



# Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC)

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## Legislative & Public Awareness Committee Minutes for June 16, 2025, from 11:00 AM to 12:00 PM

Members Present (P)

Not Present (NP)

Christie Cyktor (P)

Lynn Heitz (P)

Julia Barol (P)

Joan Myers Goodman (P)

Passle Helminski (P)

Michelle Mitchell (P)

William Paz De Melo (NP)

**PaRC Staff Present:** Chris Todd, Michelle Gerrick

**OVR Staff Present:** Chris Harbert, James Whitonis

### CALL TO ORDER

This meeting was conducted through Zoom. Ms. Christie Cyktor called the meeting to order at 11:00 AM once quorum was established.

### ADDITIONS TO THE AGENDA

Members requested adding to the meeting agenda a report out from educating federal Legislators during the APSE Conference, recent advocacy efforts from the Centers for Independent Living (CILs), public comment regarding the Direct Final Rule on Rescinding New Construction Requirements Related to Nondiscrimination in Federally Assisted Programs or Activities and follow up discussion from Legislative meetings regarding public transportation and SEPTA funding.

### APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA AND PAST MINUTES

***MOTION was made by Ms. Joan Myers Goodman to approve the agenda with additions and past meeting minutes. Ms. Lynn Heitz seconded the motion. All were in favor.***

### Follow up from May/June Meetings with Legislators

- Ms. Julia Barol reported that she and Mr. William Paz De Melo represented the PaRC at the Association of People Supporting Employment 1<sup>st</sup> (APSE) conference in June 2025. They met with Legislative staff of Federal Legislators and handed out

19 packets containing information about the PaRC, OVR, Medicaid, and Employment First. Legislative staff were receptive to the information and education provided regarding the diverse issues affecting employment of people with disabilities. Ms. Barol explained that this was an overall positive experience and worth the effort to visit all 19 of Pennsylvania's Congressional offices in the Washington D.C. Capitol Hill area.

- Ms. Michelle Mitchell reported that many of the CILs located throughout the Commonwealth recently provided advocacy during an event held in Harrisburg last week. Information and education were provided regarding Medicaid, accessible transportation, and employment impacting people with disabilities. The Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC), Pennsylvania Council for Independent Living (PICL), and many other organizations attended the event to advocate for issues critical to people with disabilities.
- Members held discussion regarding the Public Comment for the Direct Final Rule on Rescinding New Construction Requirements Related to Nondiscrimination in Federally Assisted Programs or Activities. The Public Comment period ends June 16, 2025. Members requested this information be shared with the Full Council and to inform members they may submit comments as members of the public.
- Members held discussions regarding the crucial need for accessible public transportation and how transportation is one of the biggest barriers to employment for people with disabilities. Members explained concerns regarding the funding and audits for the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA). Ms. Lynn Heitz explained that it has been 13 years since the Pennsylvania Auditor General last conducted an audit of SEPTA. Members agreed to draft a letter recommending that the Auditor General conduct an audit of SEPTA and the importance of accessible transportation for people with disabilities to gain and maintain employment. Members recommend including information from an email regarding SEPTA funding that was previously shared by Committee members. Members agreed to share a template of the letter with other organizations such as the State Board of VR, SILC, Transit Access Coalition and others. Mr. Chris Harbert explained that the State Board is supportive of transportation advocacy efforts and would assist in coordinating with the State Board.

***MOTION was made by Ms. Passle Helminski to draft a letter regarding the importance of accessible transportation relating to employment of people with disabilities and recommending the Auditor General conduct an audit of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA). Ms. Joan Myers Goodman seconded the motion. All were in favor.***

- Ms. Christie Cyktor reviewed talking points and other notes from the May 2025 meetings with Legislators and / or their staff. Members agreed to inquire with 2 Legislators that followed up to schedule or reschedule a meeting.

## **VR Funding Letter**

- Members reviewed a draft letter regarding funding of the Commonwealth's Vocational Rehabilitation program and had no changes or additions.

***MOTION was made by Ms. Julia Barol to forward the draft letter regarding VR funding to the Executive Committee for approval. Ms. Lynn Heitz seconded the motion. All were in favor.***

### **Review State and Federal Legislative Watchlists**

- Members reviewed the State and Federal Legislative Watchlists.

***MOTION was made by Ms. Passle Helminski to recommend support for [HB485](#) An Act amending Title 71 (State Government) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes, in boards and offices, providing for Office of Information Technology. Ms. Julia Barol seconded the motion. All were in favor.***

### **Polling for Next Slate of Meetings with Legislators and/or Their Staff**

- Members agreed to hold additional meetings with Legislators in October of 2025 and requested PaRC personnel conduct a poll to determine dates for Legislative meetings.

### **Schedule next meeting**

- Members agreed to hold the next Committee meeting on July 8, 2025, from 10:00 AM to 11:00 AM.

### **Adjourn**

***MOTION was made by Ms. Julia Barol to adjourn. Ms. Lynn Heitz seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned.***