

CITIZEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE (CAC) TO THE READING OFFICE OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (OVR)

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MEETING MINUTES

NOTE: Meeting Minutes are posted on Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC) website.

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RECORDED BY:	Chris Harbert, Administrator to the State Board of VR

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CHRIS HARBERT: Good morning, everyone. Welcome to the Statewide Citizen Advisory Committee Chair and co-chair meeting. We will wait for more members to join and get started shortly.

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CHRIS HARBERT: Good morning, everybody. Welcome to the Statewide Citizen Advisory chair and co-chair meeting. We will wait for more members to join and get started here shortly. Thank you.

CHRIS HARBERT: Good morning. Welcome to the Statewide Citizen Advisory Meeting chair and co-chair meeting. It's 9:00 sharp so we can get started. I'm Chris Harbart, the administrator for the state board. I report directly to Ryan. I'm also the liaison for a few of our stakeholder groups, such as the Rehab Council, the Statewide Independent Living Council, Employment First, and a couple other stakeholder groups. So I'm pretty busy. I started coordinating this meeting back in March. I appreciate all the assistance and understanding in getting this group organized, the correct points of contact, things like that.

To get started this morning, we will have a welcoming and an open remarks from the OVR executive director Ryan Hyde.

Ryan is able to join us shortly. I know he has another engagement at the Governor's residence this morning.

So Ryan, take it away. And whenever you finish, I will begin our roll call.

RYAN HYDE: All right. Good morning, everyone. It's great to be with you. I apologize I have to step out a little earlier than I originally anticipated.

But I did want to share why I'm stepping out because I think it's pretty cool.

So one of our summer programs is the college student internship program within the

Commonwealth. We have 25 interns this summer that are OVR sponsored college students. And they are participating in a paid internship experience with a variety of Commonwealth agencies across Pennsylvania. And this morning, governor Shapiro and the First Lady invited them to come to the Governor's residence for a brief meeting to hear about the importance of internships and just to interact with them.

And then have brunch and a tour of the facility. So pretty awesome experience for OVR and for our interns. So we're really excited for that. I'm going to be heading over to that here very shortly.

I do want to talk a little bit about where we stand kind of state of the union stuff and why CACs are so important.

Obviously, we have the state board and the rehab council and a variety of other important advocacy groups that we interface with on a statewide level. But the CACs are really important as well locally to keep our offices informed of what's going on in the local region or county level. We really appreciate your service to our organization and your advocacy. And that's probably going to be an ask I will have here as I explain where we're at.

If you haven't heard, unfortunately, when the Federal budget was passed in March, it normally would pass in October or before October, we were flat funded at a national level. So what does that mean? Normally, OVR and VR at a national level is a formula grant, which means we would normally receive, for lack of a better word, a COLA every year, cost of living adjustment raise in our grant.

However, this past year, the Federal Government or legislators decided not to include the COLA in the VR grant. So that cost Pennsylvania \$12.79 million in additional funding that we were anticipating receiving. So that hurts us substantially this year.

Fortunately, we were carrying over some Federal funds from the pandemic, so we have a little bit of a bufferer. But we are using up those funds pretty quickly. Our costs are rising across the organization with staffing, personnel costs, service costs, tuition costs, stuff like that. So basically all the costs are going up, as I'm sure you're experiencing in your personal life as well.

What's more concerning is being flat funded one year, we can adjust to some extent.

What's more concerning, though, is the present Federal budget proposed for fiscal year '25 starting on 10/1, if passed by 10/1, has the VR program flat funded again. Again, based on our formula, we would expect to receive an increase. Our estimates would put the increase for Federal fiscal year '25 around \$15 million. So in the span of potentially less than 12 months, we could be losing nearly \$27 million to \$30 million in Federal funding.

Federal funding is our larger portion. We do get 21.3% of our funding from the state and 78.7% from the Fed. So losing those COLAs have a pretty substantial impact on our program.

So what are we doing about it? And what can you do to help us? So some of the things we have

done so far is over the past two years, because of having money left over from the pandemic, we had increased tuition rates for college. We let the board motions expire that approved that. So we will be reverting back to our former amounts.

We also had the Board approve changes to our Financial Needs Test for the last two years. Those motions and approvals expired on 7/1 as well. So we will revert back to our old Financial Needs Test amounts and procedures.

So that will be our first two things we're doing.

We're also looking at all of our numbers and doing a lot of math to try to figure out what the impact of these changes will be.

The other thing we're working on is when other states do not use all their Federal money, states like Pennsylvania can try to request it as long as we have state match available to match the Federal funds. So that process will begin on 7/15. So we will be submitting for what's called Federal Reallocation Funds to try to bring additional Federal dollars into the state.

We won't know until probably mid-September if we will be awarded any reallocation. But we would expect to at least receive some. But we are going to go as big as we can and try to get more dollars coming into Pennsylvania to cover the loss of these Federal funds.

So it's a little concerning, to be honest with you. One year of flat funding is troublesome. Two years is burdensome. And we will definitely have to look at our programs and what things we can reduce. Because it's a lot of money. Our total budget is right around \$200 million with Federal and State. So losing \$12.7 million and \$15 million makes a substantial difference in our program. So more to come on that.

But I am working with Secretary Nancy Walker and deputy executive secretary Bill Trusky in the L&I press office regarding the issue. We're going to do some advocacy to the Federal Government and out to other stakeholders about this potential flat funding. So you might see some social media posts or you might see some list serve emails asking for stakeholders of all types to let Federal legislators know that flat funding the VR program is unacceptable. So we're working on some of those communications now. And they will probably come out in the next couple of weeks, early August maybe, at the latest.

So that's where you as CAC or CAC chairs and co-chairs can help. We might be asking for phone calls to be made or letters to be sent or emails to be sent just to make sure federal representatives and senators know the importance of the program and what flat funding may do to us. Keep an eye out on that. I can send stuff to Chris and he can use this group to share information in the future.

So concerning times.

Definitely a national problem.

Some of the reason that this happened was it's nothing that Pennsylvania did. In fact, we're doing very well with number of customers served and expenditures and things like that. But

there is a -- there are several states in the south, one or two in the north, but most of the gulf states around the Gulf of Mexico have been returning large amounts of Federal funds. So then the Federal Government decides that well, if this much money is being returned, then the VR program doesn't need their COLA.

But that impacts the states using all their money, like Pennsylvania, negatively.

So more to come on that.

Some of the other things we're looking at right now is our student programs for our Pre-employment Transition Services. We're requiring to spend about \$20 million on Pre-ETS. We're a little over that right now. So we are going to re-evaluate all those programs and determine what can we continue to support or what we might need to cool off on for the next year while we wait to see if a Federal budget passes.

That's probably the other big concern is that with the election looming, we don't know if a Federal budget will pass on time, if we will get put into another continuing resolution cycle or not. Just a lot of unknowns right now for Pennsylvania and the national VR programs.

So a little gloom and doom to start the meeting. But I did want to end on some really positive stuff.

The state budget has not passed yet, at least I haven't seen an email yet this morning.

We have a small increase proposed in the state budget over \$700,000 additional funds to PA OVR. We anticipate that happening, but we won't know for sure until the budget passes. We appreciate that attention here in Pennsylvania.

We have a ton of student programs going on this summer.

We just ended our first summer academy for students who are blind and visually impaired up at Penn State. Secretary Walker came up to visit the students and interact with them. It was a ten-day experience. Great opportunity for students who are low vision or blind to learn the skills necessary to transition from high school to a college level training program. We talked about white cane skills.

We talked about assistive technology. We talked about artificial intelligence and how they can use that in their studies and the limitations of it and the ethics of it.

We also talked with professors about requesting accommodations and how to take notes and study and all that stuff that students need to be able to make the transition.

So very successful program. Really great group of young adults. And the next summer academy for students who are deaf and hard of hearing will be later this month. I will be back up there to check that out. Very similar programs. It will be about 20 students there as well.

The other big thing we have going on is our My Work program. All across the state, we have students participating in the summer paid work-based learning experience program called My Work. This summer, we would anticipate having somewhere around 1,000 kids participating in paid work-based learning experiences at municipalities, counties, townships, nonprofits, other

employer types doing all kinds of different jobs. Most of them are entry level jobs. These are high school students looking to have a work-based learning experience. But it's a very powerful program and we're very excited to be offering that. The program started in Pittsburgh years ago, and we have been able to expand it statewide.

We probably won't be in every county this year, but we will be in over 60 of the 67 counties. So we have almost reached every location across Pennsylvania.

So really great opportunity for a lot of young people to be exposed to the world of work and earn some money over the summer.

The other couple of things I wanted to end on is our disability innovation fund programs. So currently, we have two disability innovation fund grants that we applied for from the Federal Government. The first one was called sub minimum wage to competitive integrative employment, or SWTCIE. Our program is called Project Invest. And the intent of the grant, a five-year, \$14 million grant, is either to prevent individuals from entering sub minimum wage or help them get out of sub minimum wage. We're halfway through year two. We have identified both of our employment supports contractors.

We have identified our first employer partner, Sheesz Corporation in Claysville at the distribution center. And we're looking to on board more employers and start enrolling customers over the summer and into the fall. First year of that grant was administrative work getting contracts and agreements in place. In year two, it's starting to enroll employers and customers. The second grant is our Pathways to Partnership grant. A \$10 million, five-year grant we just got last fall. The intent of this grant project is to train individuals on -- all individuals across the ecosystem in Pennsylvania that support students with disabilities in transition. So we'll be training bureau of special education staff, local education staff, special education teachers, transition specialists, OVR staff, ODP staff. Basically anyone that might interface with transition students making the jump from high school to work or high school to school on how to better serve that population using some national best practices. So we're really excited about that grant. The official kickoff of the grant will be at the PA Transition Conference this summer in August. But this first whole year, again, has been really administrative, writing agreements and contracting and things like that.

And finally, there was a new DIF grant opportunity that recently just closed, it actually closed yesterday.

Pennsylvania did apply for a third Disability Innovation Fund grant. Our proposal was to purchase advanced driving simulators for all the interimmediate units across Pennsylvania and staff those are occupational therapists for a five-year period to help address the barrier of transportation in Pennsylvania for students with disabilities or others with disabilities.

So they -- once they're purchased, then OTs are available. They can start evaluating students on their ability to drive if they need driver's training, tutoring to pass the test, all that kind of

stuff. So we're optimistic that we're going to get that. But we haven't gotten it yet. We just submitted our application for it. There is heavy competition for the grant. Over RSA, our Federal parent, received over 800 letters of intent to apply nationally for that grant. So there's pretty significant competition. But we will hope and keep our fingers crossed that we will receive that grant as well. But we won't know that probably until late September or early October. And we'll of course communicate out if we do.

So I guess finally, I just wanted to, again, re-emphasize some stuff that I have been hearing nationally. The RSA has a new commissioner, Commissioner Dante Allen from California. He kind of grew up in the Center for Independent Living movement out in California. Very nice man. I got to meet him recently.

Advocate for people with disabilities, he is a person with a disability himself. And he really has been talking to us VR directors about partnership and that we must collaborate, VR is just one small piece of the rehabilitation process to allow individuals to achieve competitive integrated employment.

So partnership, engaging with stakeholders, and working together is going to be how we're successful moving forward.

So I think you guys are all a critical part of that, keeping us informed what's happening locally and advocating for what customers need and what services are necessary out there.

So I just wanted to thank you for your service. I do have to run. So I will catch you later. Chris, if there's questions for me, just collect them and we will get together on that later this week. Thank you for your time this morning. And I will talk to you soon.

CHRIS HARBERT: Thank you, Ryan. And have fun today while we meet.

All right. Yes, a lot going on with OVR. Like Ryan said, if there are further questions or you would like to further discuss, let me know and we'll connect that.

All right. So we'll get into the welcoming -- excuse me, the roll call and introductions part.

Definitely important for this first initial meeting to make sure all of the work and assistance I received getting everyone here, the correct points of contact here today moving forward. That way, we're a little more organized.

I will start by alphabetical order by office location. And I will start with the chair or the co-chair.

First is Allentown BVRs.

And the document that I have, I have the chair and co-chair vacant. If there is a chair or co-chair from Allentown?

BROOKE CHO: Hi, this is Brooke Cho. I'm the district administrator. It is true that those spots are both vacant right now.

CHRIS HARBERT: Thank you, Brooke. And thank you for attending today.

All right. Next is Altoona combined BVRs and BBVS. I have vacant chair and co-chair.

Thank you, Craig. And I see you're here today.

Andy, are you here today?

I'm sorry if you are and I didn't see it. Thank you.

Moving to DuBois BVRS.

Chair Bob Mecca.

BOB MECCA: Yes, I'm here. Hi, this is Bob Mecca. I'm the executive director for life and independence for today. And I'm also the CAC chair for the DuBois office.

CHRIS HARBERT: Excellent.

Thank you for your effort getting to this point. And thank you for your attendance today.

And OVR staff, I have Chris Roken, ADA. Is he here today?

today?

He's not here today, but that's correct.

CHRIS HARBERT: Thank you.

All right. Continuing on.

Erie BBVS, I have Linda Moore.

And for Erie BBVS, I have Cassie Falkenhagen.

Coming into Erie BVRS, Passle? I saw you earlier. Thank you, Passle. Good morning.

Good morning.

CHRIS HARBERT: And district administrator Jack Hewitt.

Good morning, everybody.

CHRIS HARBERT: Good morning, Jack.

Thank you. Coming into Harrisburg combined, CAC chair, I have Cathy Long.

And for the co-chair, I have Joe Romeo.

Cathy came in earlier.

CHRIS HARBERT: She did?

Okay. Thank you.

And Pat, I see you. Thank you. Thank you for attending today.

It came in a little broken and unreadable, Patrick. Was that the --

[Indiscernible]

CHRIS HARBERT: I'm sorry, Patrick, I'm having audio issues hearing you.

No. It sounds -- I don't know. It sounds a little off.

Patrick, if you want to type that in the chat.

All right. Pat, I will follow up with you and come back. Thank you.

Okay. Got it for Harrisburg.

All right. Thank you.

Coming down to Johnstown BVRS. For the chair, I have Josh Yoder.

Chris, this is Margie, the district administrator. Both the chair and my co-chair are vacant.

CHRIS HARBERT: Thank you.

And thank you for your attendance today, Margie.

You're welcome.

CHRIS HARBERT: All right.

New Castle BVRs. Chair is Gail Steck.

Hi. Yes. This is Gail. You can say that. But we're not active right now. But I am working on reactivating our CAC.

CHRIS HARBERT: Thank you.

And yes, I'm getting -- I have been getting an understanding how DAs handle these situations. Understood. Thank you for letting me know and for coming today, Gail.

Thank you.

CHRIS HARBERT: All right.

Norristown BVRs, chair, I have Kathleen Brown.

This is Kathleen. Can you hear me okay?

CHRIS HARBERT: Yes, I can.

Good morning.

Good morning. I am the ADA in Norristown.

CHRIS HARBERT: Okay.

So we have the co-chair is Mary Berry-Shields.

Hello.

CHRIS HARBERT: Thank you.

Good morning. All right. Thank you both for your attendance today for Norristown.

Next I have Philadelphia combined for BVRs and BBVS.

Chair, I have Suzanne Erb.

Hi, good morning, everybody. This is Suzanne Erb.

We don't have a co-chair at this point. And unfortunately, neither Sherry Brightful nor Alex Shay were able to attend the meeting today. But they send their regards to everyone.

Thanks.

CHRIS HARBERT: Thank you very much, Suzanne. Yes, I spoke with them when I initially started coordinating this. They were expecting some conflicts in availability.

All right. Next, we have Pittsburgh BVRs. I have a vacant chair and co-chair. I thought I saw Pete.

No, Tom Burgunder is here at the chair. And Sherry Rogers is on here I believe as the co-chair.

Is that for BBVS?

BBVS.

Right. We're talking about BVRs. BVRs is vacant. I'm here as the DA in Pittsburgh. It sounds

like the folks for BBVS are here as well.

CHRIS HARBERT: Thank you, Pete. Tom. So sherry Rogers is the co-chair and it's no longer Michael Zaken?

That's correct.

CHRIS HARBERT: Thank you.

And Pittsburgh BBVS OVR staff, I have Danielle Dowgiello. I apologize if I mispronounced that. All right.

Moving on to Reading. Angel Torres for the CAC chair. And I have Brian invited as well.

Good morning, everybody.

This is Angel Torres. I'm currently the vice chair and Brian D'Amico is the current president. Current chair.

This is Brian D'Amico from the Reading OVR.

CHRIS HARBERT: Good morning.

Good morning.

CHRIS HARBERT: Yes. And Angel, thank you for getting this started and the coordination back in February, I think. So it's been some time coming. But here we are. And Reading BVRS, I have Kim Baskett.

Hi, good morning, everyone.

CHRIS HARBERT: Good morning. Thank you for coming today, Kim.

All right. We're nearing completion of roll call.

Next is Washington BVRS. I have Megan Van Fossan. For the CAC chair.

And I don't have a co-chair listed. OVR staff contact district administrator Darla. Good morning.

Good morning. And I think maybe you might still have Megan's old -- I just happened to notice it when you re-sent out the invite today. I think you have her old email address.

But yes, Megan is our chair. And we don't have a co-chair. We do have a secretary, though. So I don't know if maybe that person needs to be moved up. She's the one who usually takes our minutes.

CHRIS HARBERT: Okay. Thank you, Darla. We'll make sure we get that ironed out.

Next on the list, Wilkes-Barre combined. For chair and co-chair, I have it listed as vacant.

Yes, that's correct. I'm attending, I'm Kelly, ADA for the Wilkes-Barre BVS office.

CHRIS HARBERT: Thank you, Kelly.

Kelly.

All right. Next is Williamsport BVRS. I have vacant chair and co-chair.

OVR staff district administrator Sue Swartz.

Any attendees --

Susan is off today.

CHRIS HARBERT: Thank you.

Good morning. Good to see you, speak with you. Sue is off today.

All right. Next, last on the list, York BVRS. For the chair, I have Mr. Eric Orr effective 2025.

Eric, are you here this morning?

Yes, I'm here. Hello, everyone.

CHRIS HARBERT: Good morning. Good to see you. Thank you for your attendance this morning.

Chris, I wanted to let you know, this is Stacey in the York OVR office and I'm the current chair. And my co-chair is Marie Martini and she had a prior commitment and is unable to attend this morning. But Eric is for our 2025CAC. I am currently for 2024.

CHRIS HARBERT: Excellent.

Thank you very much for getting me updated. And thank you for your attendance today.

All right. Are there any chairs, cochairs, or attendees from a CAC that I did not call that you would like to acknowledge your attendance, introduce yourself, anything like that? Excellent.

So this meeting, it's going to be generally open. I'm looking forward for the chairs and co-chairs to have a lot of discussion. I know this meeting has been a long time coming.

On the same note, are there any OVR staff, DAs, ADAs, managers, who I did not call who would like to acknowledge, say anything before we get started?

Chris, I joined a few minutes late. I was wrapping up another meeting. I'm Denise, the director of the bureau of central operations at OVR.

CHRIS HARBERT: Good morning, Denise. Thank you for coming today, for your attendance. Yes, Denise, she --

Jim, good morning.

Good morning, Chris. I want to say it's great to see so many familiar names and faces all in one place. I'm Jim Whitonis, I have been with OVR for two years as a specialist. I have been your liaison between the central office and the CACs and with PaRC. I reached out about two years ago to everyone just to get in touch. If there's any DAs here that if you're CACs are starting up and I have missed your contact information, please provide that to me.

Thanks to everyone for coming. Angel, this is your idea, your brain child. It's great to see it coming together.

Thank you, everyone.

CHRIS HARBERT: Thank you, Jim.

Anyone else?

I would like to say good morning, everybody, again. And thank you all for being here. I think the collaboration that this will encourage the benefit to all the CACs in the state.

And to OVR overall.

CHRIS HARBERT: Yes.

Absolutely. As I have been getting more familiar, seeking things out, trying to find more

information, I do -- I have heard several rehab council members echo in sentiment the value of even the local meetings. How connected it is, how informative it is. So of all things looking to replicate that at a little bit higher level with our chair and co-chair decision makers today. So we are right on time with our agenda. Next on the docket, you could say, we have two members of our Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council, Passle and Mr. Andrew Pennington, to provide an update for us. So Andrew and Passle, feel free.

PASSLE HELMINSKI: Good morning. I'm Passle Helminski, the CAC chair in Erie County with Jack and other counties here. I'm also the incoming legislative chair. And Andrew, you're on too?

ANDREW PENNINGTON: Yes, I am.

PASSLE HELMINSKI: Thank you, Andrew.

I will ask Andrew to read our mission statement. And then we'll talk about the Rehab Council. Thank you, Andrew.

ANDREW PENNINGTON: Thank you.

Good morning, everybody.

My name is Andrew Pennington. As many of you know, I sit on a lot of the CACs across the state that are actively running. And I'm hopeful that those that are no longer actively running, this may help brainstorm how to get them running. Because as Passle mentioned earlier, and Chris, these are very important I think to informing the PA Rehab Council.

On to the PaRC mission.

The mission of the council is to inform and advise the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, the state board of vocational rehabilitation, the legislature, and the governor on the diverse issues affecting employment of people with disabilities.

I'm going to pass it back to Passle now. She's going to offer up a couple of words about the importance of public comment and attendance at PaRC meetings.

PASSLE HELMINSKI: Yes. I personally invite everybody on this call to look at our web page. I think it's PArehabilitationcouncil.org. And that's one word before. That has a full list of our meetings. Our big meetings are individual subcommittee meetings. It's very important that we have your public input. Very important.

You may have to reach out to make sure you have a link to get into our meeting. But without feedback from the public, we can't grow and help fulfill our mission.

Being a CAC chair and being on the Rehab Council is good because I can share it with Jack Hewitt, who is excellent to work with. Even give him some ideas of what is lacking, for example, in the Centers for Independent Living. So we found that he had some additional funding available for them so I could pass that on to our local Centers for Independent Living.

And take it back to the Rehab Council saying this is something that everybody can look at.

So it's all interactive. I can't emphasize enough, we hardly have anybody doing public comments

at our subcommittees or our big council meetings.

Andrew, do you want to add anything else there?

ANDREW PENNINGTON: No.

That was well said. But I will also say that the PaRC wants to do what they can to support the Citizens Advisory Committees. We are an open door if you need to contact any of the members about something you may see and you would rather do it anonymously instead of public comment, you're more than welcome to.

Just to better inform the PaRC about upcoming issues at the local level or successes at the local level. As we know, CACs don't go one way. They talk about both the successes and the concerns at the district office level. That's all I will add.

PASSLE HELMINSKI: At one of our subcommittee meetings, I basically said reach out to your local CAC office. And you informed me, Andrew, that Allentown BNTh't have a CAC. So it's important to interact and encourage people to step up and volunteer to get the work done.

Thank you.

Any questions for us?

Thank you.

ANDREW PENNINGTON: Have a great day.

CHRIS HARBERT: Thank you very much, Passle and Andrew. It was recently at probably the same meeting, Passle, the importance of the local interactions was highlighted and how valuable it is. So without spreading myself too thin, I do want to try attending some local meetings to continue serving this group of chairs and co-chairs.

Well, we are doing pretty efficient -- we're very efficient this morning. So next on our agenda, we have Natasha, Hunter, and Hayley, members of the PaTTAN youth engagement specialist team. I have been speaking with them on some ideas on introducing and better championing youth, young adults in the Citizens Advisory Committees.

So, Natasha, Hunter, or Hayley, are you online and available to present?

HUNTER STEINITZ: Indeed.

Good morning, everyone.

CHRIS HARBERT: Sorry to interrupt. I did give Nichole the documents that you shared with me in case you would like any of them to be displayed. You can let her know which one.

HUNTER STEINITZ: Awesome.

HAYLEY PENN: Good morning, everyone. My name is Hayley Penn. As Chris said, we have been talking where him throughout the summer so far about a few ideas we have to bring to the CAC discussion.

But I'm Hayley, I will let my colleagues introduce themselves as well.

HUNTER STEINITZ: Hi, I'm Hunter Steinitz out of the PaTTAN west office in Pittsburgh.

NATASHA FLETCHER: And I am Natasha Fletcher out of the east office as well with Hayley.

Good morning.

HAYLEY PENN: Awesome. So first, I just want to say thank you for letting us be here and share some of these exciting ideas that we have. I have been able to attend some of the CAC meetings. I was at the Pittsburgh one a few weeks ago and then Harrisburg. So I'm still pretty new to the system.

All three of us could agree we're still navigating and figuring out what the CACs are all about. But as Chris said, our role is to provide insight and support to the youth perspective between the services that they are receiving and the providers.

So we're just here to share a new project proposal idea that we think could be super helpful and beneficial to the CAC teams.

And what I have sort of been picking up on is that it's hard for you to get public comment and for you to hear from anyone that's outside, I guess, of the core groups in each region.

And I can say that I have been able to talk to some youth firsthand since I have started.

I think that youth perspective and youth voice would be very --

they would be really excited to share their ideas. That's sort of where we're going with this proposal.

All right. So I guess I will take it away.

So what we're proposing is basically to help you all implement a youth Citizens Advisory Committee. What that would look like would be there would be youth present at each of your meetings. And as the youth engagement specialists, we would help you support that.

So basically, we're thinking maybe monthly meetings of a youth committee that could maybe meet separately and having them present at the larger CAC discussions. Hunter, Natasha, is there --

HUNTER STEINITZ: Yeah. I think it's really important, obviously, public comment in general is needed in these conversations. But it's really important for young people to be part of that conversation.

Particularly because over 53% of current OVR cases are individuals under age 25.

And so we're really trying to make sure that that is represented in the way that OVR goes about its decision making and that sort of thing.

One of the things that we're really excited about with kind of having the statewide youth council that kind of would meet separately and then would go as individual members to their local CAC meeting, whatever that would look like, is that ideally, they wouldn't be doing that alone. We would like to kind of put together a list of folks who would be interested in participating as mentors to these young CAC members so that when they step into these meetings, there's a familiar face, they're not going to into a room full of strangers and having to say things that might either ruffle feathers or going in with a little bit of someone in their corner.

And we -- pardon me, I'm double checking our notes here.

The idea would be to train not only the youth to participate in the CAC meetings in the sense of understanding how rules work and how motions happen so that they don't get put off by the language of the way the meetings run.

And to kind of support the CAC in being a space where youth can kind of say what they need to say and want to say in a way that is heard and received by the rest of the folks on the council.

Hayley, am I missing anything?

HAYLEY PENN: No. I think that was well said.

NATASHA FLETCHER: I think that we want to continue to build this momentum because they are nothing without us being able to push for their thoughts and their feelings in the most appropriate manner possible. So the mentor portion of the proposal is something that is actually probably the most important job next to their voice being heard.

We want to build that momentum here. So hopefully, everyone would be in agreement and we would take it from there if we can get the okay, we'll take it from there and blend it with what already is currently taking place to see how that would look. And it's going to take trial and error. This is new for all of us. But team work makes the dream work. And hopefully the dream for the youth is to be heard ultimately.

HAYLEY PENN: One thing we want to add too is that while we know these CAC meetings aren't just about young people, it's about all of the OVR customers, just what Hunter mentioned before is a really large percentage of the customers are under age 25. And while the young person I think would bring a lot of perspective on how the programs that are currently in place would affect them, they might -- well, I know they will be able to add perspective to the programs that will help all of the customers, not just the young people. And I think it could make the CAC meetings more lively. I think it could make them exciting.

So I see there's a question. There's a hand raised.

I don't know.

NATASHA FLETCHER: Jack, go ahead.

Hello. Thanks for joining us. I'm going off of a little bit of an assumption here. So I'm going to assume that PaTTAN has a version of a youth advisory group. And how do you go about getting releases and structure yours to give guidance to us on what you do.

NATASHA FLETCHER: I guess to kind of start, because our job through PaTTAN is split between PaTTAN and OVR, most times, depending on the agency or place that we're servicing, they have those things already in place. And their releases would say that they can share and do some things. Not to say that that can't be tweaked to be customized. But PaTTAN itself does not have an advisory. But we do work closely with other entities, such as PYLN and Hunter and her initiative with the YEN project, where these young individuals are getting together and having conversation and dialogues. And we are putting out their content, if you will.

HUNTER STEINITZ: And I will just add to that as Natasha mentioned, our positions as youth engagement specialists are in partnership with the Bureau of Special education and OVR. We are kind of stepping into a new role. This hasn't existed before. And we are -- our task is to increase the amount of youth voice and youth power in decision making across the state as part of the Pathways to Partnership grant.

So a lot of the work that we're doing is kind of new.

There is not a lot of data. One of the things that we kind of tried to wrap our heads around in visiting CAC meetings and talking with our supervisor, Kim Robinson, is that trying to get a handle on how much youth participation even exists in current CACs. And trying to get a handle on what that even looks like from a data perspective.

Because that data bunt have an official outlet at this moment.

So in a way, we're also trying to collect that information. I'm not sure that that quite answers your question. But perhaps.

Thanks for that. I'm wrapping my head around. Because I know to get a youth involved comes with additional checks and balances and releases, parents consents, and does the parent need to be involved?

HUNTER STEINITZ: In some cases, it does. In some cases, it doesn't. If we're dealing with a minor, then yes. If we're dealing with someone over the age of 18 with their full legal -- in instances where guardianship is not an issue.

And particularly public comment and things like that, to my knowledge, releases are not necessary unless that is going to be used as promotional material. In that case, releases would be necessary.

HAYLEY PENN: Thank you for bringing that up, though. That is something that I don't think we talked about before. So yeah, we'll definitely consider how we would navigate that sort of situation maybe if it was a minor trying to come. And --

HUNTER STEINITZ: Yes. I see another question.

NATASHA FLETCHER: Passle.

I hope I pronounced that right.

PASSLE HELMINSKI: That's okay. I'm echoing and agreeing with Jack. And also most of the CAC meetings are during the day when people are looking for if they're over 18, they're looking for part-time jobs or working.

Or if they're in school. So that may be a hiccup for some of the youth involvement down the road.

HUNTER STEINITZ: You're absolutely right. That is an area of concern. But part of this, we hope, is in partnership with our CAC chairs and co-chairs and DAs and ADAs that we could find ways to be flexible to include our youth members. Because part of serving your full population is being available for them to make public comment.

So in a way, we're hoping that this can be the start of a conversation to find ways to be a more accessible and inclusive environment, not just for young people, but for the general public to participate.

PASSLE HELMINSKI: This is Passle again. We currently have an opening on our CAC for a family member too.

HUNTER STEINITZ: Wonderful.

PASSLE HELMINSKI: It's hard for people to be consistently involved, we found out.

HAYLEY PENN: I wanted to add that that is something that we have been discussing too is trying to figure out meeting time that would be accessible for young people too with school and part-time jobs. But I think what we kind of figured out was it's going to look different across the state. It's not going to be one uniform meeting time, obviously. And maybe that means -- and this could be discussed separately. But maybe that means that the youth CAC meets after school at a time that works for those individuals. And then that's why the youth CAC mentor role would be so important. Because if that's the only person that's hearing the youth, they would be trusted that they could share and speak on their behalf at the larger meetings if they weren't able to make it. Hopefully, they would be able to. But if not, that's why that role is also very important.

Thank you. That is something that we have been kind of going back and forth on how we would make that work.

HUNTER STEINITZ: Absolutely. Yes?

HAYLEY PENN: Any other questions too while we're opening the floor? Brian?

Hi. This is Brian from the Reading OVR CAC. I just wanted to get clarification. I think most of us, if not all of us, would probably agree that we would love to have more participation. We would like to see more young people involved.

One of the questions I have is at our CAC at the district offices, we're focused with people with disabilities in our area. And with that said, do you at the PaTTAN offices, you're talking about the CACs, do you have youth in our areas that could attend? Or come to -- do the virtual meetings? Obviously, we would love to have them. I would be open to mentor someone and have them kind of guide them through the system.

But we're focused, like I said, with people with disabilities in our area. So is there -- are you throughout the state? Is there youth in each section that would be open to that?

HUNTER STEINITZ: That's a great question. And the short answer to that is yes. Hayley has been working with the Pennsylvania youth leadership network, PYLN, this is a statewide group of young people who are passionate about advocating about the disabled youth experience and trying to improve the quality of services that they experience.

And Hayley, what's the feedback you have heard from PYLN when you have mentioned this opportunity to them?

HAYLEY PENN: Yeah. Great.

So yeah, PYLN is all across the state. It's virtual. We found it's accessible to everyone. The youth that come are excited to be there and share their ideas and share opportunities that they have and projects they have been working on.

And like Hunter said, it's a statewide network. And I just brought this up briefly to them at last month's meeting. I didn't really go that into detail yet because we were really excited to come today and talk to you all about this before moving forward. But short answer, great response. These young people are passionate.

They're smart. They're excited.

And they have a lot of energy to bring to the table.

So while recruitment will be difficult and we haven't really started doing that, obviously, yet, I think that since our position, I don't know if we mentioned this. We're separated regionally. So I work in the central region, Natasha is on the east, Hunter is on the west. We could focus on our regions and recruit so that hopefully youth would be spread out across the state.

So to answer that question, I kind of went on a tangent there. I think that young people will be - we'll get good feedback and have interest from young people to be involved.

HUNTER STEINITZ: Yes.

There certainly is interest. And untillly, we would start with the folks who are interested and connect them with whoever their local CAC office is and branch out from there.

NATASHA FLETCHER: Not to mention, by all means, because most of some of you guys work in the field, please feel free to refer individuals that you know on your case load that is probably more than eager to want to make themselves feel useful in joining this initiative.

HUNTER STEINITZ: Suzanne, I see a hand.

From Philadelphia. Sorry.

My thing was muted.

I have a question speaking of demographics. Are you also considering blind and visually impaired students? Because I think they have some very specific and sometimes unique needs that may not be addressed by everyone and may not always be known about by various groups.

And I think it's important that we make sure that we include them as well. As well as people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

NATASHA FLETCHER: No one is excluded from being a part of the youth advisory. As long as we have and put people in place for their voice to be just as heard as all the others, it's not an issue. But that's something that probably would need to be discussed further in detail so that way all the entities are represented appropriately and equally.

HUNTER STEINITZ: Yes. And I will just add to that our time with you today is to kind of put this idea out there and collect feedback from you guys. But as well seeing who might be willing to kind of help us get this moving. If there are folks who would be interested in helping us

consider the needs, for example, that you mentioned for blind and visual impairments, as well as deaf and hard of hearing individuals to include them as well.

We would love to discuss all of those things further with you.

I see another hand.

PASSLE HELMINSKI: This is Passle. That means you will have to invest into interpreters and braille, for example.

HUNTER STEINITZ: Yes. That is certainly doable.

PASSLE HELMINSKI: Thank you.

HAYLEY PENN: Yeah. I just want to say thank you for raising these concerns. And we hear you. And they're great points.

HUNTER STEINITZ: Yes.

HAYLEY PENN: My brain goes to PaTTAN as a whole and how there's different people to work on different initiatives. And while I might not have the right answer right now, I know a number of team members who work specifically on the blind and visually impaired initiative and deaf and hard of hearing. I'm sure they would have great ideas on how to address that. It is something that will come up. So we're taking note of all of these comments and hopefully, we'll continue this discussion and be able to bring more clarity to those. So thank you.

NATASHA FLETCHER: I would like to add very quickly that although we're pushing this out there and we understand that this is new and that there may be some reluctance, like you guys have a lot of your case load. We have a lot on our case load. As we continue to try to navigate this, I just want to make it known and understood that we are here for the consumers and not to lighten or lessen the work that we have currently at hand.

So just keep that in the forefront of things as well as we're trying to recruit these individuals. Brian?

Yeah. Hi. This is Brian from Reading again.

I just wanted to get some clarification. Are you guys looking to have youth start their own CAC? Or youth join our CACs that are already in progress?

CHRIS HARBERT: This is Chris with OVR. Of course we will let our youth engagement specialists speak. So ultimately, we're looking for youth -- PaTTAN is looking for youth members to join the existing CACs. Now there is a couple of different ideas on how the collective group of youth can interact as a youth perspective group level. Whether that be a statewide subcommittee of youth spread throughout the Commonwealth that can attend, provide feedback, work on some projects.

If it were its own standing youth CAC, there would be some issues, as Dawn Sokol brought up in discussions, the other CACs would miss that opportunity of youth engagement.

Or our efforts from Hayley, Hunter, and Natasha, if it could lead to a handful of youth CAC members to join regular existing CACs, that's another possibility.

They're very receptive.

They can kind of develop this with you per your offices' thoughts. But ultimately, to either join the standing CACs, form a subcommittee that could float from one CAC to the other to get that representation across the Commonwealth. Hayley, if anyone has any additional thoughts on that. And I hope that answered your question.

It did, Chris. And I appreciate that. I have seen as far as the Reading CAC, we're always open to having people come and be part of the CAC. So it doesn't really matter what age. I guess are the youth, are they under 18? Over 18?

Obviously, if you're 18 and older, you're an adult. We would love to have you join. Under 18, I mean, I don't think it's a problem either. Like I said, I would be open to mentoring someone to get them comfortable with -- because I understand what you're saying, Hayley, for someone to be comfortable at a young age to come into a meeting with a lot of adults and understand the process, it might be difficult.

So we're definitely always looking for members to become part of the CAC. And youth are a very important part of that because they're going to be the ones who are having to grow up, take on this responsibility if they have a disability and further this process.

So we're always open to having youth join us.

HAYLEY PENN: Yeah. That's awesome. Thank you. And we appreciate your openness to the idea.

Like I mentioned earlier, I think it will just depend on the CAC itself and how you all operate. It's going to look different in each region or in each office. And as Chris mentioned, we can help you sort of plan and format that as they develop.

So as for age range, I don't think we decided on a specific age range. Kind of just open to anyone at the moment.

But it's still in the works.

But there's a few questions. Passle, go ahead.

PASSLE HELMINSKI: Chris, then we have to take a look at our bylaws. Correct?

HAYLEY PENN: That was mentioned, yeah.

CHRIS HARBERT: Which part of the bylaws are you thinking, Passle?

PASSLE HELMINSKI: With a membership attending and open comments. We have to pull out the bylaws and look at that and make sure we're all inclusive.

CHRIS HARBERT: Absolutely.

As this further develops, and Passle, I would definitely put you at the top of the list to be on the work group for your subject matter expertise. But yeah, a lot of consideration is involved with that.

PASSLE HELMINSKI: I want to make sure that they're inclusively in our everything. So thank you.

CHRIS HARBERT: Yeah. Thank you.

Yes, coming up on break.

But we definitely want to handle questions or comments. Tom, I see your hand is raised. And then Jack after that.

Yeah. I'm Tom Burgunder from the Pittsburgh office. Our meetings generally occur in the morning from 10:00 to noon on a quarterly basis. We have trouble attracting adults to participate on our CAC committee. I would be really surprised if young people want to go through a two-hour meeting when so many of the issues don't necessarily involve them. But I will certainly take back to our CAC next meeting the possibility of trying to set up a mentor program inviting people to volunteer as mentors, and then passing those names on to the PaTTAN people who attend our meetings in case there are students that would like to work with us.

We have tried mentoring in the past, and it didn't work. We had volunteers, but we didn't have people who wanted to get involved.

HAYLEY PENN: Yeah. Thank you. One thing we talked about briefly too was having a section of time, a portion of time just for the young person to pop in.

But I think that defeats the purpose then because they're not able to hear the whole conversation. But that's another thought that we have been back and forth on.

I'm going to write these down. I don't want to go over the time too much. There's Jack also has a question.

I guess more of a comment than a question. I always whenever we have new conversations like this, I immediately get into how are we going to make it work. And I guess this is a comment for the OVR people on the call. We have Pre-ETS, so we have access to youth. And I'm looking at this thinking I need to get my arms around the interest of this. So I should be using my early reach coordinators who are already interacting with youth to get a sense of the interest, the ability, and then we can start folding in -- I'm on the west, so then we can start folding in Hunter on this to potentially make referrals.

So I guess I'm throwing out that yes, definitely the PaTTAN people, we'll need your help on this. But I need to get a sense of do I even have youth?

So I'm throwing out I'm going to circle back with my three early reach coordinators to start folding in CAC membership for youth when they start talking to youth. And then if we get interest, great. And if we don't, I will circle back around to let you know that's the barriers. Because I guess the struggle I'm having is I got to get my arms around the interest, the availability, and then start talking about where my obstacles are after that.

HAYLEY PENN: Great. I love that idea. I think that's a great high note to sort of end this discussion on. I didn't even think of the ERCs. That's a wonderful idea. That's where we have been struggling is how to measure involvement and availability. So I see your hand raised, Dr.

Grimm. So we'll take that last question.

And I will drop in the chat a survey that we kind of put together sort of to gather some more information on the interest and availability, like we were talking about. So hopefully, you all have a minute to fill that out.

Would you be able to --

could you make sure that the survey gets sent to everyone too in case there's some people on the phone or something who may not have access to the chat?

HUNTER STEINITZ:

Absolutely. We will make sure the survey link gets sent out to everyone.

And that includes all links and any materials that get shown on the screen.

CHRIS HARBERT: Hi, yes, I will make sure all meeting materials and everything shared is sent to everyone involved.

PASSLE HELMINSKI: This is Passle. I cannot read the chat.

Thank you for that.

CHRIS HARBERT: Thank you, Passle. All right.

HUNTER STEINITZ: Sorry, real quick. Erin.

Yes. Thanks, Hunter. Thank you, Chris. Good morning, everyone. For those of you that don't know me, I'm a TAC training and consultation coordinator for Allegheny County with IU3. Worked closely with Hunter on various things. She is involved with our transition coordinating council, especially this year.

Just listening to everybody and I don't know if this will help or not, but just working with the 42 districts, I have been at the IU15 years and as a former director of special education. The youth component and having a leadership network in the west is very important to me and trying to get that established. I know PYLN really strong in the east. And getting in contact and talking with schools who have wanted to do a chapter or something like that has been on interest. But we have always had hiccups and contact and haven't been able to get in contact with folks.

One of the things I'm thinking of as coordinator for our transition council is having Hunter come out and talk about this. And the reason I jumped in real quick, and I apologize, but just with Jack what he was saying about the integration of this process in early reach. So I think about it through the perspective of teaching kids early about advocacy and self-determination and all those kinds of things and how to be involved in groups like this from an early age. So just to really piggyback off of what Jack said to blend it into what the early reach coordinators can do and educate the teachers and transition coordinators that work with the youth in the districts about the importance of being involved in committees such as this, even as an adult, and how it can help get your voice heard or stand up for certain points that others might not have a voice for, but you're passionate about. Being able to integrate this into the education of

secondary transition process, if you will, to help students understand the importance of that self-determination, how to do self-advocacy, how to be involved in organizations like this at an early age starting with transition age would be a great way to do that.

So that's one thing I was thinking about in terms of educating and getting youth interest. And even possibly tapping into some of the parent network groups in some of the districts to either have Hunter or some of her other colleagues come out and talk with the parent interest groups and those groups at the districts to see do they have a son or daughter who is interested in doing this or contributing but doesn't know how. If that makes sense.

I don't know if that helps. That's how I was thinking about it and thinking of having some further discussion with Hunter in our region this school year.

Thank you.

CHRIS HARBERT: Thank you.

And being mindful of time, Jim.

I see your hand is raised.

Yeah. Thanks, Chris. I wanted to toss out an idea that I think it was Eva Gonzalez had at the Reading office. One of the ideas was to encourage youth to get involved if it's youth that have a requirement to do volunteer work or community service work, whether it be for a senior project or a requirement to go to college, she thought that the participation in the CAC could be used as part of that volunteer work. That's something to keep in mind to encourage students to get involved.

HAYLEY PENN: I love that idea. Thank you.

CHRIS HARBERT: Definitely.

Thank you. I'm very glad that this was so well received. So we're going to move into our break. We did run over time a little bit. But we will take a break and reconvene at 10:30.

HAYLEY PENN: Thank you.

CHRIS HARBERT: Thank you, Hunter, Hayley, and Natasha.

HUNTER STEINITZ: Thank you. And please take a moment and fill out that survey, if you are able to. That's really going to help us in putting together the work group to really bring youth voice into these CAC meetings. Thank you guys. Have a good break.

JACK HEWITT: I have a question and possible assignment for you, if that's okay. It's about our previous topic.

CHRIS HARBERT: Okay.

JACK HEWITT: Because my mind is going around. All of the adults that we have on our CAC, their drive is for the betterment of the disability community and the betterment of OVR. Youth, they're working toward their personal goals of life and advancement. And we got to give them something to get them to participate in a youth CAC.

And what I want to find out is is this an allowable expense? We have the CIL OVR internship

where they get a paid internship. Can we have an OVR CAC internship program so that each CAC that's interested can offer a paid internship so that way we're giving the youth an experience, we're giving them the opportunity to work, it's paid, it falls under our Pre-ETS so it will count for us. But we're giving the youth something that they can put on their resume. And they're just not volunteering their time. They're too young. They need to be working on work experiences.

It's a little work on my part as a DA to have an intern. But that's a possibility of attracting youth.

And I don't know if it's allowable or not. But it's an idea. So I don't know if you can find that out for me. And I can help too if need be. But it's an idea.

CHRIS HARBERT: Sure. Yeah.

PASSLE HELMINSKI: I totally agree with Jack. I know how hard it is for us to recruit youth on the Rehab Council, and that's a volunteer. So I totally agree with Jack. So thank you, Chris.

This is Darla. I had another idea. We already have youth ambassadors in a lot of our district offices and that's part of what their goal is, my understanding is, to go out and do outreach and a lot of the things that the ladies were talking about. So that might be another way that's already set up and you have got already students who are involved in those that this could just be another part of their outreach and advocacy. You have already -- we already have it built in house. So I think that might be an easier route to start with.

CHRIS HARBERT: Definitely.

So thank you, the three of you, for continuing to share ideas.

We're already moving forward with developing.

So I'm going to curb that discussion for -- the open discussion part of our agenda.

But I will revisit it on some of these additional points. But thank you Darla and Passle and Jack.

So all right. Hopefully, everyone is feeling a little refreshed from our break.

A lot of great discussion so far, and I appreciate everyone's participation and feedback.

The next item on our agenda, we have a CAC history and expectations to be presented by Mr. Jim Whitonis.

JIM WHITONIS: Thanks, Chris. I put together a PowerPoint because everybody loves a PowerPoint presentation.

I'm going to try to share that.

CHRIS HARBERT: You should be able to I think.

JIM WHITONIS: Okay. And forgive me, I am not used to Zoom. I'm more used to Teams. Is everybody seeing that?

CHRIS HARBERT: Yep.

And again, can you please make sure that everyone receives it afterwards for those of us who are not able to view the PowerPoint? Thank you.

JIM WHITONIS: Certainly, yes, I can do that. Thank you.

Jim, I can see it. Go ahead.

JIM WHITONIS: Thanks, Brian.

So the Pennsylvania OVR is the state agency responsible for the administration of the state's vocational rehabilitation program which is funded by a combination of federal and state moneys. The agency is a part of the Commonwealth's department of labor and industry and directed by the state board of vocational rehabilitation and an executive director. It serves Pennsylvania residents with vocational disabilities caused by physical or mental impairments and helps these individuals receive the services necessary to secure gainful employment.

15 district offices throughout the Commonwealth implement the program at the local level, along with six BBVS offices. According to the vocational rehabilitation state plan, the DOs are charged with supporting persons with disabilities determining their eligibility for OVR services, doing a vocational assessment, and together developing an individualized plan for employment. The local offices develop local level agreements with state and community human service agencies and new programs and service opportunities which will help individuals with the most significant disabilities achieve independence in employment.

Part of OVR's mission through the DOs is to promote the programs, the employment of people with disabilities, and the concept of nondiscrimination and equal access to community facilities and services.

Citizen participation in the OVR service delivery system is a mandate of the act of 1973 as amended. At the state level, the Pennsylvania rehabilitation council, PaRC, comprised of customers, service providers, and consumer advocates has been operating since 1981. Since 1984, it has been a goal of OVR to have a citizens advisory committee, a CAC, in each DO. Currently, there are 12 active CACs, 7 representing BVRS, 2 representing BBVS, and 3 representing combined. Five CACs are enactive. If any of that information is incorrect, please let me know.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the remaining active CACs successfully transitioned from in person meetings to virtual meetings. The CACs maintain a frequency of quarterly meetings as best practices in the handbook. The Erie CAC was the exception, but as of yesterday, they switched to quarterly.

The purpose of a CAC is to evaluate the service provision of OVR with the local district office and provide information and advice to the OVR district administrator, DAs, and the individuals they serve. A CAC should consult and advise, make suggestions on the needed rehabilitation services and programs in the district office service area, advise on proposed OVR programs, services, and regulations. Do, assist in the formation of positive relationships between OVR district office staff, persons with disabilities. And participate in the development of the state plans and OVR policies.

Although the organizational structure of a CAC should be informal, each should select a chairperson and secretary. The responsibilities of the chairperson is residing at meetings and planning agendas and meeting arrangements in cooperation with the district administrator.

Making committee assignments and other assignments as decided by the group.

The secretary would record minutes of each meeting and distribute minutes of meetings and other activities.

In some district offices, secretary support may be provided to the CAC by the district office staff.

The role of the OVR district administrator. The DA or the representative should attend CAC meetings or send another staff person as a representative.

Serve as an OVR resource person to CAC members. Serve as a link between CAC and OVR customers who might be resources for the CAC studies.

Assist CAC in arranging for necessary clerical support services. Provide information and training on OVR policies and procedures for CAC members.

Forward CAC minutes and reports to OVR and PaRC. And assist with work of CAC subcommittees as requested by the CAC.

In CACs that do not have a chairperson, the DA or the representative, generally an assistant DA or a vocational rehabilitation supervisor, have taken on many of the duties of the chair or secretary. However, efforts should be made to fill the roles.

Suggested CAC activities.

Following is a list of possible activities for CACs. The list is not all inclusive.

A, the first task of a CAC is to enable all members to become familiar where the OVR mission, programs, policies, district office personnel, and procedures, including eligibility determination, case closure criteria, the OVR jargon, et cetera.

The CAC may use the district office administrator to arrange for and coordinate training sessions for CAC members.

B, in order to gain insight into problems and ideas for possible OVR programs and procedural changes, the CAC may meet with or current or pass customers to gather the suggestions for solutions to problems they may have encountered.

C, the CAC may arrange for presentations from other local organizations serving people with disabilities and discuss with them ideas on how OVR might interact with them to improve employment and independent living opportunities for people with disabilities.

D, the CAC may meet with groups of people with disabilities to gather information on problems they face in daily living. This may identify possible impediments to people with disabilities in their area, which OVR could work to remove.

E, when CAC members have become familiar with OVR, they may plan and present informational program to family members with children with disabilities at the start of the educational

pathway. CAC members may continue to plan and present programs to high school students with disabilities and their family members, school guidance counselors, and groups of people with disabilities and support groups in order to pursue that part of OVR's mission.

F, the CAC may use the information in meetings and consumer groups and outreach to develop reports and recommendations on how to improve OVR services or remove barriers to employment if the community to be presented to OVR and PaRC. The CAC should expect to receive feedback from managers on input given.

G, CAC members are encouraged to attend OVR statewide meetings, for example, PaRC meetings, and keep informed through the activities through the minutes of the organizations. More detailed information on suggested CAC composition best practices and bylaws can be found in the CAC handbook. And also it is posted digitally on the PaRC website listed here and it was listed in the chat earlier. It is in the resource drop down menu, along with the minutes from the active CACs.

Thank you. I will open to questions and comments. There are probably a lot of CAC members here who have been involved with the CACs much longer than I have. If I have history they want to share as well, I would love to have that shared.

CHRIS HARBERT: Thank you, Jim. Are there any questions or comments on Jim's presentation. Hi, Angel, go ahead.

ANGEL TORRES: I would like to say that the bylaws that he went over are very important because getting help from your local DO is important to keep the CACs going. The clerical help that they provide, if the CAC doesn't have a secretary, it's so important. We utilize that now with the Reading DO since we don't have a secretary.

So to keep CACs going and to continue growing, having the DOs, the regional DOs help the CAC in that manner is so important. So I just needed to put that out there.

JIM WHITONIS: Thanks, Angel.

ANGEL TORRES: Thank you.

JIM WHITONIS: Passle?

PASSLE HELMINSKI: I agree with what he said. Jack Hewitt is an excellent DA to work with here. He is also our secretary.

And we can communicate on a regular basis between our meetings too. So that's very important to reconnect it with your DA. Thank you.

JIM WHITONIS: Thanks, Passle. Suzanne?

NICHOLE WADE: Suzanne, you're muted.

Okay. Now I should be unmuted. Sorry about that.

Yeah, I agree with everything. It really is important to have a good working relationship. And fortunately in BBVS and BVRS in Philadelphia, we have very active input from the DOs. And also one thing that we have done is we have implemented that LIN Heitz, who is a member of our

CAC, also gives a report from PaRC at each meeting now. We have sort of instituted that so that that's always part of the agenda. And that might be helpful for other offices as well.

JIM WHITONIS: Thanks, Suzanne.

Brian, go ahead.

Thanks, Jim. This is Brian from Reading again. I just wanted to get some clarification. And I agree with what everyone is saying. At our CAC at Reading, obviously, we don't have a, as you know, a secretary.

So my question is just for us and for the rest of the CACs if they're having this problem, can our district administrator, she's very busy, we have a good OVR going on, a good CAC, and she's currently our interim secretary. Is it -- under your handbook, is it possible for her to have someone else at the district office be our secretary and/or is it an allowable expense for the district office to hire out a secretary to get someone else to take the minutes?

JIM WHITONIS: That's a good question. If the district office has the clerical staff available to do the secretarial work, that's allowed. But I don't think they can pay to have someone do it.

I guess the reason I ask that, Jim, is under the handbook, it says that it's allowable expense that they can hire someone outside of their district office to be the secretary or take those minutes.

Similar to someone in the CIL or another organization. And that's what I was reading in the handbook. That's why I asked.

In Philadelphia, clerical staff sets up the Teams meetings and sends out the minutes and things. And I would assume that this is just done under at the behest of the district administrator. And so I would think that since the -- this is a delegated task, I don't see why they shouldn't be allowed to get paid to do it because it's just part of their duties. They're not asking to take on these duties. These are just sort of duties that are delegated. delegated.

And that's been the way it's been done for decades.

Good morning. I'm Cathy Long. I had my hand up, but nobody is telling me to talk. So I'm going to talk.

Yeah, I couldn't get unmuted when -- before the break. But I got out and now I got in and realized I had to hit okay because of the recording and stuff. But I wanted to say good morning. I'm chair of the Harrisburg BBRS and BVRS. We had an assistant chair that stopped coming when he became assistant chair. We don't have a secretary either, and that's me. So we're working on things. It's very sparsely -- we don't have a whole lot of people that come. But I keep coming. I have been on the CAC since I retired 11 years ago.

And that's all I have to say.

CHRIS HARBERT: Thank you, Cathy. And good morning. And the co-chair, that was Joe Romeo?

Yeah. He disappeared. I think he got a job, and that's fine.

CHRIS HARBERT: Sure.

It is what it is.

CHRIS HARBERT: Thank you.

Yep. Thank you.

KIM BASKETT: Hi. It's Kim Baskett, the district administrator here in Reading. I wanted to jump in and say that I know for quite some time as far back as I can remember, we did have a clerical staff here in our district office taking the minutes and sending out the correspondence to all of the members. Unfortunately, over the last couple of years, like so many other OVR offices, we're very short staffed. And that includes clerical staff. So I took over as secretary temporarily a couple of months ago just to help my clerical staff focus on customer case work, which I felt takes priority at least for now.

So I'm hoping to get some of those positions filled. But as everyone probably can appreciate, that takes a while.

And it definitely takes some time. And there's the training part of all of that.

So it's an honest situation that I expect to continue for the long term, but just for the short term, that's where we're at right now. I want customer services to keep going.

And that's the priority for my clerical staff for what little clerical staff I have right now.

JIM WHITONIS: Kim, while I have you, I want to circle back to Brian's question. As a DA, could you procure someone to do the secretarial work? I'm even thinking could a customer of OVR be paid to do something like that as an apprenticeship or an internship or something?

KIM BASKETT: It's an interesting idea. We haven't actually talked about that idea before. So I really can't answer that without looking at the bylaws and really seeing whether or not that's something that would be permissible and how we would go about that. Would that person need to be an actual member of the CAC? And how --

just the logistics of if we were allowed to pay that person, how we would do that. Regardless of whether or not they were a customer or not, current customer or not.

But it's something I definitely would like to look into. Sure. I'm open to options.

This is Darla. I wanted to jump in there. You also have to remember you're dealing with union. So you might end up getting some pushback from the union folks.

Our CA3 is assigned to do our notes for our staff meetings and some of our other meetings. So it would be just an assignment on my part if I chose to do that. So I think we're making it harder than it needs to be. But those are just my two cents.

JIM WHITONIS: Thanks.

This is Danielle. I don't know if you can hear me now. I was not able to unmute as well this morning.

CHRIS HARBERT: Yes, we can hear you. Thank you, Danielle.

I wanted to give feedback on that. We do have the CA3s that helps with the notes and it's

wonderful. I was just thinking as we're talking about that, because we have also had an annuitant in our office part time because we have had the needs with not having clerical full time. So I don't know if that's even possible. But that was just an idea of having an annuitant or if anybody was interested in doing that with the CAC and helping with that.

CHRIS HARBERT: Thank you.

JIM WHITONIS: Daniel, Pittsburgh BBVS? Am I remembering correctly?

That's correct.

JIM WHITONIS: I think I need to get minutes from your group and get them on to PaRC's website. So while I have you, if you could pass the most recent minutes on to me, I would appreciate it.

Okay. Great. Thanks.

JIM WHITONIS: Thank you.

CHRIS HARBERT: Thank you.

Any further discussion, comments, questions for Jim?

All right, Jim. Thanks a lot for your time today.

JIM WHITONIS: Thank you, everyone. Justice justice all right. Our next item on the agenda, I will be covering and presenting and providing an overview of the state board and the rehabilitation council.

NICHOLE WADE: Chris, Hunter has her hand up.

CHRIS HARBERT: I'm sorry.

Hunter, please go ahead.

HUNTER STEINITZ: Hey, sorry. Just on the last thing about taking notes. I just want to throw out there that a lot of formats like Zoom here have a really nice AI note taking software that I have used in other venues to help with the process of trying to take notes for meetings. It's in your settings. I would encourage you to investigate them. But they can be really helpful for taking notes if you don't have a person to do that. That's all.

CHRIS HARBERT: Thank you for that, Hunter.

Yeah, if anyone would like to try that out, please feel free.

All right. If there's no more discussion on these topics, I will come right into mine, which is an overview of the OVR State board and the Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council.

All right. So the Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, we have two mandated organizations that focus on the direction, operation, and management and efficient service delivery of publicly funded vocational rehabilitation activities and services within Pennsylvania. Each of these organizations ensure OVR's alignment with the respective state and Federal laws, regulations, priorities, initiatives, and that the leadership aligns with OVR's mission to assist Pennsylvanians are disabilities to secure and maintain employment and independence.

The organizations are the State Board of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Pennsylvania

Rehabilitation Council.

The Board and Council were each established by separate state and federal authorities to serve in purposes special to the aspects of agency alignment and requirements. Both the Board and Council may operate in ways Commonwealth agencies are not permitted, as members serving are volunteer subject matter experts in disability issues, business, and vocational rehabilitation. And they are also members of the public.

The OVR State Board is a Governor appointed chain of command entity within the PA Department of Labor and Industry tasked to administer OVR.

However, being a volunteer organization, the Board has delegated the administration of the day-to-day operations to the Secretary of Labor and Industry, Nancy Walker, while retaining policy approval for all policies that impact the delivery of vocational rehabilitation services within PA.

The oversight structure of today's State Board was established by the PA Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1988. This action repealed the vocational rehabilitation act of 1945 and was established by the general assembly to assure alignment, responsiveness, and accountability within Commonwealth governmental operations and service delivery.

The Rehab Council is also a governor-appointed entity.

However, its duties were established under the Rehabilitation Act Title 4 of the workforce innovation and opportunity act. The council's partnership with OVR is advisory as the Rehab Council helps ensure compliance, efficiency, and service delivery that it occurs throughout Pennsylvania.

The Rehab Act provided councils the ability to provide advice, support, and make recommendations to VR agencies in carrying out complex tasks by incorporating council members in work groups and involvement sharing expertise, participating in the involvement in the administration and operation of OVR.

The Council serves OVR in many roles, such as VR and community subject matter experts and advocates to ensure that decision makers are aware of the needs of the program that it specifically relates to funding and staffing.

I'm going to give a few live working examples of each the State Board and the Rehab Council. Before I do that, are there any questions or comments before I continue?

Thank you. Passle?

PASSLE HELMINSKI:

Pennsylvania is the only state that has a board separate from the rehab council.

CHRIS HARBERT: I know it's Pennsylvania and Georgia. But yes, those are the only two.

PASSLE HELMINSKI: Thank you for correcting me.

And then for the Rehab Council, we have to have a certain amount of membership in order to facilitate your federal match. That's very important. So I want to encourage people to look at

our website and apply for positions. Please do. Thank you.

CHRIS HARBERT: Yes, absolutely. So thank you very much, Passle. I did not include that. There are categories of representation to represent the diverse customers throughout the Commonwealth.

The Rehab Council, they're very active, especially now in the recruitment. Some members of representation, I have been with OVR for a year now this month, categories of representation has been vacant up until one of the last recent meetings, I know Passle was there. So they're always recruiting. They're doing very well actually. So thank you very much. Yes, if anyone is interested in that, those categories of representation are on the Rehab Council site.

So ultimately, being mindful of time, the Rehab Council represents consumers, advocates, and others advocating for persons with disabilities in vocational rehabilitation agency involvement to consult regarding the development, implementation, and revision of representative best practices and recommends to state policies, procedures, and other VR-related activities.

On the other side, the State Board provides administration, supervision, and control of OVR with the delegation to the L&I secretary.

The State Board establishes the overall agency expectations, the goals, ensuring the delivery of services as the agency responsible within the Commonwealth.

So in short, that is the comparison of the Rehab Council and the OVR State Board. They are two separate entities specifically for separate functions and purposes. However, there is a lot of overlap as far as the nature on working things to move forward for progression.

So I'm going to stop my presentation at this time. If there are any questions, please feel free to reach out to me directly. Email me, chat me, call me. I'm pretty available.

So thank you for your time this morning.

Eric Orr, you did see you put a chat in. We'll get to that after the next presentation.

I will turn it over to Kim who is going to present an overview of the OVR case process. So Kim, whenever you're ready.

KIM BASKETT: Thanks, Chris. Thank you, Nichole. I was just going to say I don't think I have displayed anything on Zoom before. I'm so used to Teams. Thank you, Nichole, for being on top of that.

So I really love how Jim gave this nice lead in to what I'm going to talk about for a few minutes here when he reviewed the CAC history and expectations. And expectations meaning in terms of case process, all CAC members should understand what the case process is for OVR. I think especially as committees made up of people from different entities and different perspectives, we all need to have a good understanding of what the process is. Because as we get feedback from whether it be current or former customers, from stakeholders, from citizens in general and other stakeholders, we need to have that perspective of all right, so where is this person coming from, what could they possibly be experiencing that maybe what their feedback is being

based on.

And just like many other things we deal with in life, it's not simple. It's not as straight forward as we probably would like for it to be. But I can tell you that we at OVR talk a lot about especially in the last year or two rapid engagement, getting individuals into services as quickly as possible so that we could make them eligible, provide the necessary rehabilitative services they need to be successful in employment and get to the successful outcomes.

I will just preface this by saying this is a very high level overview of the OVR case process. There is an awful lot that goes on behind the scenes that our counselors, clerical staff, supervisors, early reach coordinators, and everyone in our management people all contribute to the OVR case process to keep things moving.

And our fiscal folks as well.

So it is absolutely a team effort. And this overview really is just pretty high level so that everyone has an understanding.

Those of you that have been around OVR for a long time and especially I know I'm talking to the DAs and ADAs and other OVR staff, you all know this already so I apologize for covering something that you know well. But I think that it's really important for all CAC members to be familiar with what this process is and understanding how it goes.

Next slide, please, Nichole.

So I know this is a little bit of a busy slide. And for those of you that can't see it, you will see it when Chris gets all the information out to everyone, all of the presentation materials. But this is a little bit of a flowchart of when a referral is submitted to OVR through the eligibility determination.

So this is just actually the first part of the OVR process. Starting over on the left, you see that we start with a referral that is submitted.

And that's either the individual can submit a referral themselves online, they can do that through the CareerLink, through their CareerLink account. Or they can do it in person or by phone directly with OVR staff as well.

So there's several different ways to submit that referral.

The referral is pretty basic information. Demographic information. And that gets them into our system so that we are notified that that individual is interested in applying for OVR services.

When that referral is submitted, we have five days to assign that referral to an available counselor. And once that counselor receives that referral, then they have five days to contact the individual to start their application process. They should be meeting with them. Here in Reading, I like for my staff to -- my counselors to meet with individuals in person for that first meeting. I think it really sets the tone for a good working relationship. It also expedites things as far as getting paperwork signed, the forms and whatnot that are needed. And I find that doing a lot of that by phone or virtual meetings kind of slows down the process. We don't want

to slow down the process. We want that rapid engagement model to continue on right from the very beginning.

So after the counselor meets with the customer to complete their application and start their case, their application is started. From that point, so now we're talking ten days, right? So from that point, now we're in a 60-day compliance period to determine eligibility. So counselor does have up to 60 days per RSA regulations to determine a customer eligible for services.

They do that by gathering information from health care providers, from self-report, and maybe even counselor observation. There are some conditions that allow for counselor observation.

And I could tell you that we all try very hard to cut down that 60-daytime line to as little as possible. In a couple of slides here, I'm going to give you tips and tricks here on how to work together with customers to expedite that process, that eligibility determination.

So this is just the beginning from referral, application, and through eligibility. It could take up to 60 days. We like for it to take a whole lot less than that. But that gives you an idea of what's required in order to get a case started.

Next slide, please.

So here are a couple of tips to keep things moving forward. Because like I mentioned, rapid engagement is really important. We want to make sure that customers are prepared to schedule an intake appointment soon after completing a referral. We do get a lot of folks that apply for services and we get the referral assigned to a counselor within five days. That counselor is reaching out to a customer to schedule an appointment. And the customer says oh, I'm not ready, can we do this next month or can we do this over the summer or something like that. We want to make sure that potential customers understand that if they're going to apply for services, we really want to get the process started for them.

Our system is set up so that we can do that rapidly for them now. And we want to do that in every case possible.

Understanding that sometimes things come up and the customer needs to choose a date a little bit further out in the future. But as much as possible, we are expecting our counselors to get that customer scheduled for their intake appointment within 15 days at the most of their contact.

Customers can also help the process along. And I think this is where the CAC comes into play. As you're talking to potential customers or current customers, encouraging them to be prepared for their intake appointment. What really helps the process move along here is if the customer shows up to their intake appointment with information that's really important to get their case going, such as a photo ID.

That's really important because a counselor can't move a case beyond eligibility without the photo ID.

Any income information or if they're receiving Social Security benefits, to have evidence of

that.

Any medical documentation.

When you go to the doctor, for a doctor's office visit and they can print out an office visit summary. Or maybe you have been to the doctor recently and they have a discharge report or something like that. Lots of hospital and doctor systems, medical systems now have online portals that you can sign up for an account. And that's something that someone can access before or even during their appointment so that they can get that information to the counselor. That would be extremely helpful in moving along to eligibility determination.

And of course having the names and addresses of all health care providers. Because our counselors are still going to send out requests for medical documentation, medical records to all providers and having that information up front is extremely helpful in getting that big picture, getting the full picture of what the individual might be dealing with.

Another thing is to respond to OVR staff attempts to contact promptly. So if an OVR staff person counselor or supervisor contacts a customer, that they are staying in contact with their counselor. Keeping their appointments. And if they can't, if something comes up, it's life. We understand. But to just reschedule as soon as possible to keep things going.

And this we run into quite a bit when people move or they change their phone number or their email address changes and we can't get ahold of them. So we want to make sure that any changes in their contact information or their employment status, sometimes we find out that they got a job early on in the process before the counselor could even really start working with them. But maybe it's not their long-term job, it's something they had to take in the interim. And that's okay.

But that's something that they need to report to their counselor so that the counselor is informed and can plan services accordingly.

Next slide.

So after that first part where I talked about referral and application and eligibility determination of eligibility, then we move to the individual plan for employment, or IPE.

This is a list of some of the IPE case statuses that you might find a customer in depending on what services that they are requiring. You can see just there's counseling and guidance, physical restoration. We get a lot of folks who have -- who are in need of hearing aids that are in status 16 for physical restoration. They might be already working, but need hearing aids to continue being successful at their job.

There are several different training statuses as well. So from a high school, that would be status 17.

Training for secondary education, all the way up through bachelor's degree or higher.

So if someone had said to you my counselor told me I'm in status 14, I don't know what that means, that means that the person is working together in counseling and guidance sessions with

their counselor to help determine the best path forward for their successful employment.

Next slide, please.

So this is something that we talk a lot about here in the Reading DO. We think that collaboration is extremely important. And it's sometimes not just the counselor and the customer, although certainly those are the two most important people in the process. But there are other important people in the process as well. That could include family members or other support staff that is customer utilizes, any other services that might be part of their support team. And it's important to talk to the customer about hey, inviting some of those people if they would like to some of their meetings with the OVR counselor. That collaboration helps keep everyone on the same page. It keeps everyone moving in the same direction. And working together to determine appropriate services. And that leads to active engagement.

We know that active engagement can lead to quicker case progress because things like we might be waiting for medical records. Well, if the customer is actively engaged with the counselor, then they might actually be able to intervene if we have requested records from a medical provider a couple of times and they're not responding. The counselor may reach out to the customer and say hey, I have tried contacting your doctor's office, they haven't sent anything. Do you think maybe you could give them a call and see if you can ask if they can send something. Here's the fax information for our office.

So quicker active engagement often leads to quicker case progress.

And quicker case progress means more successful outcomes because we are moving along in the process at that rapid engagement model in mind. And getting those services that the individual needs so that they can be successfully employed.

And doing so in a timely manner.

Next slide.

I just have my contact information there. Like I said, this was a really quick overview of what the process is from a rapid engagement perspective, particularly with the referral on through eligibility and then developing an appropriate IPE in the status that the customer needs to be in order to have the correct services in place for them so that they can be successful.

And just some tips and tricks on maybe encouraging those things that they can be doing on their end to help with the process to be an active participant. Because more active they are in their case process, the more success that we see with customers.

Does anybody have any questions?

CHRIS HARBERT: Thank you very much, Kim. I definitely learned a couple of things out of that. Whether it was intended to train agency staff or not, I have definitely learned a couple of things. I'm glad that I have that document. I will be sending that around as well whenever I pass out the meeting materials.

KIM BASKETT: Thanks, Chris.

CHRIS HARBERT: Brian, I see your hand raised.

BRIAN D'AMICO: This is Brian from Reading again. I want to thank you for doing that. Obviously, Kim is at our district office. I think that was a great presentation. It was very helpful.

Two things I wanted to say. One, I would like to see that presentation on OVR's website or the PaRC website. And kind of with that narrative also, I think that would be very helpful to customers, almost similar to a webinar where they could pull that up and see that.

If Kim wanted to narrate that or someone else wanted to. I think that was very helpful. A very good presentation.

The other comment or question I had is in that presentation, Kim, it didn't mention anything about returning customers. Do they go through the same flowchart as a referral?

KIM BASKETT: Yeah. They do. Returning customers go through the same process. We still have to determine eligibility. If we have records for a returning customer, we might be able to use those records that we have, which could help speed up the process.

But it's the same process for each person when they apply.

BRIAN D'AMICO: But their past information should still be in your system, though, correct?

KIM BASKETT: If it's recent enough, sure.

BRIAN D'AMICO: Sure. Okay.

Yeah. Very good. Thank you.

KIM BASKETT: Sure.

And I do see that there is a question in the chat, Chris, if I can go ahead and address that from Teresa? So she asked if VRCs -- do VRCs ask if connected to a waiver with ODP or office of long-term living, et cetera. And proceed to ask if health choices waiver, which is managed care organization.

So our counselors do ask if the customers have a waiver services. I can tell you that a lot of times, they don't know that they have waiver services.

And sometimes that's not apparent right away unless the case manager or the supports coordinator is actually the one referring them. Then the counselor knows right from the get go. So I know that the systems can be very complicated and a lot of moving parts and folks don't always know exactly where they're getting their funding from for certain services. So that is something that the VRCs do ask about.

I hope that answered your question. Sure, you're welcome.

CHRIS HARBERT: Thank you.

Any other questions or comments or feedback for Kim?

All right. And again, I will make sure Kim's PowerPoint is distributed after the meeting.

All right. We are on the final portion of our meeting agenda already. I feel it's been pretty engaging. We're moving right along.

So this next -- excuse me.

The next portion, I wanted to allot some time for an open discussion for our chairs and co-chairs. I'm sure district administrators or assistant district administrators could contribute to this open discussion as well.

So I don't have any plan as far as who, what. It's really a chance for the chairs and co-chairs to speak with one other, speak with us agency staff to share any discussion of topics, concerns, any local updates you may have. If you need some advice, if you would to provide some advice, whatever it may be. We can continue some discussion on youth CAC members.

Mr. Eric Orr, he did put a question in the chat. And I can read or Eric, you can come off mute and ask the chairs or co-chairs yourself.

Before I get or read Eric's chat, Brian, did you raise your hand again? Or is that from before? I'm sorry.

BRIAN D'AMICO: No. I was going to address some comments.

Or Eric, I saw Eric's chat earlier. If he wanted to go ahead.

CHRIS HARBERT: I can read it quick. And Brian, if you would like to first start off.

And I couldn't think if I was presented with this topic from Eric, I couldn't think of a better audience or a place to ask this.

So Eric Orr. He said hello, as an up and coming CAC chair, does this group have any advice for him and also what's the first thing he should do as a CAC chair coming up for 2025, I think. Brian?

BRIAN D'AMICO: Yeah. The one piece of advice I was going to give him was you could attend one of our -- another CAC or you're welcome to join our CAC to see -- attend one of our meetings just to see what we do, how we go about it. I think any of the people in here, any of the CACs would be the same.

That's kind of one of the first things I would do is try to attend one of the other CACs just to see what's going on.

That's really all I had for that.

ERIC ORR: Thank you very much. That's a good idea.

Brian, I wanted to ask for Eric, what CAC office are you from? And how often do you guys meet?

BRIAN D'AMICO: Yeah. Thank you, Stacey. We're at the Reading district office. And we're about an hour outside of Philly. And we meet on a quarterly basis. So four times a year. Our stuff is being posted to the PaRC website. So we have our minutes up there, our agenda. And I'm not sure if we have our meeting times yet. But we're going to start putting our meeting notices up there also.

But Eric, you could email me or Angel is our vice chair or Kim Baskett is our district administrator. Any one of us, we can send you the information.

And I think it would be helpful for you if you join a CAC meeting and see how we go about it. And we're basically discussing everything we're discussing here, just on a district office level. So yeah. Hopefully that's helpful.

ERIC ORR: Yes, it is.

Thanks for the advice. I'm not sure if you guys can hear me or not.

BRIAN D'AMICO: We can hear you, Eric.

CHRIS HARBERT: Thank you.

I saw a number of hands. I see Angel, Suzanne, Passle. I see you, but I don't see a hand anymore. So please open discussion for our chairs and co-chairs.

ANGEL TORRES: I would say to Eric just attend some of the PaRC and State Board meetings and stay abreast of the current initiatives being discussed.

For the Reading which we cover also, CAC, I think the next meeting is scheduled for September 10th. We do quarterly meetings. Usually -- well, it's always 1:00. Virtually, of course.

And concerning this, I'm glad that we got together today and plan on meeting again in the future. Whether it be once a year or twice a year or whatever is planned. But to discuss any possible standard operating procedures that we could incorporate with the CAC.

Of course, social media is a big one that we need to discuss. And also implement because as with Hayley and Hunter and Natasha, that is something the youth are big on.

They are big social media. They just eat it up constantly. And passing that out to them in posts, Facebook or whatever manner. But social media is a big topic that needs to be addressed.

And I like the idea of the mentor ship with the youth.

Bringing them along so that they understand what the CAC is about, what OVR is about, and promoting it in the future.

And recruitment.

Recruitment, that's part of it.

And finding ways to encourage current customers, previous customers, future customers to become CAC members. And to improve OVR services, which is what our goal is.

And again, with the -- for the chairs and current chairs, the ones that aren't here, don't have access to some of the PaRC meetings or the State Board meetings, having the transcripts or even the recordings, if possible, sent to them so that they could see these things and read them and understand what's going on with the current initiatives, et cetera, that are being discussed at these meetings. Thank you.

And And I would also say --

this is Suzanne. I'm sorry about butting in quickly. I have to leave. I have a doctor's appointment this afternoon.

I wanted to say a couple of things before I get off.

First of all, thank you for having this meeting. I think it was a really good meeting, well

organized. And thank you so much for bringing us all together.

The other thing I would like to say to the gentleman who is going to become a CAC chair is don't be too discouraged if you don't always get good attendance. Keep going. And encourage people to come. You might want to consider maybe even sending a notice to various groups that you're involved in if you're involved at all with your CIL, send them an email.

Let them know that you're going to be starting as the CAC chair and inviting people to the meeting.

And take the opportunity to let people know where ever you are. But don't -- sometimes CAC meetings are not as well attended as we would like. But then they come -- then people start coming again. There are times when you will have a lot of people show up, and there will be times when you won't have as many. But don't be discouraged. Keep going and good luck.

PASSLE HELMINSKI: This is Passle. I concur with everybody's comments here. We just switched to quarterly meetings, so we're going to be the third Monday instead of the second Monday in October. So please join us. Or reach out to us if you have any questions.

Thank you.

CHRIS HARBERT: Thank you, Passle.

And yes, Eric, Passle is with Erie. If you need any contact information, you can let Jim or myself know.

Brian, I see your hand is raised again. Or your hand is raised. You can go ahead. I'm sorry. My views are a little off.

BRIAN D'AMICO: No, no.

You're fine.

One of the things that I wanted to hear from other CACs, two issues that we have at our CAC at the Reading district office is, one, as some of the members here already talked about is getting membership to our CAC. I'm wondering how other CACs are dealing with that on trying to get their outreach on how to get members to join the CAC committee.

And then the other thing is in our office on the service side, Kim and her staff are doing a great job. We have --

our referrals are up. We have a lot of referrals. The challenge we face it seems to me in our office is workers, employment, getting the counselors -- we have a lot of referrals where counselors are, for lack of a better term, inundated with referrals. So how do we solve the employment problem on our end? Those are two things that we have a challenge right now is getting members to join our CAC and getting workers to work in our OVR office.

So I'm wondering how other CACs are dealing with those challenges.

CHRIS HARBERT: Thank you, Brian. Do any CAC chairs, co-chairs have any insight regarding membership, how your office is handling outreach, recruitment, retention? Any ideas or sharing of information on what you might be doing, challenging, obstacles, things like that?

Passle?

PASSLE HELMINSKI: In our meetings, we always have people from the Centers for Independent Living and other organizations attending. So we always ask them to reach out for us, encourage people. We have open slots. On an ongoing basis, we do that.

Chris, I wanted to say --

this is Stacey Collins from the York office. I wanted to share with the group how we solicit to try to get more recruitment into our CAC. It hasn't been successful, but it might be successful in another office.

What we have tried is to solicit to our counselors and letting them know that when they're speaking with their customers, letting them know about CAC, even soliciting as a way of beefing up their resume with having experience as maybe a co-chair or member of CAC or a secretary, a way that would help them with their resume to see if that would draw them in to join CAC. And I have to say for our office specifically, we don't have a lot of consumers or OVR customers and things of that nature. We're mainly of community providers and businesses that is predominantly in our CAC group that we have, our committee. But those were some of the ways that we were trying to have folks. And Eric is from our CIL. I know that they do, along with the businesses that's in our office in CAC, they are soliciting to folks that they know to join CAC in our office.

But I was going to say those are just the various ways that we have tried to have more consumer buy in to CAC.

CHRIS HARBERT: Thank you, Stacey.

BRIAN D'AMICO: Thank you.

I couldn't find the raised hand in here. We have developed a brochure for the CAC, which is helpful. We're in the process of updating it because we had a couple of changes. That's handy to provide to counselors that they can give some written material about our organization for recruitment for help in recruiting.

CHRIS HARBERT: Excellent.

I think that would be a good little show case.

BRIAN D'AMICO: I think Angel has a hand up.

CHRIS HARBERT: Thank you.

ANGEL TORRES: Something that came to mind with Jim's presentation about the handbook. About interviewing current customers or previous customers about their experience with OVR. If that would be an avenue to get the foot in the door with some of these customers and enlighten them about the CAC and their interest in becoming a member of the CAC.

That's just an idea that I just thought about.

But I think that would be a good way to just get some insight from these customers where they're thinking concerning the CAC would be.

That's all I have. Thank you.

CHRIS HARBERT: Absolutely.

And when I do send the meeting materials, you will see PaTTAN, the documents that came from PaTTAN, the three did a very good job typing up the youth CAC member position description. It looks very much like a state government job description. And they also did a great job, the mentor, they typed up a very inclusive position description for that.

And if you heard the conversation I was having the Jack Hewitt regarding internship potential and coming with this discussion resume builder, skill development, I very much see a connection for youth, even -- I will be 35 in December. But even individuals middle aged, my age-ish, skill development, skill building.

BRIAN D'AMICO: Lucky guy.

CHRIS HARBERT: Ryan still busts on me. Ryan is about ten years older than me. I will leave it at that. Ryan says I'm officially middle aged once I hit 35. We'll see. We'll see.

But yes, staying on track.

Great ideas.

Great ideas across the board, especially some more tailored specific needs.

Are there any other concerns, topics for discussion, any local updates on some accomplishments your CAC or your office has been pursuing or achieved?

BRIAN D'AMICO: Chris, this is Brian again. I had a question for you and maybe Jim also. Is there anyone at the OVR level at the Central Office or maybe PaRC that would be willing or able to investigate, research on doing a public service announcement video? And not so much for TV, but similar to thatthat. They could do a PSA and put it on your website or PaRC's website or at our CAC, we're looking to start a Facebook page.

So I think if someone similar to what Kim did with her presentation, if we possibly had someone that could do a public service announcement like that and say hey, this is what the CAC is, this is what we're looking for, we would like you to join. I think that might be helpful and a way to go.

Any thoughts from you guys, Chris or Jim? Or anyone else?

CHRIS HARBERT: Yeah. I think that's the way things are turning as far as short media clips of a public service announcement promoting.

Absolutely.

The Rehab Council, they have a social media committee.

BRIAN D'AMICO: That would be great.

CHRIS HARBERT: A stand alone committee alone very focused on outreach, everything involved with that. And they monitor the analytics and the data behind it. They do a great job.

BRIAN D'AMICO: As Angel talked about earlier, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt you. But he was talking about the youth and people are really into media. Nowadays, it's all about

Facebook and Tik-Tok and YouTube. So if they have that social media committee, if they could come up with maybe a PSA announcement, we could post that somewhere. And like you said, it's a short little clip that however long, someone could watch that and say hey, this is what the CAC is about. It might interest them.

CHRIS HARBERT: Passle?

PASSLE HELMINSKI: Chris, are you going to take it back to the social media? Or should I take it back?

CHRIS HARBERT: I mean, you definitely can. The CAC -- no, no. Hey, you're the Council member. You're the CAC chair.

I'm here for you. I can definitely support -- did Michelle leave? Is Michelle out?

PASSLE HELMINSKI: She's --

CHRIS HARBERT: I can't remember.

PASSLE HELMINSKI: She's not the chair anymore.

CHRIS HARBERT: Okay.

PASSLE HELMINSKI: Her term is up. If somebody applies for her term -- I think she's still advising. I think the new chair isn't as knowledgeable as Michelle Leahy is. So I will reach out after this call, reach out to Todd and Michelle Gerick and tell them it was suggested we do this. If they need anything, they can get -- they will have the minutes from this, right?

CHRIS HARBERT: So I do not have staff typing minutes. But I do have a transcription services and I'm going to form that up, make sure it's included in the meeting materials. But yes, the Rehabilitation Council, they're very open to cross media cross sharing to raise a joint awareness for a larger achievement.

But yeah. And if local offices or if local CACs, if tasking did young youth members with the social media things, if that works well for them, yeah.

Sure. Passle?

PASSLE HELMINSKI: I would say our local CAC is very active. For example, when the CareerLink was moving their offices, we were very active of going there and making sure everything was accessible, giving feedback. We do more than just have our Zoom calls. And I think my friend has -- Andrew has his hand up too and I will defer to Andrew. I will mute myself for a second, Andrew.

ANDREW PENNINGTON: You don't have to do that at all. I was just going to say that I believe it was today that I saw Linked In quite literally something from the PA Rehab Council endorsing local Citizen Advisory Committees and urging people to join the local Citizens Advisory Committee and had a link through Linked In as to where to find them. So the PaRC is already actively doing this. But it would be something that I'm sure they may be interested in forwarding.

PASSLE HELMINSKI: And I will reach out. Did you check the Facebook page too, Andrew?

ANDREW PENNINGTON: No, I did not.

PASSLE HELMINSKI: Okay. I will ask them when we get off the call. I will put a phone call in. Thank you, Andrew. I haven't been there yet today.

Thank you.

CHRIS HARBERT: Thank you, Andrew.

Rehab Council raise awareness and have a very good outreach working with them every day, I say with a smile, and I'm lucky to say that.

So any other updates or any other chairs, co-chairs who would like to share, discuss anything?

All right. Thank you. I'm going to check the chat one more time. Middle age starts at 40.

Thank you.

All right.

BRIAN D'AMICO: Chris, this is Brian again. I wanted to see if anyone reiterate again did anyone have information on -- or maybe you, Chris, or Jim or Passle if you have any information on how to recruit more workers at our OVR, more counselors. It seems like we're, like I said before, we have a number of referrals, our referrals are high. We're doing well there. The challenge is our counselors have a full load or overload you could say in some cases.

So we are challenged with having workers and where to get those workers. So any thoughts there?

CHRIS HARBERT: Sure. Well, I know if you hear Ryan speak or deliver any larger message or a presentation, he always hits staffing, OVR staffing being a priority. There are a number of things the executive team at central office is working through in the staffing realm.

In the eastern part of the state, as you heard Ryan say, they're looking at bachelor's level VRC positions. I have been with the flat funding and I have had a couple competing deadlines or conflicting deadlines recently. I can share some more specifically with you on that.

Nothing that you wouldn't have heard Ryan say at any sort of public message delivery. But speaking with your DA, your ADA, they're going to know the complement, the current complement, current case loads.

Definitely ask them if they have recruitments in place, if there's interviews, things like that. Having that line of communication directly to your DA or ADA, they have that communication directly to Ryan or directly to Dawn or Marci and directly to Ryan.

As far as any new ideas right now, I'm kind of limited on proposing any new ideas just through the governmental chain of command reporting structure, things like that.

Continue working and sharing with your DA and ADA because they have that direct influence and communication to the directors right up to executive director Ryan.

I wish I had a better answer for you, though.

BRIAN D'AMICO: No, Chris, that's fine. I appreciate that.

I just wanted to see what other CACs, their thought process, what they were doing. We do have

good communication with our district administrator, Kim.

Obviously, one of the things I recommended a while back and I still do is eliminating the master's degree qualification or requirement, I should say, and going down to a bachelor's degree. That's one thing I know our governor has done some of that already. I think that will open the field up to a lot more prospects with staffing.

I think there's a big challenge that we have, and I'm sure it's not just, like you were talking about, not just our office, our district office across the state, it is getting the workers. So I think going down to a bachelor's degree would be helpful. Other than that, we do have good communication. We're trying to see how we can solve the two problems we have with getting CAC members and also with getting OVR staffing.

So I appreciate your thoughts on that. Thank you.

CHRIS HARBERT: Yeah. And thank you for sharing. Jack?

JACK HEWITT: I was just going to chime in a little bit with the district office kind of answer when it comes to complement and hiring for Brian.

And that's as an agency, when we went to the master's degree in vocational rehab, that did make it a very specific track. And we were having those difficulties filling because you could only hire somebody with a master's degree in vocational rehab or CRC availability.

And over the years as an agency, we have been doing a few things to address the complement of struggles that the field is having. And one, before we can go to the bachelor's, and I think that's where Ryan is coming from, we started with expanding the master's degrees.

So now we have about six or seven different master's degrees to see if that is going to address the need. It's been helping. Not to the speed that we would like. So central office is evaluating the bachelor's degree. But we had to do it in kind of this step down approach to see if we could fill it with expanding master's and now Ryan's entertaining the bachelor's. I am right there with you, Brian. I think we can get great quality local people that will stay with us longer.

I'm excited for that as well.

The other thing central office has done is created a specialist in central office to help be our single point of contact. Because not only do we have to deal with our internal, but we're also dealing with the bureaucracy of civil service.

And they do the hiring of all agencies across the Commonwealth. So we're in competition with other agencies.

So having Danielle as our specialist to be our point of contact helped streamline and move things along quicker. I don't think it will ever be as quick as we all want it, but it is getting better. And we are filling at a pretty good pace compared to the past.

I hope that helped, Brian and Chris.

BRIAN D'AMICO: It did, Jack. Thank you for the explanation. And I did read some of those challenges and comments on past minutes of the VRC. I know -- so I appreciate that explanation

and thank you.

CHRIS HARBERT: Yes, thank you. Great discussion.

Any other chair, co-chair, district administrator, or assistant district administrator comments or discussion?

All right. Angel? Yes.

ANGEL TORRES: Are there plans for a future meeting?

CHRIS HARBERT: Yes, there are.

BRIAN D'AMICO: Took the words right out of my mouth.

CHRIS HARBERT: I'm going to poll the chairs and co-chairs that were here in this meeting today. If we did want to have, per your thoughts, if you wanted it twice a year. Quarterly, it might start competing with your local meetings, but it's achievable. I picked July because that's just how it worked out. I had a board meeting in June. I had a Rehab Council meeting in May.

Employment First meeting in both those months. Some other things.

It worked out.

And I think I planned October if you want to do quarter will you, there could be a quarterly meeting in October and then January. Depending. But I plan to poll. Unless a consensus or a preference is made twice a year, quarterly, whatever. But yes, I know we have been waiting for a chair, co-chair meeting. I will definitely keep the tempo alive.

JACK HEWITT: Chris, an idea would be the majority of the CACs are meeting quarterly, could once a year be our quarterly meeting, but together?

And we would have a, let's just say the July CAC meeting is a statewide one and we all count our CAC meeting as that meeting.

So then we're together once a year at least to talk about our CACs. And we can give statewide information rather than doing district office. Just a thought. Because you are right, we have a lot of meetings. But this might be a way to build in at least a once a year opportunity where we're all together.

CHRIS HARBERT: Making sure I wasn't on mute. Definitely.

Thank you for the feedback.

This is Cathy Long. I'm okay with having a meeting once a year. But I think twice would be good. But we meet in June.

Let's see, March, June, September, and December. And I don't think I could get any other CAC people to come in July to allegedly combine. Because I'm having enough trouble getting people to go to quarterly meetings.

But I would say twice a year at the most. Once a year is okay too.

CHRIS HARBERT: Thank you.

Okay. Noted. Any other --

ANGEL TORRES: Chris, I would vote for twice a year. To incorporate it as a regular CAC meeting on a quarterly basis, you're inviting then other members. My idea of this would be for the CAC chairs or vice chairs or officers to discuss their concerns and also to ask for the input from other CAC chairs and vice chairs and officers, et cetera.

So I would vote for twice a year. I don't know if you want to do October or maybe early November before the holidays.

But I think maybe next year May and November or October or something like that. Six months apart. That would be a great --

I would vote for that.

CHRIS HARBERT: Okay. Thank you.

Tom, I see your hand is raised. And then Brian. Tom, if you're speaking --

BRIAN D'AMICO: Tom, I think you're on mute.

TOM BURGUNDER: Now can you hear me? I'm sorry.

I am in favor of having a statewide meeting like we're having today once or twice a year. Twice is mine with me. But not as a substitution for a local CAC meeting. Because we get into levels of detail locally that we would miss if we substituted a state meeting for when we normally or close to normally would have a local meeting.

CHRIS HARBERT: Okay. Thank you. And Brian?

BRIAN D'AMICO: Yeah. I want to reiterate what Angel and Tom said. And Jack, I appreciate Jack's opinion also. I think obviously myself and Angel are on the same CAC so we have discussed this in the past already. I would go for twice a year. I think when Angel, like you said, when he originally came up with the idea and we had more discussion between us and our CAC, we were trying to get together with the other CACs just as officers to see what people were doing in other CACs, how they were promoting their CAC, how they were dealing with the challenges, what recommendations they were coming up with.

So I'm all for twice a year, maybe spring and fall.

That way, like Angel said, it doesn't impede the holidays.

Once you get to October, you hit Halloween and then it gets kind of busy for people.

So I would vote for two a year, spring and fall. So that's my comments. Thank you.

CHRIS HARBERT: Okay.

Excellent. Any other feedback, comment? I know we're just stepping over our end time.

Mr. Whitonis? What's up, sir?

JIM WHITONIS: Hi, Chris.

I'm thinking about for the next meeting. The topic of social media has been popping up. It's been a common theme for the past two years and we have never found a good solution to it. One of the topics for the next meeting probably should be social media. I think at that point we might have feedback from PaRC and the subcommittee there. And I'm kicking myself for not

thinking of this sooner.

I saw Deb from the legal team was on before. Maybe a presentation by Deb Schwartz about our -- OVR's social media page and kind of the limitations we have on what we can post. I think that might be a good presentation from her just so everybody has an understanding about what OVR can and cannot post. And then we could discuss other avenues of social media. I was even looking at our -- we have an OVR YouTube page. I was thinking if we put the presentation on case flow one there. And I know in the past, PaTTAN has hosted some stuff too. So that also may be an avenue for posting things.

CHRIS HARBERT: Definitely.

Passle?

PASSLE HELMINSKI: Jim, what feedback are you looking for from the PaRC?

JIM WHITONIS: I know the social media subcommittee has been looking at just expanding reach and if they want to look at maybe helping the CACs host anything on their own pages just to spread the word about meeting times and post agendas.

PASSLE HELMINSKI: That's up to the CACs to furnish information to the PaRC.

JIM WHITONIS: Yes.

PASSLE HELMINSKI: So what is in charge of that so when I make a phone call and talk to staff I can tell them who to expect it from.

JIM WHITONIS: I can take that role on. If the CACs want to pass the information to me. And I want to commend Chris Todd too. He is contracted by the Rehab Council. He works for UPC.

He has been a great help in helping post minutes and just any formatting. So if anybody needs any help with formatting or organizing their notes, he's been a great help in getting that stuff ready to be posted.

So I really want to commend Chris Todd.

PASSLE HELMINSKI: I second that. He's excellent.

JIM WHITONIS: Yes.

CHRIS HARBERT: Yep. I can agree with that. Absolutely. Absolutely.

For development, for future development. So any other hands? One last call.

Chair, co-chair, ADA, or district administrator? All right.

We are just over time. I'm going to open it up for public comment. Is there any members of the public who joined us today who would like to make a public comment?

All right. Well, hearing none, that closes our statewide CAC chair and co-chair meeting for today.

Again, OVR staff, committee chairs, co-chairs, thank you so much for coming today, for your attendance and participation. Again, I'm going to be sending -- I'm going follow up with an email

of all the meeting materials that were displayed and discussed today by email. I appreciate everyone's input and the assistance getting to this point.

So thank you very much again. And have a great day.

BRIAN D'AMICO: Chris, I appreciate you guys, you and everyone involved in getting this meeting together. I know it was a long time coming. And I just wanted to say thank you to you, Chris, and anyone else, Jim and Passle and all you guys for putting this together.

Appreciate it. It was very helpful.

ANGEL TORRES: Thank you, everybody.