



Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC)

55 Utley Drive, Camp Hill, PA 17011

Voice: (717) 975-2004 or (888) 250-5175 TTY: (888) 559-2658 Fax: (888) 524-9282

Email: parc@parehabilitationcouncil.org Website: parehabilitationcouncil.org

Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC) **2024-2025 State Position Paper**

The Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC) is mandated by the Rehabilitation Act of 1998, as amended by Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) 2014, to review, analyze, and advise the Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) regarding the performance of its responsibilities, particularly those related to eligibility (including order of selection); the extent, scope and effectiveness of services provided; and the functions performed by State agencies that affect the ability of individuals with disabilities in achieving employment outcomes under Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services. The PaRC's Legislative Committee respectfully submits, with approval by Executive Committee and/or Full Council, the following Position Paper for your review and consideration:

Sustain Full Funding for OVR Services to match all available Federal Funds

Action Requested:

- *Funding for the "Transfer to the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Fund" must be adequate to ensure that PA OVR has sufficient funds to match all available grant funds from the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA). Grant funds are matched at 21.3% (state) to 78.7% (federal). Changes made to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) in 2014 required that PA OVR reserve a minimum of 15% of its federal funds specifically for Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) services to students with disabilities. Having adequate funds to ensure the continued operation of both the Pre-ETS and adult VR program is essential to the financial health of the agency and its ability to provide services across its multiple programs.*
- *VR Transfer should be \$50M for SFY24 to ensure PA OVR has adequate funding to manage operations and provide services.*
- *Additionally, lasting impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic combined with the Great Resignation have resulted in significant changes to our economy, employment, and workforce. Full Funding of OVR will allow for the expansion of programs to maximize opportunity to support our businesses and meet workforce needs through the successful employment of people with disabilities. Furthermore, we have learned that flexibility in relation to the location of a workplace is possible for all Pennsylvanians, especially those with a disability, with so many opportunities to work remotely.*

Expedited Employment

Action Requested:

- *The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania should review an Expedited Hiring System to be a model employer and to comply with the spirit and intent of the PA Employment First Act.*
- *The State should establish, through legislation or regulatory action, an Expedited Hiring System so that people with disabilities in Civil Service, Non-Civil Service, and State Contractor hiring positions have an alternative path to employment similar to Schedule A on the Federal level.*

Collaboration of Services for Persons with Neurological Injuries in Pennsylvania

Action Requested:

- *Collaboration is needed between all state agencies working with persons with neurological injuries to ensure that there is no break in services from in home services to employment services. Additional dedicated funding is needed for this population.*
- *PaRC recommends an increase in funding of 25% for the PA Department of Health & Human Services Head Injuries Program (HIP), to support those with traumatic brain injuries attain and maintain employment.*

Adequate Funding of the Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH)

Action Requested:

- *The PaRC agrees with the Disability Budget Coalition's recommendation as follows: To the extent feasible, increase the state appropriation for the ODHH to \$650,000; authorize ODHH to increase its staff for all its offices or its contracting, or both, at its discretion, within the increased budgetary allocation; move ODHH's budget from the Labor and Industry General Government Operations line item to a separate line item within the overall Labor and Industry budget.*
- *Codify the ODHH Support Service Provider (SSP) Program into the budget by providing its own line item and continue to fund the SSP Program in the amount of at least \$300,000 annually.*

PaRC supports the following regarding Centers for Independent Living (CILs)

Action Requested:

- *Line item appropriation of \$2.7 million which will enable the CILs to: maintain quality staff and a stable location, effectively deliver services that facilitate transition from nursing homes and other institutions to the community, provide assistance to those at risk of entering institutions, and facilitate transition of youth to postsecondary life (the fifth IL Core service) and provide reasonable benefits; increase the number of individuals served; and lower the cost per individual.*

Transportation

Action Requested:

- *Line item appropriation of \$1.5 million which will enable the Department of Transportation to: provide transportation services to persons with disabilities, including those with physical disabilities, mental disabilities, and sensory disabilities; and provide transportation services to persons with disabilities who are unable to drive.*

- *Transportation Network Providers, like Uber and Lyft as well as all taxi service providers must be required to provide accessible vehicles on demand to people with disabilities.*
- *Education or training must be provided to all Transportation Network Providers and taxi service providers on the requirements of the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act; especially with respect to the provision of service to individuals who use service or guide dogs.*
- *The State must work with Amtrak and the Federal Government to ensure that all train stations in the Commonwealth are physically and programmatically accessible, which is not the case today.*
- *Providers of the Rural Shared Ride System should work jointly and collaboratively with Fixed Ride and Commuter Ride Systems to maximize transportation resources for individuals with disabilities.*
- *The Rural Shared Ride System should enable transportation providers to cross County lines to assist people with disabilities who use these rides to obtain, maintain, and/or regain employment.*

Disabilities Caucus

Action Requested:

- *Establish a bi-partisan and bi-cameral caucus to review and support legislation that would enable people with disabilities to have equal opportunity in all aspects of their lives and to be productive and contributing members of their communities.*
- *Hold a public hearing on the Commonwealth's disability services with PennDOT, Dept. of Human Services, PA Workforce Development, OVR, Office of Developmental Programs, Office of Long-Term Living, Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, Dept. of Corrections, Dept. of Health, and the Dept. of Community and Economic Development to educate the House and Senate on the importance of establishing a Disabilities Caucus inclusive of all people with disabilities.*
- *Membership in the Caucus should be open to any Member of the PA Legislature who is interested in promoting and ensuring the independence, equal opportunity, full participation in community life, and the economic self-sufficiency of people with disabilities.*
- *Bi-cameral Disabilities Caucus should be co-chaired by a member of each major party and two vice-chairs to ensure bipartisan representation in both chambers.*
- *The "Disabilities Caucus" should meet on a quarterly basis.*

Employment First Oversight Commission (EFOC)

Action Requested:

- *The PaRC supports the EFOC recommendations made to the Executive Office, Legislature, and individual State agencies included within the most recent [EFOC report](#).*
- *EFOC core values such as person-centered, holistic, equitable, collaborative and data informed approaches should be embedded throughout state agencies' Employment First implementation.*

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. The Council supports real consequences for those that interfere with Service Dogs.*

Control and Contain Dog Laws

Action Requested:

- *PaRC 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.*

The Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council's Legislative and Public Awareness Committee support the following State Bills:

[HB151](#) An Act amending the act of March 4, 1971 (P.L.6, No.2), known as the Tax Reform Code of 1971, in tax credit and tax benefit administration, further providing for definitions and for application and administration.

[HB181](#) An Act establishing the Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program and the Family and Medical Leave Insurance Fund; conferring powers and imposing duties on the Department of Labor and Industry; and imposing penalties.

[HB185](#) An Act amending Title 75 (Vehicles) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes, in registration of vehicles, further providing for person with disability plate and placard; in fees, further providing for exemption of persons, entities and vehicles from fees; and, in powers of department and local authorities, further providing for specific powers of department and local authorities.

[HB348](#) An Act amending Title 71 (State Government) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes, in civil service reform, providing for excepted service hiring and promotion authority; and imposing duties on the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation.

[HB661](#) An Act amending the act of June 13, 1967 (P.L.31, No.21), known as the Human Services Code, in public assistance, providing for intellectual disability and autism fee schedule rates.

[HB1135](#) An Act amending the act of January 17, 1968 (P.L.11, No.5), known as The Minimum Wage Act of 1968, further providing for definitions and for minimum wages; providing for gratuities; further providing for enforcement and rules and regulations, for

penalties and for civil actions; repealing provisions relating to preemption; and providing for taxpayer savings and reinvestment.

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.

HB2419 An Act amending Title 18 (Crimes and Offenses) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes, in trade and commerce, providing for the offense of fraudulent misrepresentation of a service animal.

HR174 A Resolution directing the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee to conduct a study and issue a report on the current status, management and implementation of mass or public transit in Pennsylvania's rural communities.

SB189 An Act amending Title 51 (Military Affairs) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes, in veterans' pensions and benefits, further providing for blind veteran's pension and for amputee and paralyzed veteran's pension.

SB438 An Act amending Title 51 (Military Affairs) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes, in veteran-owned small businesses, further providing for definitions; providing for miscellaneous provisions; and imposing a penalty.

SB451 An Act amending Title 71 (State Government) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes, in selection of employees for entrance to or promotion in classified service, providing for additional points in grading civil service examinations of applicants with disabilities.

SB452 An Act relating to the delivery of services and programs to individuals with disabilities; conferring powers and duties on the Office of the Governor; establishing the Office for Individuals with Disabilities and the Advisory Committee for Individuals with Disabilities; and providing for the powers and duties of the office and the committee and for funding of the office and the committee.

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.

For additional information or questions, please contact PaRC's support staff via email at parc@parehabilitationcouncil.org