



Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC)

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PaRC Special Meeting Minutes May 28, 2024, 12:30 PM to 1:00 PM

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

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

Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) Present: Ryan Hyde, Chris Harbert

Stakeholders Present: Melissa Hawkins, Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH), Matthew Seeley, Esq., Pennsylvania Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC), Robert Schramm, Esq., PA Labor & Industry (L&I) Office of Chief Counsel (OCC)

Project Staff Present: Michelle Gerrick, Christopher Todd

Moderator of Zoom: Nichole Wade

Interpreters: Ashley Shenk

OPENING REMARKS: Paul Fogle, Chair

ELECTION OF CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR FOR FY 2024 – 2025: Susan Tomasic, Governance Committee Chair

Ms. Susan Tomasic stated that there was only one candidate for the position of Council Chair which is Mr. William Del Toro Vargas. Ms. Tomasic opened the floor for nominations. There were no nominations from the floor. Ms. Tomasic closed the floor and explained that members may vote yes, no, or abstain for Mr. Del Toro Vargas for Chair. Ms. Nichole Wade conducted a Roll Call vote for Chair of the Council for Fiscal Year (FY) 2024-2025. The results are as follows:

Julia Barol – **Abstained**

Sylenthia Dent – **Not Present**
Paul Fogle – **Abstained**
Joan Goodman – **Yes**
Lynn Heitz – **Yes**
Passle Helminski – **Yes**
Twana Jones – **Not Present**
Jessica Keogh – **Abstained**
Michele Leahy – **Abstained**
Michelle Mitchell – **Yes**
Michelle Paonessa – **Not Present**
Kara Pham-Donatucci – **Not Present**
Andrew Pennington – **Yes**
Susan Tomasic – **Yes**
William Del Toro Vargas – **Yes**

Ms. Tomasic congratulated Mr. Del Toro Vargas as the new PaRC Chair beginning July 1, 2024. Ms. Tomasic stated that there are two candidates for Council Vice Chair, Ms. Passle Helminski, and Ms. Michelle Mitchell. Ms. Tomasic opened the floor for nominations. There were no nominations and Ms. Tomasic closed the floor. Ms. Tomasic explained members may provide a vote for Ms. Passle Helminski, Ms. Michelle Mitchell, or abstain. Ms. Nichole Wade conducted a Roll Call vote for Vice Chair of the Council for FY 2024-2025. The results are as follows:

Julia Barol – **Michelle Mitchell**
Sylenthia Dent – **Not Present**
Paul Fogle – **Michelle Mitchell**
Joan Goodman – **Abstained**
Lynn Heitz – **Passle Helminski**
Passle Helminski – **Passle Helminski**
Twana Jones – **Not Present**
Jessica Keogh – **Michelle Mitchell**
Michele Leahy – **Abstained**
Michelle Mitchell – **Michelle Mitchell**
Michelle Paonessa – **Not Present**
Kara Pham-Donatucci – **Not Present**
Andrew Pennington – **Michelle Mitchell**
Susan Tomasic – **Passle Helminski**
William Del Toro Vargas – **Passle Helminski**

Ms. Tomasic stated that according to her tally Ms. Michelle Mitchell has been elected as Vice Chair.

PUBLIC COMMENT

- Ms. Michele Leahy explained that she is providing public comment as a member of the public. She explained that people turning 40 or 50 are not able to maintain their services because they have retirement plans and if they lose their employment and they have a retirement plan, their assets become unveiled, and they lose their services. She explained that OVR counselors are not providing proper counseling to let customers know that if they lose their job their services will terminate, they will lose Medicaid, Medical Assistance for Workers with Disabilities (MAWD), or Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA). There is a generation that will never be eligible for waivers or for services due to their retirement assets such as 401ks and pension plans. She reported that we need to be mindful of providing information on benefits counseling and retirement planning as you must have a job to receive MAWD or Medicaid.
- Ms. Joan Goodman provided a reminder that the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) policy public comment period ends tomorrow. Ms. Passle Helminski confirmed this information and asked members to please comment regarding Seeing Eye Dogs and Service Dogs.
- Mr. William Del Toro Vargas provided comment as a member of the public and explained that OVR has started making strides in addressing some of the Hispanic community or Spanish speaking community issues that were provided during his previous Public Comment.
- Mr. Ryan Hyde stated that he appreciates Mr. Fogle for his time serving as PaRC Chair as it is a lot of extra work and coordination. Mr. Hyde stated that he appreciates Mr. Del Toro Vargas clarifying comments from the last meeting and that they have an ongoing dialogue and will continue to work together.

ADJOURN

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