



Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC)

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Legislative & Public Awareness Committee Minutes for June 10, 2024

Members Present (P)

Not Present (NP)

William Del Toro Vargas (P)	Julia Grant Barol (NP)	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, Jim Whitonis, Rebecca Gardner, Zulqarnain Nasir

PaRC Staff Present: Chris Todd

CALL TO ORDER

This meeting was conducted through Zoom. Mr. William Del Toro Vargas called the meeting to order at 11:00 AM.

ADDITIONS TO THE AGENDA

There were no additions.

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA AND PAST MINUTES

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

AGENDA ITEMS:

Committee Chair / Vice Chair for Fiscal Year 2024-2025

- Ms. Joan Goodman nominated Ms. Passle Helminski for Committee Chair for Fiscal Year 2024-2025. There were no other nominations. Ms. Helminski was elected unanimously.
- Mr. William Del Toro Vargas nominated Ms. Lynn Heitz for Committee Vice Chair for Fiscal Year 2024-2025. There were no other nominations. Ms. Heitz was

elected unanimously.

Bender Consulting Project

- Mr. William Del Toro Vargas explained that he would prefer that Bender Consulting services be used for organizing the Committee rather than for educating Legislators to avoid any misinterpretations or misunderstanding of educational outreach. These services would be provided internally with the Council, may include social media, collaborating with other State agencies, and/or organizing a conference if needed.
- Mr. Chris Harbert explained that initially 2 topics were proposed by Legislative Committee for educational outreach on Subminimum Wage Sheltered Workshops and Schedule A hiring at the State level. Office of Chief Counsel (OCC) reviewed language for those topics over the winter, informed OVR and Committee that the status for those projects was pending approval and that the Legislation regarding those topics have not been enacted. The State Board of VR sent a letter outlining the Direct Care Worker Crisis in January. This topic was identified as a potential project that may be most impactful and has been discussed across all state agencies including the PaRC, State Board, Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC), an Employment First concern, Workforce Development Board, and their Healthcare Committee. Labor and Industry and OCC support the topic of the Direct Care Worker Crisis and specifically the stances included in the State Board's letter. This was brought up with Mr. Ryan Hyde approximately one month ago. Mr. Harbert explained that he did not want OVR and the Council to miss the opportunity to complete the project with Bender Consulting and meet the spending goal for the current Fiscal Year project budget. Given the short amount of time considering quality assurance factors, invoicing and accounts payable requirements, and the scope of such a large project it was not feasible to meet this spending goal within the Fiscal Year. This information was reviewed with PaRC Executive Committee last week and questions were forwarded to OVR finance staff. Mr. Harbert explained that he was able to confirm the contract for Bender Consulting is year to year, the \$12,000 will not be spent for the current Fiscal Year but will be available for the upcoming Fiscal Year with the contract renewal.
- Mr. Del Toro Vargas explained that an undertaking of this size would have required more than just a few weeks to complete. Mr. Harbert agreed especially considering the Commonwealth's quality assurance requirements.
- Mr. Harbert explained that OVR and OCC were concerned with an educational outreach project over the winter, as Bender Consulting is a lobbying business. With a very defined scope as was described by Mr. Del Toro Vargas, of not having Bender Consulting do any advocacy or education and with the ability of this vender he is confident they will be able to do a good job. The \$12,000 for the current FY 2023-2024 will be returned to the agency however, the \$12,000 for the upcoming FY will be available with the renewal of the contract. Mr. Del Toro Vargas explained that the finance piece of the project will need to be discussed with the PaRC Executive Committee and that the discussion of project topics was kicked back to the Legislative Committee, not the finance aspect of the project.

- Ms. Rebecca Gardner reported that she is currently in discussion with procurement, will be in contact with PaRC staff, and will keep Mr. Harbert informed of any changes from what was previously discussed. Ms. Lynn Heitz inquired about the timeframe of the contract renewal. Ms. Gardner reported that the contract is already renewed, and they are waiting for the Comptroller to give the contract back, they have already submitted for the renewal.
- Ms. Mitchell inquired at what point will the Legislative Committee be free to establish topics that benefit the disability community even if it may not necessarily be something that OVR or OCC wants to support. Mr. Del Toro Vargas explained that OVR may only make recommendations about the topics. The Council has full control over topics and what they support individually. The Direct Care Crisis could be a part of the agenda for this project but there may not be a lot of additional information to provide, as members and Legislators are well informed of these concerns. Action on this topic needs to be taken by the Legislative body in regard to budgetary concerns. Mr. Harbert explained that topics can be determined by the Council, during a recent Employment First Cabinet meeting there was interest among the Governor's staff in Subminimum Wage 14(c) and Schedule A topics. Moving forward, OVR and Labor and Industry may continue with the same stance on these topics and Mr. Harbert can continue to hold further conversations.
- Ms. Heitz explained that there are a lot of individuals that experience vision loss and have attendant care services. She proposed the goal of including this discussion for the Bender project as this topic would cover Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services (BBVS) and other agencies providing attendant care services to those with vision loss. This may include information on meeting or defining the criteria required to receive attendant care services. Mr. Del Toro Vargas confirmed with Ms. Heitz that the topic of discussion of attendant services for people with blindness and visual impairments would also be beneficial to include other state agencies such as Office of Long-Term Living and Office of Developmental Programs that provide attendant care services through Managed Care Organizations (MCOs).

Discussion for Renewal of MYPLS Communication Connection Services

- Members inquired about the continued use of Pennsylvania Legislative Services (MYPLS). Mr. Chris Todd, PaRC Staff informed members that MYPLS Communication Connection, bulk email service one-year subscription was purchased by the Council in August 2023 and has been used to distribute the PaRC Bi-monthly Newsletter to State Legislators and their staff. Data is provided upon request by MYPLS for each email which includes the number of emails sent, email openings, link clicks, bounces, and blocked emails. This ongoing data was provided to the Committee. An estimate to renew this service in August was provided by MYPLS and the cost would be \$1375.00 for one year. Mr. Del Toro Vargas explained that MYPLS continues to be very responsive regarding any accessibility concerns for the service.

MOTION was made by Ms. Michelle Mitchell to recommend purchase of MYPLS Communication Connection Service for Fiscal Year 2024-2025. Ms. Lynn Heitz

seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Meetings with Legislators

- Mr. William Del Toro Vargas reported that the meetings with Legislators and their staff were well received and that follow up thank you messages were sent last week to all Legislators and their staff that the Council members met with on May 30th and 31st, 2024. Members requested that staff poll the Committee regarding a request for a follow up meeting.

Review/Discussion State Watchlist

- Members reviewed the Committee State Legislative Watchlist and reviewed [HB1834](#), An Act amending the act of June 19, 2018 (P.L.229, No.36), known as the Employment First Act, further providing for Employment First Oversight Commission. Members also reviewed [SB1094](#) An Act amending the act of May 17, 1921 (P.L.682, No.284), known as The Insurance Company Law of 1921, in casualty insurance, providing for coverage for post-acute neurorehabilitation.

MOTION was made by Ms. Joan Goodman to recommend adding support of [HB1834](#) to the State Position Paper. Ms. Sylenthia Dent seconded the motion. All were in favor.

MOTION was made by Ms. Michelle Mitchell to recommend adding support of [SB1094](#) to the State Position Paper. Ms. Lynn Heitz seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Schedule next meeting

- Members requested that the next Committee meeting be scheduled for July 19, 2024, from 2:00 PM to 3:00 PM.

Public Comment (3 minutes per attendee)

- Ms. Michelle Mitchell provided public comment not as a PaRC member but as a Disability Learning Specialist and Professor at Lehigh Carbon Community College. She would like the opportunity to get PaRC's support for the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) grant 84.4 21F, Creating a 21st Century Workforce. She has a sample letter of support draft that could be shared. Understands that this is not the place it would happen but would like to put on public record that she would like it to move forward to get to Full Council for review and support.
- Mr. Del Toro Vargas asked Ms. Mitchell to send her materials to PaRC staff as a member of the public and provided a reminder that this will be available to the public and to remove any information that needs to remain private.

Adjourn

MOTION to adjourn was made by Ms. Helminski. Ms. Heitz seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned.