



# Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC)

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## **OVR Policy & State Plan / Customer Satisfaction Committee Minutes for July 22, 2025, 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM**

### **Members Present (P)**

### **Not Present (NP)**

Lynn Heitz (NP)  
Sylenthia Dent-Siebenlist (P)  
Twana Jones (NP)  
Susan Tomasic (P)

Julia Barol (P)  
Cindy Duch (P)  
Michelle Mitchell (P)

Christie Cyktor (P)  
Passle Helminski (P)  
Julianna Rodrigues (NP)

**Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) Staff Present:** Audrey O'Connor, Cheryl Novak, Ralph Roach, James Whitonis,

**Project Staff Present:** Michelle Gerrick

### **CALL TO ORDER**

This meeting was conducted through Zoom. In the absence of the Chair, Ms. Julia Barol, Vice Chair, called the meeting to order at 11:00 AM after a quorum was established.

### **ADDITIONS TO THE AGENDA**

There were no additions to the agenda.

### **APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA AND PAST MINUTES**

***MOTION was made by Ms. Christie Cyktor to approve today's agenda and past meeting minutes. Ms. Passle Helminski seconded the motion. All were in favor. The motion passed.***

### **DISCUSSION ITEMS:**

#### **OVR Updates**

- Ms. Cheryl Novak confirmed the agenda items.

**Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) – Targeted goals for next cycle**

- Mr. James Whitonis reminded members that OVR was developing the Statement of Work for the next CSNA cycle and shared that Mr. Ryan Hyde would like to add a targeted goal on the impact and effectiveness of Pre Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS).
- Ms. Julia Barol suggested a goal identifying low performance school districts that are not participating in Pre-ETS and developing a roadmap to get them on board.
- Ms. Cindy Duch expressed concerns about the data regarding People with Substance Use Disorders, specifically that drug disorders impact 3.9% of the population in Pennsylvania and plans to compile specific information for OVR staff to address as it relates to these individuals gaining and/or maintaining employment.
- Ms. Christie Cyktor recommended addressing barriers for people with sensory disabilities, enhancing collaboration between VR and the mental health system, and expanding Pre-ETS services.
- Ms. Sylenthia Dent expressed concern about the data related to students of color with disabilities since they are much more likely to be punished than other students, more specifically, black boys with disabilities are the most disproportionately arrested as they are nine times more likely to be arrested than white students and asked what detection, prevention, and recovery techniques can be used more often for OVR.
  - Ms. Cheryl Novak confirmed that OVR works with the Bureau of Juvenile Justice under the Transition division in the Central Office and staff may be able to address some of these concerns.
- Ms. Novak further explained that the CSNA encompasses the overall rehabilitation needs of people with disabilities throughout Pennsylvania and assists in the development of the State Plan.
  - Goals should be in question format and within the scope of OVR services.
  - Each CSNA cycle should help OVR to identify areas such as service gaps, priorities, and possible solutions.
- Members further discussed whether the underserved population should be vague or specifically defined.
  - Ms. Michelle Mitchell felt that being both general and specific was beneficial since PaRC membership changes within the three-year cycles and what may be a suggested population today may not be in the future
  - Ms. Barol felt that having specificity is important for a successful outcome
  - Ms. Novak suggested identifying specific areas of need as underserved population alone can be open for interpretation
- Following additional discussion with Mr. Whitonis to define underserved populations, members drafted the following goal:
  - What barriers have the following underserved populations (individuals with substance use disorders, individuals in the justice system, black and brown communities) with disabilities encountered in receiving OVR services?
- Based on the committee's recommendations and further discussion with Mr. Hyde, Mr. Whitonis, will compile 2-3 targeted goals for the Executive Committee's review this Thursday so that Full Council may conduct a vote in August.

***MOTION was made by Ms. Passle Helminski to move the targeted goals discussed today to the Executive Committee for review. Ms. Susan Tomasic seconded the motion. All were in favor. The motion passed.***

### **Continued Discussion of CSNA Year 2 Interim Report**

- Mr. Whitonis confirmed that he received the updated version of Year 2 report from Temple yesterday and apologized for the late distribution to members.
- Mr. Whitonis confirmed that Temple did address OVR's comments, changed wording, and streamlined the analysis section on their focus groups.
- Members shared the following concerns based on their review of assigned pages:
  - Ms. Barol shared that the data within pages 13-21 was not updated. Mr. Whitonis confirmed that the data would be updated for the Year 3 final report.
  - Ms. Susan Tomasic pointed out that the digital equity focus group is supposed to be addressing the inequity of broadband and internet service, yet the recommendation is to hold the focus groups virtually. Mr. Whitonis confirmed that an in-person meeting was held in Philadelphia, however, Temple attempted to hold additional in-person meetings and could not get enough participants. Ms. Mitchell asked how participants learned about the live sessions if they did not have internet access. Mr. Whitonis confirmed that Temple put out flyers which were shared with customers by the District Offices. Ms. Mitchell feels this is similar to the difficulties of filling other roles such as on the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) and asked if there are other ways to get the data in a more effective manner. Mr. Whitonis said that he will pass this along to Temple.
  - Ms. Duch feels after reviewing the data on page 45, that more support should be available for those who use American Sign Language
  - Ms. Cyktor said that pages 22-30 did a good job highlighting underserved groups but felt that more can be done for next steps tied to those findings; thinking through how the findings help influence the state plan. Mr. Whitonis agrees and said that it should be very clear in the Executive Summary of the final report so that OVR can translate it into actionable items for the State Plan.

### **Schedule next meeting**

- Ms. Barol suggested that PaRC personnel contact Ms. Lynn Heitz to poll for the next meeting.

### **Public Comment**

- No public comment was made.

### **Adjourn**

***MOTION was made by Ms. Sylenthia Dent to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Susan Tomasic seconded the motion. All were in favor. The meeting adjourned at 12:07 pm.***