. Summer Academies will be held at Penn State. OVR expects investments in these programs to be around \$13 to \$15 million.
- OVR continues share their Annual Report and to work on creating success story publications that highlight OVR customers, successful milestones, and OVR staff.
- HGAC created a palm card with QR code for distribution and outreach at all District Offices along with several videos highlighting CTI at HGAC success. OVR is working on a Board and Council cross training session that will cover roles and collaboration opportunities. Renovation and painting projects continue at HGAC dorms and facilities. CTI at HGAC is partnering with BSE and several Intermediate Units (IUs) to purchase driving simulators and providing driving training and evaluation. Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry (L&I) hearings are scheduled and OVR will be participating.
- Mr. Fogle stated that Mr. Chris Harbert has helped the Council immensely in his role with OVR to streamline a lot of collaboration between the Council, Central Office, L&I, and the Governor's Office.

PUBLIC COMMENT

- Mr. Angel Torres stated that he is the Chair of the Reading District Office Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) and would like to learn more on how to facilitate a statewide CAC Chair / Officer meeting. They believe that organizing an OVR and CAC Chairperson meeting twice a year or annually would be beneficial to the Chairs and CAC members. Collaboration and understanding during these meetings would help the CAC grow their focus on high priority issues and making informed suggestions to District Offices. Attending PaRC and state board meetings by the CAC chairs is an important practice to follow if their schedule permits. Also having access and reviewing PaRC and state board meeting minutes is of high importance. A citizen advisory committee who understands the function of the CAC and the priority of having a productive agenda / meeting are helping OVR to reach the goals of satisfying the needs, wants, and rights of OVR customers.
- Mr. Fogle agreed that it would be great to start an annual meeting with the CACs and will work with Mr. Harbert and Ms. Gerrick to have this scheduled. Mr. Hyde agreed and stated the logistics can be worked out with Mr. Harbert and that a virtual meeting may be the preferred method for those involved at this point.
- Ms. Helmski explained that she is the Chair of the Erie District Office CAC and would gladly join in the efforts to facilitate a statewide CAC meeting.

STAKEHOLDER UPDATES

Mr. James Martini – State Workforce Development Board

- Mr. James Martini reported that Workforce Development Board held their Quarterly meeting yesterday which included 6 voting actions including approval of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA) Combined State Plan. The Board recommended that all local Workforce Development Boards host a pardon related event for communities to ensure access to pardons and eventual expungement to clear their records and make them more employable. There was a recommendation for 8 or 9 counties to enter into agreements with PennDOT to develop Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to provide inmates with licenses or government issued IDs upon exit which is best practice as lack of ID can be a big barrier to employment. A recommendation was made to make all license examinations with accessible language to benefit a lot of entry level occupations for those that may not be native English speakers. A recommendation was made to research investments for the apprenticeship space and increase diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility of those entering occupations and expand the scope of occupations that are apprentice able. A recommendation was made to work with Pennsylvania Longitudinal data system to better gather information on outcomes for participants in the L&I youth programming, summer youth programming, and identify year round the positive impacts of those who participate.
- Mr. Fogle agreed the accessible license testing inclusive of languages for those who are not native English speakers is great and necessary and inquired if that will include accessible language for those with intellectual and development disabilities moving forward.
- Mr. Martini explained that the recommendation was kept broad to be inclusive of findings regarding the educational and reading levels for licensing and employment related testing. Anything that can be done, whether it's in terms of making sure that tests aren't overly complicated, or to make sure they are not unintentionally putting in cultural barriers is being reviewed.
- Ms. Barol explained that using ChatGPT could allow for test questions to be translated into parameters such as a fourth grade reading level and would be a fabulous way to make tests accessible.
- Mr. Martini will provide this suggestion with the recommendations to the Governor's Office. Workforce Development Board now has 11 Committees and invited attendees interested in participating with Committees to contact him. Board members were asked to volunteer to join the PaRC during their meeting and to participate with the Board of VR's Legislative Committee.

- Ms. Tomasic reported SILC will be holding their quarterly meeting tomorrow, has gathered information and is assessing data to begin working on their first draft for their State Plan.
- Ms. Melissa Hawkins thanked members for their advocacy of Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH) Support Service Provider (SSP) Program. In 2022 they had 63 Deafblind clients using SSP services and a total of 37 SSPs trained. There was a total of 3019 hours used in the SSP Program with 843 completed assignments. This past January they had their 1000th assignment through SSP program a huge milestone. ODHH averages about 8 or 9 referrals for Deafblind individuals a month. SSPs are paid \$20 an hour and Deafblind individuals can receive 15 hours a month of SSP services. The program is going to outgrow funding so PaRC's advocacy efforts for funding and growing the program are much appreciated.
- Ms. Joan Goodman inquired what would the Governor's upcoming budget funding amounts include for the SSP program. This question will be forwarded to Ms. Hawkins for Committee discussion.
- Ms. Tomasic reminded members that PaRC's election of officers will be held during the May meeting, the nomination process is officially opening, and to provide nominations directly to her.

MR. MICHAEL KIEL AND MR. THEO BRADY, Members of the State Board of Vocational Rehabilitation

Discussion on roles and increasing collaborative efforts

- Mr. Harbert explained that Mr. Michael Kiel and Mr. Theo Brady were not available to join today's meeting. Mr. Harbert is slated to provide a presentation and one page report to the Council on the differences between OVR's Rehab Council and State Board which will complement a larger project in providing a collaborative training for OVR staff, Board, and Council members. Current goals for the training include defining a framework of the individual and combined relationship for the Board and Council to OVR, improve effective communication, understand organization obligations and roles to the agency, and develop onboarding or cross training assistance for Board and Council members and OVR staff.
- Members agreed this is a great starting point and look forward to collaborative meetings with OVR and the Board.
- Ms. Mitchell recommended including information on how to become a Board member.
- Mr. Harbert explained meetings could be hybrid or virtual format depending upon logistics and member's preferences. Resources being used for the development of

the training include the State Rehabilitation Act of 1988, training content from Board documents, definition, and information directly from Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), State Rehabilitation Council and Independent Commission page, Bylaws for the Council, existing policies and procedures, documentation from the Council, documentation and understanding from Office of Chief Counsel, and regulations from RSA.

- Ms. Heitz suggested having a conversation with Dr. Federick K. Schroeder.
- Ms. Helminski suggested reaching out to Janet LeBreck, former RSA Commissioner.

ADJOURN

MOTION was made by Ms. Barol to adjourn. Ms. Twana Jones seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned.