



Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC)

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Full Council Quarterly Meeting May 7, 2025, from 10:00 AM to 3:30 PM APPROVED MINUTES

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

Julia Barol (P)	Christie Cyktor (P)	Sylenthia Dent-Siebenlist (P)
Cindy Duch (P)	Kait Gillis (P)	Joan Myers Goodman (P)
Lynn Heitz (P)	Passle Helminski (P)	Mallory Irwin (P)
Twana Jones (P)	Michelle Mitchell (P)	William Paz De Melo (P)
Andrew Pennington (P)	Kara Donatucci Pham (P)	Julianna Rodrigues (P)
Susan Tomasic (P)	Rob Wallington (P)	

Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) Present: Ryan Hyde, Chris Harbert, Wes Runnels, Cheryl Novak, James Whitonis, Denise Verchimak, Audrey O'Connor, Dawn Sokol, Marci Katona, Jim France, Susan Storm, Ralph Roach, Stacey Collins, Krista Sloan, Tammy Burke, Chris Palmer, Douglas Rand, Dana McKinney, Anna Griffiths, Pete Huey

Stakeholders Present: Tim Krushinski, Bureau of Special Education, James Martini, Pennsylvania Workforce Development Board, Erin Donahoe, Pennsylvania Workforce Development Board, Deborah Schwartz, Esq., Office of Chief Counsel, PA Department of Labor & Industry, Angel Torres, Reading Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC), Linda Carmona-Bell, Norristown Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC), Megan Van Fossan, Washington Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC), Jeff Iseman, Pennsylvania Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC), Eric Orr, Centers for Independent Living, David Goldstein, National Federation of the Blind of Pennsylvania, Mary Dougherty, PA Department of Labor & Industry

PaRC Support Personnel Present: Michelle Gerrick, Christopher Todd

Moderator of Zoom: Nichole Wade

CART (CAPTIONER): Michelle Brandt

Interpreters: Jessica Sassaman, Ashley Shenk, Laura Schupp, Ramona Martin

Guests Present: Francisco Lima Paz De Melo, Betsy Ruiz, Edna Niceforo

WELCOME & OPENING REMARKS: William De Paz Melo, Chair

- Mr. William Paz De Melo read the PaRC Mission statement and Ms. Nichole Wade conducted roll call. A quorum was confirmed for the meeting.

MOTION was made by Ms. Passle Helminski for approval of the meeting agenda. Ms. Julia Barol seconded the motion. All were in favor.

MOTION was made by Ms. Passle Helminski for approval of the February 12, 2025, Full Council meeting minutes. Ms. Julia Barol seconded the motion. All were in favor.

MOTION was made by Ms. Passle Helminski for approval of the April 8, 2025, special meeting minutes. Ms. Julia Barol seconded the motion. All were in favor.

FISCAL REPORT (3rd QUARTER): Julia Barol, Member at Large

- Ms. Julia Barol reported that the council's total budget for the current fiscal year, from July 1, 2024, to June 30, 2025, is \$80,000. The fiscal report detailing expenses in the third quarter for FY 2024-2025, includes the months of January, February and March of 2025. January 2025 expenses totaled \$8,272.35, February 2025 expenses totaled \$6,111.57, and March 2025 expenses totaled \$13,012.47. The total amount spent for quarter 3 was \$27,396.39. The remaining balance for FY 2024-2025 is \$32,341.77.

ELECTION OF PaRC OFFICERS FOR FY 2025-2026: Susan Tomasic, Governance Committee Chair

- Ms. Susan Tomasic informed attendees that one candidate, Ms. Michelle Mitchell, has been nominated for Chair of the Council for Fiscal Year (FY) 2025-2026. The floor was opened for nominations and Ms. Passle Helminski nominated Ms. Christie Cyktor for Chair. Ms. Cyktor informed attendees that she cannot accept that nomination. Ms. Tomasic asked for additional nominations and there were none.

MOTION was made by Ms. Lynn Heitz to close the floor for nominations and elect Ms. Michelle Mitchell as Chair for FY 2025-2026 by acclimation. Ms. Joan Myers Goodman seconded the motion. Ms. Michelle Mitchell abstained. Mr.

William Paz De Melo stated that he is unable to vote. The motion passed and Ms. Mitchell was elected as Chair for FY 2025-2026.

- Ms. Susan Tomasic conducted a Roll Call vote for Vice Chair of the Council for Fiscal Year (FY) 2025-2026. Ms. Tomasic announced that the nominees for Vice Chair are Ms. Julia Barol and Ms. Lynn Heitz. The floor was opened for additional nominees and there were none. The floor for the nominations was closed and Ms. Tomasic instructed members to announce their vote for either Ms. Julia Barol or Ms. Lynn Heitz. The results are as follows:

Julia Barol – **Julia Barol**

Christie Cyktor – **Julia Barol**

Sylenthia Dent-Siebenlist – **Julia Barol**

Cindy Duch – **Julia Barol**

Kait Gillis – **Julia Barol**

Joan Myers Goodman – **Lynn Heitz**

Lynn Heitz – **Lynn Heitz**

Passle Helminski – **Lynn Heitz**

Mallory Irwin – **Julia Barol**

Twana Jones - **Abstained**

Michelle Mitchell – **Julia Barol**

William Paz De Melo – **Non-Voting Member**

Andrew Pennington - **Not Present**

Kara Donatucci Pham – **Julia Barol**

Julianna Rodrigues – **Julia Barol**

Susan Tomasic – **Lynn Heitz**

Rob Wallington - **Abstained**

- Ms. Susan Tomasic announced that Ms. Julia Barol has been elected as Vice Chair for FY 2025-2026. Ms. Tomasic conducted a Roll Call vote for Member-at-Large of the Council for FY 2025-2026. Ms. Tomasic announced the nominees for Member-at-Large were Ms. Christie Cyktor and Ms. Lynn Heitz. The floor was opened for additional nominees and Mr. William Paz De Melo nominated Ms. Julianna Rodrigues. The floor for nominations was closed and Ms. Tomasic instructed members to announce their vote for either Ms. Christie Cyktor, Ms. Lynn Heitz, or Ms. Julianna Rodrigues. The results are as follows:

Julia Barol – **Julianna Rodrigues**

Christie Cyktor – **Christie Cyktor**

Sylenthia Dent-Siebenlist – **Lynn Heitz**

Cindy Duch – **Christie Cyktor**
Kait Gillis – **Julianna Rodrigues**
Joan Myers Goodman – **Lynn Heitz**
Lynn Heitz – **Lynn Heitz**
Passle Helminski – **Lynn Heitz**
Mallory Irwin – **Julianna Rodrigues**
Twana Jones – **Julianna Rodrigues**
Michelle Mitchell – **Julianna Rodrigues**
William Paz De Melo – **Non-Voting Member**
Andrew Pennington – **Not Present**
Kara Donatucci Pham – **Julianna Rodrigues**
Julianna Rodrigues – **Julianna Rodrigues**
Susan Tomasic – **Lynn Heitz**
Rob Wallington – **Lynn Heitz**

- Ms. Tomasic announced that Ms. Julianna Rodrigues was elected as Member-at-Large for FY 2025-2026.

CHAIR REPORT: William Paz De Melo

ACTION: Approval of Executive Committee goals for Fiscal Year 2025-2026

- Mr. William Paz De Melo recognized PaRC member Ms. Kara Donatucci Pham as her term on the Council will end in July 2025. Ms. Donatucci Pham is a member of the CareerLink/WIOA Committee and the Transition & Education Committee.
- Ms. Michelle Mitchell recognized PaRC member Mr. William Paz De Melo as his term on the Council will end in July 2025. Mr. Paz De Melo represents the category of Physical Disabilities from 2019 to present day, was elected to Member-at-Large for FY 2021-2022, chaired 2 standing committees including the Policy/State Plan/Customer Satisfaction Committee and the Legislative/Public Awareness Committee. Mr. Paz De Melo serves as the current Chair and was presented with a certificate of recognition.

MOTION was made by Ms. Susan Tomasic for approval of the Executive Committee goals for FY 2025-2026. Ms. Joan Myers Goodman seconded the motion. All were in favor.

OVR DIRECTOR’S REPORT: Ryan Hyde, Director

- Mr. Ryan Hyde provided report on OVR receiving the Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) for the current Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2025 and explained that there is

still a lot of uncertainty regarding funding for FFY 2026. Reallocation will re-open in July 2025. The Order of Selection will remain and OVR will begin accepting rolling cases after an analysis of budgetary and staffing concerns is conducted. The college tuition and Financial Needs Test (FNT) amounts will remain the same due to uncertainty surrounding the budget for FFY 2026. More information regarding the COLA, reallocation, and the 2026 budget may be available in September or October 2025.

- Mr. Hyde also provided report on Summer Programs, the My Work program, Summer Academies, overtime allocations, caseloads, staffing vacancies, State Plan, proposed state budget, county level success stories, partnership story, statistics, advocacy efforts, Centers for Independent Living (CILs), partnerships with the First Lady's Office and the Transformation Office, OVR internships, business services, On-the-Job Training (OJT) program, status of the Rehabilitation Services administration (RSA), impacts of Executive Orders, and the Civil Service Modernization Act.
- Mr. Hyde informed attendees that he received questions provided by PaRC members in advance of the meeting and addressed them with the following general statements:
- Regarding questions about Mental Health Services, OVR increased rates for psychological services in July 2024. OVR changed authorization process for psychological testing, District Offices work with local Mental Health Services routinely, OVR leadership is involved with the Statewide Coalition regarding Mental Health and works closely with the Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services.
- Regarding the question of cross training between the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (BVRS) and the Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services (BBVS), cross training happens locally between District Offices, statewide in-services are provided quarterly, and Mr. Hyde invited members to share specific topics for the cross training.
- Regarding the question about provider training, OVR provides training routinely including supported employment, Pre Employment Transition Services, vendors, and invited members to share specific topics for those trainings.
- Regarding questions about the Customer Satisfaction Surveys and use of interns to support the surveys, OVR will have 2 interns over the summer, and an inquiry has been made regarding their list of duties. OVR has been involved in talks with Information Technology (IT) for several months regarding the surveys, potential text-based surveys, IT restrictions, legal concerns, and including limitation to have only 3 to 5 questions within text-based surveys. More information is to come on these topics and the mandated surveys due at case closure will continue.

- Regarding questions about Fiscal Information, statistics were included in the Executive Director report but a breakdown of fiscal information by Bureau was not included. This information will be shared in the June Executive Director report and provided to the Council Chair.
- Mr. Hyde shared OVR's RSA dashboard information for the second quarter including that OVR had 36,000 open cases, eligibility timeliness is at 95.6%, timeliness score is at 97%, 19,607 of 36,000 customers are under age 25, OVR served 12,822 students during the quarter, and provided almost 19,000 services which may include the same student receiving multiple services. 71% of customers present with cognitive or psychological diagnoses, 5.4% of customers are blind or have visual impairment, and 9.4% have hearing impairment or are deaf or deafblind. Wages for closures during the second quarter are 27% between \$15 to \$20 an hour, 12% between \$20 to \$25 an hour, and 16% above \$25 an hour. Mr. Hyde provided additional data regarding wages for closures, including 10% were \$10 an hour or less and 35% was \$10 to \$15 an hour. Total closures to date are 5,518 and OVR had 6,002 closures by the end of the last state fiscal year. Ms. Heitz requested that the data regarding wages also be broken down for individuals who are blind. Mr. Hyde explained that further data for disability types would need to be acquired using custom queries within the RSA dashboard.
- Mr. Hyde provided information about an event that was held for the Commonwealth Technical Institute at Hiram G Andrews Center (CTI at HGAC) students of the Culinary Associate's program at the Governor's Residence. The students prepared food for the event which was attended by the First Lady, Secretary, Deputy Executive Secretary, and Legislators. Students had the opportunity to speak with the first lady, eat with the guests, and a follow-up visit to tour HGAC is being planned.
- Mr. Hyde recognized Ms. Kara Donatucci Pham for her work on the PaRC. Mr. Hyde also recognized PaRC Chair, Mr. William Paz De Melo, and presented him with a letter of recognition from the Secretary of Labor Industry, Ms. Nancy Walker. Both Council members' terms end in July 2025.
- Mr. Andrew Pennington requested that information be shared regarding case closures and exit prior to application. Mr. Hyde will follow up with the requested data.
- Mr. Hyde shared information regarding a member question about the college tuition program which is based on 13 different formulas depending upon school year, amount of funds, Social Security benefits, graduate or technical programs, and other factors. There are different policies, procedures, and codes for experience programs which also vary.

OVR REPORTS

Business Enterprise Program (BEP): Wes Runnels, Director

- Mr. Wes Runnels explained that Pennsylvania's Business Enterprise Program (BEP) was built upon the legacy of the Randolph Shepherd Act of 1936, which was created to empower individuals who were blind, providing them employment opportunities through licensing to operate facilities on federal and other properties under 34 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) and state-specific guidelines. The BEP is designed to facilitate vending operations and long-term entrepreneurial and business management skills. Mr. Runnels provided additional information about the program's staffing, locations, licensees, facilities, operations, average income, training programs, and online courses. Currently there is no waitlist for the program because the training is not solidified but they are aware of individuals who have expressed interest in participating in the next training. Sites are selected based upon traffic volume, accessibility, customer potential and property status. Innovations such as mobile vending units, food trucks, micro-markets, grab and go, and ghost kitchens are being considered. BEP representatives and program agents conduct targeted outreach to property owners and managers to introduce the benefits of partnering with BEP. The majority of outreach comes from licensees. Requirements to enter the program include being legally blind as defined in the Randolph Sheperd Act, being over the age of 18, being a Pennsylvania resident, passing background checks, and taking steps through VR including assessments, referrals, and training. BEP is not currently pursuing new licensees however the Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services (BBVS) District Offices provide referrals. The program continues to expand training capacity, explores new partnerships, outreach opportunities and the focus remains on facilitating economic independence while fostering broad-based community engagement. Mr. Runnels reported that it is difficult to provide an exact number of referrals received due to the status of residency and eligibility regarding VR services.
- Ms. Lynn Heitz explained that the program can be lucrative for blind and low vision individuals seeking employment through entrepreneurship and is aware of individuals who have been interested in participating for at least 5 years but have not received information regarding the training program. Ms. Heitz inquired when the training program provided through the Hiram G Andrews Center (HGAC) is anticipated. Mr. Runnels reported the training is planned to begin prior to December 31, 2025.
- Members and attendees inquired about recruitment, funding, and BBVS staff training for the BEP training program. OVR staff reported that outreach for the training will begin through the BBVS District Offices after it is finalized. Outreach

for the BEP is provided to students through the BBVS Summer Academy each year. BEP funding is not separate from other VR programs. All BBVS employees are provided with education about BEP.

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) 2024-2028 State Plan – Jim Whitonis, VR Specialist

- Mr. James Whitonis explained that OVR is currently focused on updating Description (a) the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) section and Description (c) Goals, Priorities, and Strategies for the State Plan 2 Year Modification period. PaRC's Policy Committee met with OVR and finalized its draft of Description (a) including an updated commendation and the elimination of 1 recommendation regarding the impacts of COVID. OVR leadership is crafting responses which should be available for review during the next PaRC Policy Committee meeting. Once OVR has completed an update of their goals and priorities they will be presented to the PaRC, and a special session will be scheduled for discussion and review. All updates should be finalized by August 1, 2025.

STAKEHOLDER UPDATES

Client Assistance Program: Andrew Pennington, Co-Director / Steve Pennington, Esq., CEO

- Mr. Andrew Pennington explained that the Client Assistance Program (CAP) is the federally mandated, statewide advocate for individuals seeking services with OVR. Members provided questions in advance of the meeting and inquired if cases are categorized based upon the type of concern and if so, what does the data show for those categories and what is the typical number of cases for CAP per year. Mr. Pennington explained that CAP does track categories and there are 10 problem areas tracked at the time of intake which include the following: 13% of individuals are individuals requesting information, communication problems with a counselor is 36%, conflict with services to be provided is 30%, issues related to application and eligibility process is about 2%, issues related to the assignment of the Order of Selection is 0%, selection of vendors is 5%, selection of training or post-secondary education is 4%, selection of employment outcome is 0%, transition services is 1%, independent living services is 0%, other Rehabilitation Act problems is 0%, and non-Rehabilitation Act related issues is 0%. CAP has about 230 cases a year.

Department of Education: Timothy Krushinski, Bureau of Special Education, Policy Advisor

- Mr. Tim Krushinski provided an update from the Bureau of Special Education (BSE). BSE is currently being monitored by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), which includes general supervision to ensure compliance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to promote and improve student outcomes. OSEP reviews BSE's operations including fiscal management, monitoring of school districts, policies and procedures, technical assistance and development, dispute resolution, due process, state data, and their annual performance report. Mr. Krushinski also provided updates regarding the teacher shortage, the Attract, Prepare, and Attain initiatives, and the Pennsylvania Disability and Inclusive Curriculum pilot project.
- Members provided questions to BSE in advance of the meeting and Mr. Krushinski provided the following responses. Braille is not taught to all public-school students. If there is a significant need for a student with an Individual Education Plan (IEP), it is the IEP team's decision to provide that education and necessary Braille printed materials. BSE does not control what is used regarding the learning media assessments which are based on local controls. More information can be provided by the local Special Education Supervisor or Director. Special Education curriculum is the same curriculum utilized by schools which is adapted for students. Graduation is not based on communication modes, students with disabilities graduate based on state requirements, and they can graduate on a combination of requirements and IEP goals. If a student requires Assistive Technology, it should be included within their IEP and should be discussed with the IEP team. Regarding the question about Philadelphia public school system's remedial, weekend, or evening programs for students or adults with disabilities, this is not within the BSE jurisdiction and encouraged anyone interested to reach out to the school district, adult services, Office of Developmental Programs (ODP), and CareerLink.
- Members inquired about Transition Services staff training and shared concerns regarding the delivery of Transition programs. BSE provides several Transition Service training courses, some districts may need support, BSE has a lot of support in place for schools across the state regarding the Transition process. Concerns regarding Transition programs will be relayed to Dr. Carol Clancy, BSE Director.

Office for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing

- Mr. Ryan Hyde reported that the Office for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing (ODHH) is following the federal administration's elimination of the early hearing detection and intervention program as the impacts to state funding are unknown at this time. ODHH is also aware of other deaf programs and interpreter education programs

that could potentially lose funding or federal cuts. This will be closely monitored by ODDH and the Advisory Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. The next Advisory Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing meeting will be held virtually on June 6, 2025. Today is Interpreter Appreciation Day, Ms. Melissa Hawkins asked that we recognize and highlight all the interpreters we work with, their professionalism, and how vital their services are as they provide communication accessibility throughout the Commonwealth.

Statewide Independent Living Council: Susan Tomasic, SILC Board Chair

- Ms. Susan Tomasic reported that the next Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) meeting is scheduled for May 15, 2025, and meetings will be virtual only for the remainder of the year due to funding concerns. The Independent Living Administration has received funding cuts and Independent Living programs are being absorbed by the Department of Health and Human Services. SILC received notification that their programs will be fully funded throughout the remainder of the Federal Fiscal Year. An event with the Centers for Independent Living will be taking place on June 10, 2025, in support of raising the wages for Direct Care Workers. More information will be made available on the SILC website.

State Workforce Development Board: Kait Gillis, Board Member / James Martini, Executive Director

- Mr. James Martini provided information about the next Workforce Development Board (WDB) meeting, work on the 2-Year Modification of the Combined State Plan, funding for the Home and Community Based Services Direct Care workforce, data sharing across Workforce programs, and the recommendations regarding phasing out 14c Certificate employment.

NEW BUSINESS

ACTION / SOCIAL MEDIA COMMITTEE: Joan Myers Goodman, Chair

- Ms. Joan Myers Goodman reported that Ms. Mallory Irwin has joined that Committee which brings its membership to 6 voting members. The next meeting is scheduled for May 14, 2025, and meetings are typically held the first Wednesday of each month from 9:30 AM to 10:30 AM.

MOTION was made by Mr. Rob Wallington for approval of the Action/Social Media Committee goals for FY 2025-2026. Ms. Michelle Mitchell seconded the motion. All were in favor.

CAREERLINK COMMITTEE: Andrew Pennington, Chair

- Mr. Andrew Pennington reported that Ms. Twana Jones was elected to serve as CareerLink/WIOA Committee Chair for FY 2025-2026. The next Committee meeting is scheduled for May 20, 2025, at 1:00 PM.

MOTION was made by Ms. Passle Helminski for approval of the CareerLink/WIOA Committee goals for FY 2025-2026. Ms. Joan Myers Goodman seconded the motion. All were in favor.

GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE: Susan Tomasic, Chair

- Ms. Susan Tomasic reported that she has been reelected as Governance Committee Chair and Ms. Julia Barol was reelected as Vice Chair. Members have received clarification that Mr. Tim Krushinski can be put forward to serve on the PaRC as a full voting member, not an ex-officio member. Members were encouraged to consider joining the Governance Committee as membership is down to 4 voting members.

MOTION was made by Mr. Rob Wallington for approval of the Governance Committee goals for FY 2025-2026. Ms. Passle Helminski seconded the motion. All were in favor.

MOTION was made by Mr. Rob Wallington for approval of the revised Bylaws. Ms. Passle Helminski seconded the motion. All were in favor.

MOTION was made by Ms. Cindy Duch for approval of submitting Mr. Tim Krushinski's application to the Governor for consideration of appointment to the PaRC representing the State Department of Education category. Ms. Joan Myers Goodman seconded the motion. All were in favor.

LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE: Christie Cyktor, Chair

- Ms. Christie Cyktor reported that she has been elected as Committee Chair for FY 2025-2026 and Ms. Lynn Heitz was reelected as Vice Chair. The next Committee meeting is scheduled for June 16, 2025.

MOTION was made by Ms. Passle Helminski for approval of the Legislative/Public Awareness Committee goals for FY 2025-2026. Ms. Joan Myers Goodman seconded the motion. All were in favor.

MOTION was made by Ms. Passle Helminski for approval of supporting State Bill [HB487](#) An Act amending Title 62 (Procurement) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes, in source selection and contract formation, further providing for supplies manufactured and services performed by persons with disabilities. Ms. Sylenthia Dent-Siebenlist seconded the motion. All were in favor.

MOTION was made by Mr. Rob Wallington for approval of supporting State Bill [HR10](#) A Resolution directing the Joint State Government Commission to conduct a study of how Home and Community-Based Services waivers can be improved to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities, including programs administered by the Office of Long-Term Living and Office of Developmental Programs. Ms. Passle Helminski seconded the motion. All were in favor.

MOTION was made by Ms. Lynn Heitz for approval of supporting Federal Bill [HR1529](#) Access Technology Affordability Act of 2025. Ms. Passle Helminski seconded the motion. All were in favor.

MOTION was made by Ms. Passle Helminski for approval of supporting Federal Bill [HR1175](#) Blind Americans Return to Work Act of 2025. Ms. Joan Myers Goodman seconded the motion. All were in favor.

POLICY COMMITTEE: Lynn Heitz, Chair

- Ms. Lynn Heitz reported that she has been reelected as Committee Chair and Ms. Julia Barol was elected as Committee Vice Chair for FY 2025-2026.

MOTION was made by Mr. Rob Wallington for approval of recommending revisions to the Customer Satisfaction Surveys. Ms. Julia Barol seconded the motion. All were in favor.

MOTION was made by Mr. Rob Wallington for approval of the Policy/State Plan/Customer Satisfaction Committee goals for FY 2025-2026. Ms. Julia Barol seconded the motion. All were in favor.

TRANSITION COMMITTEE: Julia Barol, Chair

- Ms. Julia Barol reported that she has been reelected as Committee Chair and Ms. Sylenthia Dent-Siebenlist has been elected as Committee Vice Chair for FY 2025-2026. The next Committee meeting is scheduled for June 3, 2025.

MOTION was made by Mr. Rob Wallington for approval of the Transition/Education Committee goals for FY 2025-2026. Ms. Christie Cyktor seconded the motion. All were in favor.

AD HOC COMMITTEE: OVR HEARING OFFICERS / MEDIATORS: Andrew Pennington, Chair

- Mr. Andrew Pennington reported that the Committee is awaiting a response to the requested agreements regarding the PaRC's role to be provided in writing by the Office of Chief Counsel (OCC) and OVR. The Committee received confirmation of this being received within 90 days of the request and it has now been approximately 6 months since the request was made. Communication has continued regarding the request. The Committee will schedule a meeting, and Full Council will be informed once the requested document is received.

AD HOC COMMITTEE: BOARD / PaRC: Lynn Heitz and Michelle Mitchell, Co-Chairs

- Ms. Michelle Mitchell reported that the Committee's work showing a chart of similarities and differences between the PaRC, and the State Board of VR as mandated by Federal and State Legislation was previously presented to Full Council, and next steps included a monthly invitation to Board members for all PaRC meetings. Invitations have been provided to Board members for Full Council meetings and future invites will include Committee meetings. The goal is to build engagement and collaboration with the Board members to ensure Pennsylvanians are represented in all the work the PaRC and Board does. Next steps will be based on the level of engagement and collaboration observed. Concerns were raised regarding the availability of State Board meeting minutes. Mr. Chris Harbert, OVR, explained that he distributes the draft and approved Board meeting minutes and can make those available to anyone interested.

COUNCIL DISCUSSION

CSAVR / NCSRC Spring 2025 Conferences Report: Julia Barol, Andrew Pennington, Julianna Rodrigues

- Members shared updates from the Council of State Administrators for Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) and National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC) conferences including Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) updates and staffing concerns, VR programs real property form instructions, Pre-Employment Transition Services, other states' Customer Satisfaction Survey processes, VR funding, Cost of Living Adjustment, reallocations, and 14(c) Certificate sub-minimum wage facilities.

Public Comment regarding PDE's proposed grant application under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act for FFY 2025

- Members reviewed a letter for PDE's proposed grant application under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and provided revisions to state that a student should be eligible for transition services through their entire 21st year up until their 22nd birthday. Members requested holding a Special Meeting to approve those changes.

PUBLIC COMMENT

- Mr. Andrew Pennington thanked Mr. William Paz De Melo for his tenure as Chair, stated that he did an incredible job, appreciated his leadership, and is sad to see him leaving the Council.
- A member of the public provided comment that there has been a lot of misconceptions about the change in the Commonwealth University system, that people are suing over several schools that have changed their name. They explained that Commonwealth University is comprised of 3 state universities that have technically become one group. Their campus locations have remained the same, the schools are still open, all programs are still open and are offering their programs and degrees.
- A member of the public provided comment and explained that they would like to see a report given at future PaRC meetings by PA OVR on how District Offices have active Citizens Advisory Committees (CACs). Members explained that the Council and OVR have been working to collaborate with the CACs and ensure they are accessible to everyone interested in joining. Mr. Chris Harbert reported that the next CAC Chair and Officer meeting will be scheduled for the end of August 2025. He is in communication with all District Administrators and Assistant District Administrators, Mr. Whitonis and Mr. Andrew Pennington attend local CAC meetings. Members explained that CACs are very important to Pennsylvania to provide feedback for the VR system.

- Mr. William Paz De Melo thanked OVR and NCSRC regarding collaboration on an advocacy letter with all states across the country to educate Congress regarding the Cost-of-Living Adjustment.

ADJOURN

MOTION was made by Mr. Rob Wallington to adjourn. Ms. Joan Myers Goodman seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned.