



Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC)

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Executive Committee Meeting Minutes for December 9, 2024, 2:00 PM to 3:00 PM

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

William Paz De Melo (P)

Susan Tomasic (P)

Michelle Mitchell (P)

Lynn Heitz (NP)

Joan Goodman (NP)

Passle Helminski (P)

Andrew Pennington (P)

Julia Barol (P)

Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) Present: Chris Harbert

Staff Present: Michelle Gerrick, Christopher Todd

ADDITIONS TO THE AGENDA

There were no additions.

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

AGENDA ITEMS

CHAIR REPORT

Discussion - revised 2023-2024 PaRC Annual Report - Julia Barol, Member at Large

- Members reviewed assigned sections of the Annual Report and did not have any changes. Mr. Andrew Pennington explained that his assigned section of the report was well written and that the Employment First Oversight Commission (EFOC) used a helpful AI service to make their report quicker to read, reduce language, and ensure it was written at an 8th grade reading level. Members agreed to make similar revisions for the PaRC report. Members understood that the report must be submitted by the deadline mandated within the Rehab Act of December 31st of each year.

MOTION was made by Mr. Andrew Pennington to approve the 2023-2024 PaRC Annual Report with the suggested revisions. Ms. Michelle Mitchell seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Discuss potential reports for February Full Council Meeting

- Members confirmed with Mr. Chris Harbert reports from the Directors of the Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services (BBVS) and Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (BVRS) for the February 12, 2025, Full Council quarterly meeting.
- Mr. William Paz De Melo requested that correspondence be provided to the Directors of the Bureau of Special Education and Workforce Development Board requesting a stakeholder report be provided for the February 12, 2025, Full Council quarterly meeting.
- Ms. Julia Barol agreed to provide an update for the Employment First Oversight Commission (EFOC). Members requested that the EFOC be informed that the current PaRC representative is no longer a member of the Council and that Ms. Barol serve as the unofficial PaRC representative until a new representative is appointed.

COMMITTEE UPDATES

Legislative Committee – Passle Helminski, Chair

- Members reviewed and had no changes for the draft letter in support of the final rule regarding the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking: Employment of Workers with Disabilities Under Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act.
- Ms. Passle Helminski informed members of the work she is doing with other Council members as private citizens regarding Service Dog legislation. She will keep members informed once there is legislation to share with the Council. Ms. Helminski shared the importance of attending in-person meetings with State and Federal Legislators. In-person meetings could be scheduled with State Legislators the Monday and Tuesday prior to the May 7, 2025, Full Council meeting. An orientation will be provided to all members attending in-person meetings with Legislators at that time. Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) and State Board of VR members will be provided an invitation to also attend those meetings.

MOTION was made by Ms. Susan Tomasic to approve the letter in support of the final rule regarding the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking: Employment of Workers with Disabilities Under Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act. Ms. Michelle Mitchell seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Action/Social Media – Joan Goodman, Chair

- The next meeting is scheduled for January 8, 2025.

CareerLink – Andrew Pennington, Chair

- Mr. Andrew Pennington informed members of the State Workforce Development Board, Barrier Remediation Committee recommendations regarding Competitive

Integrated Employment and transition from 14 (c) Certificates. The next Committee meeting is scheduled for February 18, 2025.

Governance – Susan Tomasic, Chair

Recommendation: Revisions to the PaRC Member Handbook/bylaws

- Governance Committee continues to review and revise Bylaws and Member Handbook. The Executive Committee discussed concerns regarding member attendance, time requirements for corrective actions prior to asking for a member's resignation, providing additional guidance within the PaRC Bylaws after a warning letter is received regarding attendance issues, and language from Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) on removal of a member. Governance Committee will hold discussion regarding these concerns during their next meeting scheduled for January 16, 2025.

Policy – Lynn Heitz, Chair

- The next Committee meeting is scheduled for December 12, 2024.

Transition – Julia Barol, Chair

- Ms. Julia Barol reported that the Commonwealth Technical Institute at Hiram G Andrews Center (CTI at HGAC) provided a comprehensive update during the December Transition Committee meeting. Ms. Barol explained that OVR informed the Committee that they are working to standardize their Pre Employment Transition Services (Pre ETS) training modules and inquired on the timeframe. Mr. Chris Harbert will review their notes and follow up with Ms. Kim Robinson to confirm the timeframe. An update on the Youth Ambassador program was also provided during the Transition Committee meeting. Members very much appreciate the Youth Ambassadors and their staff attending the Committee meetings. Members were informed that the Philadelphia YA program was not a good fit with HUNE and there is currently no YA program in Philadelphia.

Ad Hoc Committee OVR Hearing Officers & Mediators – Mr. Andrew Pennington, Acting Chair

- Mr. Andrew Pennington reported the next meeting is scheduled for January 23, 2025. Members hope to have a finalized agreement in writing on the PaRC's role provided by OVR for the January Committee meeting.

OVR UPDATES

- Mr. William Paz De Melo explained the importance of starting to hone in on employment regarding the Legislation supported by the Council and included within the Position Papers. Ms. Michelle Mitchell explained that it is important to represent all Pennsylvanians with disabilities, focus on Legislation that has a

maximum impact, explained that the Council loses impact if everything is supported, and suggested providing a laser focus to address larger needs for employment. Mr. Andrew Pennington shared the importance of focusing on the PaRC Mission, OVR services and barriers to services for employment. Mr. Pennington explained that casting a wide net can be confusing and he supports a laser focus on employment. Mr. Paz De Melo explained importance of focusing on the PaRC mission when reviewing supported legislation, each Bill should be reviewed and voted on individually rather than voting on a Position Paper as a whole and that voting should include Full Council discussion on what legislation should be supported or not supported. Ms. Mitchell explained it is important to empower members of the Legislative Committee and suggested asking the Legislative Committee to add to their agenda time to focus on each piece of legislation included within the Position Papers.

- Mr. Chris Harbert reported that a draft of the Financial Needs Test (FNT) policy will be provided on December 20, 2024, and requested that the Committee meet 30 days after that to be provided enough time to review and provide approval. The OVR Executive Director report will be provided to Council this week. Mr. Paz De Melo requested support personnel poll Committee members for the next meeting to align with Mr. Harbert's request regarding the FNT policy.

PUBLIC COMMENT

- Mr. Andrew Pennington provided Public Comment and explained that the Client Assistance Program (CAP) provided a recommendation for OVR to publish their policies online. He reported that as of today the policies have gone live, not all policies have been published but feels this is a huge step toward transparency with customers and potential customers. This allows the public to review policy prior to engagement with OVR and this is an important milestone to recognize.

ADJOURN

MOTION was made by Ms. Mitchell to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Tomasic seconded the motion. All were in favor.