



Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC)

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Executive Committee Meeting Minutes for June 4, 2024, 1:30 PM to 2:30 PM

Committee Members (P = Present) (NP = Not Present)

Paul Fogle (P)	Susan Tomasic (P)	Michelle Mitchell (P)
William Del Toro Vargas (P)	Michele Leahy (P)	Lynn Heitz (P)
Julia Grant Barol (P)	Andrew Pennington (P)	

Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) Present: Chris Harbert

Staff Present: Chris Todd

ADDITIONS TO THE AGENDA

There were no additions.

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

AGENDA ITEMS

Re-Appointments: Julia Barol, Sylenthia Dent, Joan Myers Goodman

- Members confirmed that Julia Barol, Sylenthia Dent and Joan Myers Goodman are interested in reappointment to the PaRC.

MOTION was made by Ms. Susan Tomasic to forward the reapplication of Julia Barol, Sylenthia Dent, Joan Myers Goodman for their reappointment to the Council. Mr. Andrew Pennington seconded the motion. All were in favor.

- Ms. Michele Leahy inquired of her status as a member under USQ (Until a Successor is Qualified). Ms. Susan Tomasic explained that Ms. Leahy may remain on the Council under USQ until another member is approved by the Governor's Office that fills her position and then she will be released. Ms. Tomasic explained that USQ is purely voluntary and that members can leave the Council at the end of their term or choose to leave the Council after a few months under USQ.

Bender Project

- Mr. William Del Toro Vargas explained that the Legislative Committee would like the Executive Committee's support regarding approval for funding of the educational outreach event project with Bender Consulting for the current Fiscal Year. This event would be in collaboration with Bender Consulting and different State advocacy organizations. Mr. Chris Harbert, OVR explained in order to provide the support of OVR and Labor and Industry Office of Chief Counsel (OCC) he had previously proposed the Direct Care Worker Crisis as a topic that could be agreed upon to meet the requirements within this Fiscal Year.
- Mr. Del Toro Vargas inquired if Schedule A was also a topic that would be approved to include within this project. Mr. Harbert explained that OVR Leadership and OCC were not opposed to an educational outreach component regarding Schedule A hiring within the Commonwealth but were hesitant to provide approval as this is not a current policy within the Commonwealth. Mr. Del Toro Vargas explained that the project for Schedule A would be to pull together different State agencies to collaborate and initiate discussion on the impacts of Schedule A and would not be educational outreach or involve Legislators.
- Mr. Harbert explained that the Direct Care Workers Crisis topic would receive full support from the State Board of VR, Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC), Workforce Development Board and their Healthcare Committee, Governor's Employment First Oversight Cabinet, and Pennsylvania Centers for Independent Living (PCIL).
- Mr. Del Toro Vargas inquired if the Executive Committee could provide approval to initiate the Bender Consulting project and then move it back to the Legislative Committee to discuss how to best utilize Bender Consulting. Mr. Harbert explained that keeping the scope narrow and very specific would be very important. Mr. Harbert explained that he does not think they would be able to meet the spending goal within this Fiscal Year as the project would need to be finished and an invoice would need to be submitted by Bender prior to June 30, 2024, for OVR to reimburse PaRC. Mr. Harbert reported that he spoke with their Funding Manager and was informed PaRC will be able to retain the funds, the total amount would decrease but the percentage amount of spending would remain the same.
- Mr. Pennington shared concerns about being able to complete this project by the end of the Fiscal Year which is in 3 weeks and inquired if Mr. Del Toro Vargas would like to have this topic further discussed by the Legislative Committee. Mr. Del Toro Vargas agreed that was correct and explained that he would like to use Bender more to pull collaborative groups and meetings together with advocacy organizations rather than providing education. Mr. Harbert explained that it is probably not feasible to have this conversation take place and have the project completed by the end of the Commonwealth's spending requirement for this year's cycle.
- Members agreed upon tabling this discussion until OVR provide definitive answers regarding the requirements for PaRC funding for the Bender Project.

MOTION was made by Mr. William Del Toro Vargas to refer the Bender Project topic back to the Legislative Committee for discussion. Ms. Julia Barol seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Letter of Support for OVR's Creating a 21st Century Workforce of Youth and Adults with Disabilities Through the Transformation of Education, Career, and Competitive Integrated Employment Model Demonstration Project

- Mr. Harbert informed members OVR will be pursuing a Disability Innovation Fund (DIF) grant. The letter of support for the DIF grant will be voted on by the State Board of VR during their June 6, 2024, meeting. The letter is consistent with policies that OVR has approved in the past and is currently working towards. The application due date for this grant is July 8, 2024. OVR is looking into providing driving simulators for all of the Commonwealth's Intermediate Units (IUs) for this project.
- Members provided several questions regarding the DIF grant including, where the personnel will be acquired to provide these services, what exactly is the proposal for the grant, what will be the Bureau of Special Education's (BSE) and Department of Transportation's involvement, will there be an aspect of the project included for the Blind and Visually Impaired, why the driver simulators will be located at IUs when services are also needed for adult services, and will this project create a capacity issue for OVR personnel to take on. Members agreed that the scope of the project needs to be broadened to people with sensory disabilities. Mr. Harbert agreed to relay member's questions and concerns regarding the DIF grant and follow up.
- Ms. Lynn Heitz shared concerns that a lot of these grants are very one-sided and don't take into account the Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services (BBVS) customers.

Draft Agenda Topics/Speakers: Full Council hybrid meeting 08/13/24

- Mr. Paul Fogle suggested moving the conference reports up to the morning on the Full Council (FC) meeting agenda to allow for enough time.
- Ms. Lynn Heitz explained that the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) provides entrepreneurial opportunities to individuals that are legally blind and not a lot of people know about it. The program has a new director and members requested that their information be forwarded to incoming Council Chair and PaRC staff in regard to an invitation for the August FC meeting.
- Mr. Fogle suggested inviting Mr. Michael Gamel-McCormick from Senator Robert Casey's Office to an upcoming FC meeting to provide a Federal Legislative update.

Adjourn

MOTION to adjourn was made by Mr. William Del Toro Vargas. Ms. Julia Barol seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned.