



# Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC)

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## Legislative & Public Awareness Committee Minutes for May 20, 2024

### Members Present (P)

### Not Present (NP)

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

**OVR Staff Present:** Chris Harbert

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

### CALL TO ORDER

This meeting was conducted through Zoom. Mr. William Del Toro Vargas called the meeting to order at 11:01 AM.

### ADDITIONS TO THE AGENDA

***MOTION was made by Ms. Julia Barol to add to the agenda discussion of topics for Bender Consulting to work with the PaRC on educational outreach. The motion was seconded by Ms. Passle Helminski. All were in favor.***

### APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA AND PAST MINUTES

***MOTION was made by Ms. Passle Helminski to approve today's agenda and past meeting minutes. Ms. Michelle Mitchell seconded the motion. All were in favor.***

### AGENDA ITEMS:

#### Discussion of topics for Bender Consulting to work with the PaRC on educational outreach

- Regarding quorum for today's meeting, members inquired about the date that the Bylaws revisions will go into effect expanding Committees' maximum membership

from 7 members to 9 members. Ms. Susan Tomasic explained that upon further detailed review, the Bylaws voted on during the May 8<sup>th</sup> Full Council meeting go into effect immediately upon approval. Officers' terms start at the beginning of the Fiscal Year. Based upon this information Ms. Passle Helminski and Ms. Sylenthia Dent are officially members of the Committee's quorum which was reached due to their attendance.

- Mr. Chris Harbert explained that topics previously discussed with Bender Consulting were reviewed and were a little charged for right now. Mr. Harbert has been meeting with Mr. Ryan Hyde and at least 5 stakeholder groups. Would like to select a topic that can be supported across all stakeholder groups for maximum benefit. Inquired if Council members had additional topics to share for the educational outreach projects. Potential topics for educational outreach that are currently discussed by all 5 stakeholder groups that could be provided to educate the public include the Direct Care Worker Crisis and the benefits of hiring people with disabilities. OVR understands Schedule A for employment however the bill is not passed at this time. Subminimum wage is still legal practice.
- Members suggested that the topic of transportation issues would be relevant across all stakeholder groups, especially in regard to rural transportation. The focus could be on both urban and rural transportation issues. Ms. Heitz explained that the concern with urban transportation is more around safety rather than availability. Ms. Mitchell inquired if Council could include a broader topic, such as barriers to employment. This would include transportation and the Direct Care Workers Crisis. Ms. Michelle Gerrick reported the budget for the projects with Bender Consulting for the current Fiscal Year is \$12,000.
- Mr. Del Toro Vargas requested Mr. Harbert provide a list of stakeholders mentioned to pull in everyone's voices to hold discussion. Mr. Harbert reported that those groups include the State Board of VR, PaRC, Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC), PA Workforce Development Board (WDB) Healthcare Committee, Employment 1<sup>st</sup>, and the Advisory Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.
- Mr. Del Toro Vargas explained that this would require further conversations and inquired what would be required regarding approvals for the Committee budget to hold either an in person or virtual event with the stakeholder groups and Bender Consulting.
- Ms. Gerrick explained that the PaRC budget is one pot of money, and that the Committee would be okay to present this project. Inquired if members would like to present the project to Executive Committee which is scheduled to meet in mid-June to ensure all Council protocols are met. Ms. Tomasic explained the Legislative Committee does have its own budget. The Legislative Committee would make a recommendation to the Executive Committee about how they want that budget to be spent. The Executive Committee votes on that and it moves forward to the Full Council. Mr. Del Toro Vargas suggested holding a work session to put together an outline to present to Executive Committee. Anticipates this would involve an extensive conversation that would require an entire Committee meeting.
- Mr. Harbert explained that he provided this information today in an effort to ensure funds are spent prior to the end of the current Fiscal Year.

- Mr. Del Toro Vargas inquired about holding a one day event either virtual or in person with stakeholders and Bender to streamline conversations.

***MOTION was made by Ms. Helminski to hold a one day event either virtual or in person with stakeholders and Bender to streamline conversations. Ms. Barol seconded the motion. All were in favor.***

- This event would need to be pulled together in less than 6 weeks, prior to the end of the Fiscal Year. Ms. Gerrick explained that if Executive and Full Council approval is required that the next Full Council meeting is scheduled for August which is in the next Fiscal Year. Mr. Del Toro Vargas inquired about Executive Committee providing approval due to the time limitations. Mr. Fogle explained that the next Executive Committee meeting is not scheduled until mid-June. Mr. Del Toro Vargas inquired about scheduling a meeting earlier to get the necessary approval. Ms. Tomasic explained that the Bylaws state that 2 or 3 members can request a meeting at any time.
- Mr. Del Toro Vargas stated that he is officially requesting assistance to hold an Executive Committee meeting sooner than mid-June to meet the goal for the current Fiscal Year. Mr. Fogle explained that quorum would be required to get approval, he would see what could be done, but could not ensure a meeting would be held.
- Mr. Del Toro Vargas inquired if it was possible to spend the funds and meet the goal with Bender Consulting within the current Fiscal Year without the approval of Executive Committee by holding a virtual meeting with the Legislative Committee.
- Mr. Pennington inquired if Full Council would hold discussion regarding topics for the project with Bender Consulting. Mr. Fogle explained that Full Council would typically hold discussion on these topics but due to time constraints Executive Committee can provide approval. Ms. Tomasic agreed, Executive Committee is charged with handling any business between Full Council meetings. Full Council has participated in a conversation about this, it was just not finalized. A decision can be made by Executive Committee, remembering that Executive Committee has to report out to Full Council.
- Mr. Fogle explained that he is not trying to be dismissive and just has concerns with time limitations and scheduling conflicts. Mr. Del Toro Vargas explained that the potential attendance of Committee Vice Chairs may provide some flexibility to ensure quorum for scheduling an Executive Committee meeting sooner.

### **Continued Discussion of Potential Service Dog Language for Position Papers**

- Members reviewed the following draft of Service Dog language based upon member discussion from the April 30, 2024, Legislative Committee meeting:

#### **Service Dog Laws**

#### **Action Requested:**

- *A Service Dog is any dog which has been or is in the process of being trained as a guide dog, signal dog or has been trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability.*

- *The PaRC understands that Service Dogs are critical toward the attaining and maintaining of independent living especially in regard to employment and recommends that laws prohibiting any interference with Service Dogs be re-introduced and enforced.*
- *Harassment of or interfering with a Service Dog is detrimental to people with disabilities especially regarding their access to employment. The PaRC supports the education of people in our communities about the importance of Service Dogs and the harm interference with Service Dogs poses to people with disabilities.*
- *Additionally, the Council supports legislation that would strengthen protections for any fully trained animal that supports an individual with a disability through specific trained tasks related to their needs to access employment and independent living.*
- Ms. Helminski suggested adding to the first 3 bullets information about the penalty that was included within the old law for interference. The language supports this but doesn't say what it is. Ms. Barol suggested the language "stated in the past in Legislation" and inquired if the details of the past legislation should be included within the language. Members agreed to include general language stating that the Council supports consequences to the interference with Service Dogs.
- Members agreed to move the fourth bullet to a new section. The section should be in regard to Pennsylvania's Control and Contain Dog Laws.

***MOTION was made by Ms. Helminski to approve the first 3 bullet points for Service Dog Laws language with the addition of general language regarding sanctions. Ms. Barol seconded the motion. All were in favor.***

***MOTION was made by Ms. Helminski to approve creating a new section for Control and Contain Dog Laws to move the 4<sup>th</sup> bullet. Ms. Barol seconded the motion. All were in favor.***

***MOTION was made by Ms. Helminski to approve including the revised Dog Laws language to the State Position Paper. Ms. Mitchell seconded the motion. All were in favor.***

### **Preparation for Meetings with Legislators Scheduled for May 30th and 31<sup>st</sup> Pre-meeting Materials**

- Mr. Del Toro Vargas reminded members to review materials regarding meetings with Legislators. The opinions of the Council must come first during meetings including the State and Federal Position Papers, and any opinions approved by the Full Council.
- Members requested that pre-meeting materials for Legislators and their staff include State and Federal Position Paper, PaRC Annual Report and website information, VR Highlights, and the Employment First Oversight Commission Annual Report.

## **Schedule next meeting**

- Members requested polling for the next Legislative Committee meeting for Monday, June 10, 2024, from 11:00 AM to 12:00 PM.

## **Public Comment (3 minutes per attendee)**

- Ms. Passle Helminski provided Public Comment, explained that HR3935 was signed into law and is regarding people with disabilities' and Service Dogs' access to air travel. This is still in the comment period which ends on May 29, 2024. Encouraged attendees to please leave comments. It is very important for people with disabilities to make their voices be heard especially if they are a Service Dog user. Those that self-train their service dog and those that use miniature guide horses are eligible to have access to air travel again. The school in North Carolina is so overwhelmed with applications they have indefinitely closed their form for applications. Would like for members to look into doing Federal Service Dog / Animal language in the future so that all states are on the same page.
- Ms. Lynn Heitz provided Public Comment, explained that this is the opportunity to have their voices be heard.
- Ms. Mitchell requested a link be sent with this information. Ms. Helminski will send the link to staff to be forwarded to Full Council.

## **Adjourn**

***MOTION to adjourn was made by Ms. Helminski. Ms. Joan Goodman seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned.***