



Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC)

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Full Council Quarterly Meeting November 12, 2025, from 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM

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

Julia Barol (P)	Christie Cyktor (P)	Cindy Duch (P)
Kait Gillis (P)	Joan Myers Goodman (P)	Lynn Heitz (NP)
Passle Helminski (P)	Twana Jones (P)	Michelle Mitchell (P)
Andrew Pennington (NP)	Dorian Rhodes (P)	Julianna Rodrigues (P)
Susan Tomasic (P)	Rob Wallington (P)	

Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) Present: Ryan Hyde, Chris Harbert, James Whitonis, Michael Vore, Bridget Frascella, Jill Moriconi, Christopher Zakraysek, Dana Barone, Marci Katona, Cheryl Novak, Craig Schield, Dawn Sokol, Tammy Burke, Audrey O'Connor, Douglas Rand, Melissa Wert-Thrush, Stacey Collins, Susan Storm, Kim Robinson, Denise Verchimak, Ralph Roach, Dana McKinney, Jessica Hanula, Chris Palmer, Chris Cowan, Douglas Rand

Stakeholders Present: Crystal Houser, Bureau of Workforce Partnership and Operations, Angel Torres, Reading Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC), Christine Hunsinger, Pittsburgh Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services (BBVS) Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC), Natalie Herberg, Pennsylvania Developmental Disabilities Council, Rob Schramm, Esq., Office of Chief Counsel, PA Department of Labor & Industry, Linda Carmona-Bell, Norristown Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC), James Martini, Pennsylvania Workforce Development Board, Timothy Krushinski, Pennsylvania Department of Education, Russell Zemanek, Bureau of Juvenile Justice Services, Matthew Seeley, Esq., Pennsylvania Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC), Mary Dougherty, PA Department of Labor & Industry, Eric Orr, Center for Independent Living Opportunities, Tom Burgunder, Pittsburgh Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services (BBVS) Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC), Dale Verchick, Disability Rights Pennsylvania

PaRC Support Personnel Present: Michelle Gerrick, Christopher Todd

Moderator of Zoom: Nichole Wade

CART (CAPTIONER): Max Body

Interpreters: Ashley Shenk, Laura Schupp

Guests Present: Melissa Lewis

WELCOME & OPENING REMARKS: Michelle Mitchell, Chair

- Ms. Nichole Wade conducted roll call. A quorum was confirmed for the meeting.
- Ms. Passle Helminski read the PaRC mission statement.

MOTION was made by Ms. Passle Helminski for approval of today's meeting agenda. Ms. Cindy Duch seconded the motion. All were in favor.

MOTION was made by Ms. Christie Cyktor for approval of Full Council meeting minutes from August 13, 2025. Mr. Rob Wallington seconded the motion. All were in favor.

FISCAL REPORT (1st QUARTER): Julianna Rodrigues, Member at Large

- Ms. Julianna Rodrigues provided report for the 1st quarter of Fiscal Year (FY) 2025-2026. The total budget is \$80,000.00. July expenses were \$2,587.39, August expenses were \$8,078.71, September expenses were \$4,168.28. Total 1st quarter expenses were \$14,834.38 which leaves a remaining balance of \$65,165.62 for FY 2025-2026.

CHAIR REPORT: Michelle Mitchell

Annual Report 2024-2025 – Julianna Rodrigues, Member at Large

NCSRC/CSAVR Fall 2025 Conference – Julia Barol

- Ms. Michelle Mitchell provided an update on the 3 advocacy letters that were approved during the August 2025 Full Council (FC) meeting. The letters were sent to the appropriate entities including the VR funding letter that was sent to the Appropriations Committees Chairs, the Subminimum Wage letter that was sent to the Pennsylvania members of the U.S. Congress, and the transportation letter that was provided to the Governor's Policy Office. The Governor's Office has not yet provided a response however Council was informed that they continue advocating for the Employment First Oversight Commission (EFOC) recommendations regarding transportation. The Council is working with OVR on providing the transportation letter to the other entities mentioned regarding SEPTA.

- Ms. Mitchell informed attendees of the upcoming FC meeting dates scheduled for February 11, May 6, August 12, and November 18, 2026.
- Ms. Rodrigues provided a review of the PaRC 2024-2025 Annual Report which contains the theme of “Why Funding Matters.” The report is complete with the one exception of including the outgoing Chair message. Members agreed that Ms. Rodrigues did a fantastic job on this year’s PaRC Annual Report.

MOTION was made by Mr. Rob Wallington for approval of the 2024-2025 PaRC Annual Report with the addition of the pending outgoing Chair message. Ms. Joan Myers Goodman seconded the motion. All were in favor.

- Ms. Julia Barol provided a report from the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC) Fall Conference. 30 individuals attended, including members of the Puerto Rico SRC, for the first time. NCSRC celebrated its 20th year today. Presentations included the Business Lead for the Council of State Administrators for Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) regarding the National Employment Team (NET). Areas discussed included the current political climate related to moving away from Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Accessibility (DEIA) talking points and focusing more on talent and retention language. Federal contractors remain engaged but may now be operating under different program titles. An area that was identified as a universal system gap was self-employment and entrepreneurship. Suggestions for future action items for SRCs are to connect with State Representatives on business agreements and exploring joint SRC / NET meetings to better align engagement strategies and consider having business panels attend SRC meetings to bridge the gap and better align businesses with VR. Additional discussions included recruiting SRC members by inviting individuals to join Committees. There is no prohibition from having members of the public on different SRC Committees.

OVR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR’S REPORT: Ryan Hyde, Executive Director

- Mr. Ryan Hyde, OVR, provided updates regarding impacts of the anticipated federal funding levels, reallocation of funds, travel and hiring restrictions, Pre Employment Transition Services (Pre ETS), Summer Academy, internship program, reducing physical office space, and the importance of advocacy. Once the state budget is passed, payments for the Centers for Independent Living (CILs) will be processed. OVR has had many positive outcomes from partnerships with the First Lady, employers, job fairs, and the transportation office.
- The Order of Selection (OOS) definitions were updated in July 2025. OVR continues to monitor the OOS to ensure staff is applying the correct categories for

customers placed in the Significant Disability (SD) and Individual with a Disability (D) category. As of November 5, 2025, there were 942 individuals on the SD category waitlist and 35 individuals on the D category waitlist. OVR will start reevaluating their ability to take more customers off the waitlist in December. Until November 2025 OVR was taking approximately 150 cases off the SD category each month. Individuals that are placed within the Most Significant Disability (MSD) category will receive services normally. Eligibility must be determined within 60 days, and each Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) must be completed within 90 days. OVR is at a 95% compliance rate with those timeliness goals.

- Mr. Hyde provided updates regarding Presumed Competence, Commonwealth Technical Institute at Hiram G Andrews Center (CTI at HGAC), Business Enterprise Program (BEP) training program, Essential Procedures memo, updates for the Back-to-Basics Module for the Vocational Rehabilitation Services Operations Manual, and the State Plan amendments.
- Mr. Hyde informed members of internal discussions regarding the Citizens Advisory Committees (CACs) and what can be done differently to support them as many CACs have not been active since the pandemic despite OVR efforts. CACs are not currently required by the Rehab Act. OVR continues to interface with the CACs that have remained active in Pennsylvania along with other groups such as the PaRC, State Board, Statewide Independent Living Council, Employment First Oversight Commission, Advisory Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Advisory Council for Blind Pennsylvanians, Business Enterprise Program Elected Committee, statewide and local Workforce Development Boards, local transition councils, and other groups that are a part of the Bureau of Special Education and Department of Human Services. OVR has come up with 5 different options regarding the CACs and is requesting the PaRC's input. Those options include dissolving the CACs entirely as they are not required and focusing on the other groups mentioned. Replacing the CACs with quarterly regional engagement meetings divided by the different quadrants of the state. Establishing CACs into a larger area to gain more interest from participants totaling 6 to 8 areas of the state. Providing PaRC with oversight of the CACs and offering assistance in that process where UCP may be able to help with logistics. A brief conversation was held with the State Board's Executive Committee, and they liked the concept of the CACs being a subgroup of the PaRC which could provide a good opportunity to mentor local individuals through the PaRC process to develop future advocates, creating a pipeline for future Board and PaRC recruitment.
- Ms. Cindy Duch explained the importance of local voices being heard and remaining a part of OVR and the PaRC.

- Ms. Passle Helminski informed attendees that her CAC is very active, has new committee members, is engaging with youth groups and meets quarterly. Regarding regionalized CACs operating under the PaRC, she explained the need for local involvement with local District Administrators (DAs).
- Mr. Hyde explained that they have received feedback that DAs present information and often do not receive feedback from the CACs. There are a few CACs that are effective and that is why they presented the idea for PaRC to help recruit regionalized CACs and have UCP assist with coordinating those meetings and providing information from the CACs to OVR.
- Ms. Julianna Rodrigues explained that she agrees with Ms. Duch about the importance of those local voices, and that it is worth revisiting to find new ways to increase involvement.
- Ms. Joan Myers Goodman explained concerns of PaRC being spread too thin and transportation being an issue for regionalized CACs to meet.
- Ms. Susan Tomasic explained that she does not believe PaRC is prepared to provide a solidified response today and suggested a group of volunteers be assembled to provide the Council's response later.
- Ms. Michelle Mitchell shared her experiences with the CACs and emphasized the importance of citizens providing feedback to OVR. This will be further discussed within a committee. Ms. Passle Helminski, Ms. Cindy Duch, Ms. Julianna Rodrigues, and Ms. Christie Cyktor volunteered to be part of that discussion.
- Mr. Hyde provided additional updates regarding preparations for the OVR Annual Report, success stories and statistics from each county, state budget, funding carryover, Cost of Living Adjustment, and importance of the Council's continued advocacy with State and Federal Legislative Offices.

PRESENTATION: PA Bureau of Juvenile Justice Services (BJJS): Collaboration between OVR & BJJS - Russell Zemanek, Division Director, Bureau of Juvenile Justice Services & Michael Vore, Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist

- Mr. Russell Zemanek, Bureau of Juvenile Justice Services and Mr. Michael Vore, OVR, provided a presentation on the Pennsylvania Academic, Career and Technical Training (PACTT) Project Partnership.

OVR REPORTS

Subminimum Wage to Competitive Integrated Employment (SWTCIE) Grant/InVEST Project - Dana Barone, InVEST Project Director & Kathleen Locmelis, InVEST Project Manager

- Ms. Dana Barone, OVR, explained that the Subminimum Wage to Competitive Integrated Employment (SWTCIE) Grant is a 5-year model demonstration grant focused on assisting individuals with disabilities considering, are at risk of entering, or are currently in subminimum wage employment with transitioning or maintaining Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE). Pennsylvania's grant term is from October 1, 2022, to September 30, 2027. The grant award was approximately \$13.9 million. Key components for the project are family engagement, Person Centered Planning, Resource Coordination, Training and Technical Assistance, Wrap Around Supports, partnerships with designated employers, embedded support at designated employers, and On-the-Job Training (OJT). OVR is contracting with the PA Family Network and has trained 7 Integrated Vocational Engagement & Support Team (InVEST) Family Advisors. Staff are encouraged to use the Charting the Life Course Portfolio as part of their comprehensive assessments when developing Individualized Plans for Employment (IPEs). Ms. Barone shared updates on businesses that are participating in the project and participants' outcomes.
- Ms. Cindy Duch inquired about employers participating that are not food companies. Ms. Barone explained that some participants have been hired to do data entry and attendance analysis for Human Resources. Other companies provide distribution services.

**Business Services and Outreach Division (BSOD): Workforce Partnerships -
Bridget Frascella, Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist & Crystal Houser,
Director of the Bureau of Workforce Partnership and Operations**

- Ms. Bridget Frascella, OVR, and Ms. Crystal Houser, Bureau of Workforce Partnership, provided updates on collaborations, training, and other initiatives OVR has continued to participate in with businesses, customers, and jobseekers to enhance services and outcomes. Training and collaborations include OVR 101 training, PA CareerLink Administrators, youth coordinators, Disability Awareness, Workforce staff training, Commonwealth Workforce Development System (CWDS) referral system, CWDS Employer Entry, PA CareerLink accessibility evaluations, OJT, and Business Services Teams partnerships.

**Commonwealth Technical Institute (CTI) at the Hiram G. Andrews Center
(HGAC) - Jill Moriconi, Director & Christopher Zakraysek, Deputy Director**

- Ms. Jill Moriconi, CTI at HGAC, provided updates on their graduating class, Early Childhood Education program, apprenticeship programs, agreements with other colleges, collaboration with local school districts, campaign to educate and

minimize sexual assault, partnering with deaf communities, and student leadership and mentor opportunities.

- Members previously requested information about marketing efforts specifically for individuals without disabilities and providing inclusivity to ensure the college is not just for individuals with disabilities. CTI's mission and funding are specifically for students with disabilities, and they do not have specific funding to market for individuals without disabilities. CTI is open to any learner, they offer financial aid programs, and they provide direct applications online. Recent marketing efforts have been available to the public and include YouTube videos, social media, career fairs, and providing presentations, resources, collaboration, and services at high schools throughout the state. Strategies to promote inclusion have included partnering with local secondary and career technical schools. Ms. Moriconi welcomed feedback and ideas on how to better accomplish further inclusion of students without disabilities. Mr. Hyde explained that they are always working to recruit students and that 98% of funding for HGAC is from VR, which is required for people with disabilities.

STAKEHOLDER REPORTS

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

- Mr. Timothy Krushinski, Bureau of Special Education (BSE), provided updates regarding Special Education student enrollment data, federal monitoring of BSE, state assessments, Repair and Retain Initiative, disability inclusive curriculum program, new PaTTAN Manifestation Determinations, family engagement, inclusive practices, transition recommendations, mental health recommendations, crisis and restraint recommendations, and revitalization of the local and state task force.

Statewide Independent Living Council: Susan Tomasic, SILC Board Chair

- Ms. Susan Tomasic, SILC, reported that the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) quarterly meeting is scheduled for November 13, 2025. SILC is working to prepare for an Independent Living Conference scheduled for the fall of 2026.

State Workforce Development Board: James Martini, Executive Director

- Mr. James Martini, Workforce Development Board, reported that their quarterly meeting is scheduled for November 18, 2025. They will be approving a Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Combined State Plan to move forward into Public Comment.

PaRC COMMITTEE REPORTS

Action / Social Media Committee: Joan Myers Goodman, Chair

- Ms. Joan Myers Goodman reported that the Action / Social Media Committee met with the Labor and Industry Communications Office and was provided with information on the best applicable practices, guidance, requirements and restrictions in preparation for the PaRC video project. The next Committee meeting is scheduled for December 3, 2025.

CareerLink Committee: Twana Jones, Chair

- Ms. Twana Jones reported that the CareerLink Committee was provided with drafted responses to their questions regarding CareerLink accessibility and training. This will be discussed during the upcoming Committee meeting scheduled for November 17, 2025.

Governance Committee: Susan Tomasic, Chair

- Ms. Susan Tomasic reported the Committee is recommending minor changes to the PaRC Bylaws and Member Handbook. Members were informed that Ms. Sylenthia Dent-Siebenlist has resigned from the Council. The next Governance Committee meeting is scheduled for January 14, 2026.

MOTION was made by Ms. Passle Helminski to approve the revisions to the PaRC Bylaws and Member Handbook. Ms. Joan Myers Goodman seconded the motion. All were in favor.

MOTION was made by Ms. Joan Myers Goodman to accept Ms. Sylenthia Dent-Siebenlist's resignation from the Council and forwarding her resignation email to OVR for submission to the Governor's Office. Ms. Julianna Rodrigues seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Legislative Committee: Christie Cyktor, Chair

- Ms. Christie Cyktor provided an update regarding 14 meetings that were held in late October / early November with State Legislators and their staff. Education and information were provided regarding the importance of OVR and CIL funding, Direct Care workforce, access to transportation, and transitioning individuals from subminimum wage to CIE. The next Legislative Committee meeting is scheduled for December 10, 2025.

MOTION was made by Ms. Julia Barol to support State Bill [SB575](#) An Act amending Titles 18 (Crimes and Offenses) and 42 (Judiciary and Judicial Procedure) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes, in assault, further providing for the offense of ethnic intimidation; and making an editorial change. Ms. Julianna Rodrigues seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Policy Committee: Julia Barol, Vice Chair

- Mr. Jim Whitonis, OVR, provided an update on the 2024-2028 Combined State Plan 2-year Modification. OVR received 13 Public Comments from Disability Rights Pennsylvania. Changes to the plan were previously reviewed with the Council which included revisions to Descriptions (a) and (d). OVR anticipates feedback from the Department of Labor and the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) which may be delayed due to the government shutdown. Performance Indicators cannot be included until RSA provides their final numbers after applying their Statistical Adjustment Model (SAM). Members agreed a vote can take place with the indication that they will be added. The Council membership table will be adjusted to reflect a member resignation.
- Ms. Michelle Mitchell inquired if the suggestions that were included with Public Comments will be revisited once funding is back in place. Mr. Hyde explained that all comments are taken seriously and if there is something that OVR can consider, it does not necessarily need to be included within the State Plan.

MOTION was made by Ms. Christie Cyktor to accept the Public Comments with OVR responses for the State Plan 2-Year Modification. Ms. Passle Helminski seconded the motion. All were in favor.

MOTION was made by Ms. Passle Helminski for approval of the 2-Year Modification of the 2024-2028 State Plan. Ms. Susan Tomasic seconded the motion. All were in favor.

- Ms. Barol provided background regarding the Customer Satisfaction Survey project. The Policy Committee previously decided to proceed with developing recommendations to OVR to ensure that no potential vendor is excluded from future procurement opportunities. The Council was provided with an update on survey efforts including additional details about the texting-based survey process currently being developed that is managed through CWDS. The Executive Committee has recommended that the Council table the project until the effectiveness of the new texting-based survey process being developed by OVR

can be determined. A vote is required to table the project because it was originally approved by the Full Council. The next Policy Committee meeting is scheduled for December 4, 2025.

MOTION was made by Ms. Passle Helminski to table the Customer Satisfaction Survey project until the effectiveness of the new text-based survey process—being developed by OVR in collaboration with Deloitte and OIT—can be determined. Ms. Joan Myers Goodman seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Transition Committee: Julia Barol, Chair

- Ms. Julia Barol reported that the next Transition Committee meeting is scheduled for December 2, 2025.

Ad Hoc Committee - Business Enterprise Program (BEP): Joan Myers Goodman

- Ms. Joan Myers Goodman reported that the next BEP Ad Hoc Committee meeting is scheduled for December 12, 2025.

MOTION was made by Ms. Passle Helminski to approve the BEP Ad Hoc Committee goals and objectives. Ms. Julia Barol seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Ad Hoc Committee - PaRC/OVR State Board Roles: Michelle Mitchell

- Ms. Michelle Mitchell appointed an ad hoc committee to further discuss OVR's recommendations & determine best course of action for the Citizens Advisory Committees (CACs).
- Ms. Mitchell reported that monthly invitations were sent to State Board members from May to October 2025, with very limited attendance, therefore, the Ad Hoc committee created to study the PaRC and State Board roles will officially disband. Members provided the following ideas to boost collaboration: 1.) ask the Board Chairperson or request they designate a member to attend Full Council meetings regularly and 2.) schedule a virtual retreat between PaRC and Board Officers.
- Mr. Chris Harbert shared as Administrator to the OVR State Board, that he attends Council and committee meetings on behalf of Board members and the Executive Director. He also recognizes the importance of working directly with subject matter experts and believes that oversight of the CACs could create opportunities for increased collaboration and communication with State Board and District Offices. Ms. Mitchell recognized the importance of Mr. Harbert's collaborative role and

emphasized the importance of working directly with State Board members, especially when meeting with Legislators, to show a united front when providing education about the importance of funding.

- Mr. Hyde suggested the following for increased collaboration: 1.) a joint Legislative Committee for both Council and Board members to work together and 2.) hold an annual virtual retreat with the State Board. He said he also likes the idea of a joint project to increase engagement, such as the CAC project, a joint letter, legislative meetings, or other projects of mutual interest. Ms. Mitchell agreed that they can discuss these options during PaRC's update at the next State Board meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENT

- Ms. Passle Helminski provided comment as a member of the public calling attention to State House Resolution 208, dealing with the legislative budget and review of OVR's Blindness and Visual Services. Ms. Helminski requested that Mr. Hyde provide input regarding the concern of dealing with Orientation and Mobility (O&M) services, not having proper funding, item 15 of the resolution stating that without those services Pennsylvanians with disabilities may have no choice but to enter long-term living centers. Ms. Helminski explained that as a person who may begin O&M services due to applying for a new Guide Dog she is concerned with personal and other people's future problems. Mr. Hyde explained that OVR is aware of the legislation that has been around for a couple of years. VR timeliness for services is above 95%. The Older Individuals Who Are Blind (OIB) program is critically underfunded at \$1.5 million a year. OVR also uses funding from the Social Security reimbursement bringing funding to use for the OIB program above \$3 or \$4 million. Advocacy for increased funding may be more effective than conducting a study. There are also difficulties in finding those who provide O&M services.

ADJOURN

MOTION was made by Ms. Passle Helminski to adjourn. Ms. Susan Tomasic seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned.