



Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC)

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Legislative & Public Awareness Committee Minutes for August 2, 2024

Members Present (P)

Not Present (NP)

Passle Helminski (P)

Lynn Heitz (P)

Julia Barol (P)

Sylenthia Dent (P)

Joan Goodman (P)

Jessica Keogh (NP)

Michele Leahy (NP)

Michelle Mitchell (NP)

William Paz De Melo (P)

OVR Staff Present: Chris Harbert

PaRC Staff Present: Chris Todd

CALL TO ORDER

This meeting was conducted through Zoom. Ms. Passle Helminski called the meeting to order at 2:00 PM.

ADDITIONS TO THE AGENDA

There were no additions.

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA AND PAST MINUTES

MOTION was made by Ms. Julia Barol to approve today's agenda and past meeting minutes. Ms. Joan Goodman seconded the motion. All were in favor.

AGENDA ITEMS:

Discussion of Action Alert from CSAVR regarding VR funding

- Ms. Julia Barol shared the following link <https://apse.org/home-v2-2/action-center/> and suggested that members be given the opportunity to share any letter that may be offered on the APSE website regarding funding for 2025 and that staff assist with revising a similar letter to be reviewed by members during the August Full Council meeting. This is in response to the CSAVR Action Alert informing of potential budget cut to VR services at the Federal level.

Discussion on how employment affects Waiver Services and Medical Assistance

- Members suggested that a letter of support be drafted based up previous discussion from Mr. Jack Hewitt, as a parent.

Discussion to condense PaRC Position Papers

- Members recommended creating a one page summary Position Paper for each of the State and Federal Position Papers. The summary should include brief statement on each of the talking points and only list the bill numbers rather than the entire title. Supported Legislation should be categorized rather than current listing of alphabetical order. Both versions of the Position Papers should be provided in advance when meeting with Legislators and their staff.

MOTION was made by Ms. Julia Barol to re-format the Position Papers and provide 2 documents, one overview and one more in-depth to Legislators and their staff. Ms. Joan Goodman seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Meetings with Legislators

- Members requested that staff poll for one morning date and one afternoon date in mid to late October for meetings with State Legislators.

Bender Consulting Project

- Members discussed moving discussion of the Bender Project back to Executive Committee.

MOTION was made by Ms. Joan Goodman to transfer the Bender Project discussion to Executive Committee. Ms. Lynn Heitz seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Discussion of State Bill HB342

- Ms. Sylenthia Dent inquired if members could provide additional information about the supported State Bill HB342. Ms. Barol explained that the Legislation would help to make the services for students with disabilities attending college a little clearer as the current process leads to redundant assessments. This Legislation would also lead to lower costs. Members agreed that the status of the Legislation appears that it is no longer being considered by Committee. Members suggested inquiring with Representative Dan Miller if the Legislation will be revisited.

MOTION was made by Ms. Julia Barol to remove HB342 from the State Position Paper. Ms. Joan Goodman seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Discussion of Federal Service Animal protection Bill

- Ms. Passle Helminski explained that the state currently has Legislation to protect Service Animals and suggested that the Council draft a letter of support citing those bills to provide to Federal Legislators.

MOTION was made by Ms. Julia Barol to draft a letter of support regarding Service Dogs for Federal Legislators and a letter of support regarding Waiver Servicicers and Medical Assistance previously discussed by Mr. Jack Hewitt, as a parent. Ms. Joan Goodman seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Schedule next meetings

- Members agreed to hold the next Committee meeting on Friday, September 13, 2024, from 2:00 PM to 3:00 PM.
- Mr. Chris Harbert, OVR was asked by members to provide updates and reported that they were contacted by a Representative's Legislative staff in follow up to a meeting with PaRC members regarding transportation and it being referred to the Department of Transportation. Mr. Harbert explained that the Council informed and educated on how this is a larger issue relating to employment and education. This discussion is moving forward, OVR Executive Team has been contacted and informed the Committee that really good things are coming out of the Council's Legislative calls. Mr. Harbert is beginning to engage the stakeholder groups regarding the Council's Bender Consulting project in regard to the Direct Care Worker Crisis and will be scheduling a meeting with the State Board to discuss what they would like to accomplish with next steps. Mr. William Paz De Melo explained that after discussion with Legislators he understands that the Direct Care Worker Crisis needs to be held Legislatively as there is not much that can be handled administratively.

Public Comment (3 minutes per attendee)

- Ms. Lynn Heitz provided a comment as a member of the public. The National Federation of the Blind (NFB) is going to be working on a Braille bill for the State Legislature. It has come to their attention that teachers of the visually impaired in order to get certified their test has 3 questions related to Braille and they can miss all 3 questions and still get certified. They also need to have only 1 semester of Braille during their education process and take the test for certification. Ms. Heitz explained that they would appreciate the Council's support once the bill is introduced because blind children are growing up illiterate because they aren't be taught to read. Members requested that Ms. Heitz share the Legislation with the Committee when it is ready to be reviewed.

Adjourn

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