



Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC)

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OVR BUSINESS ENTERPRISE PROGRAM (BEP)

Ad hoc Committee Meeting

Minutes for December 12, 2025

10:00 AM to 11:00 AM

Members Present (P)

Not Present (NP)

Lynn Heitz (P)
Julia Barol (P)

Joan Myers Goodman (P)
Passle Helminski (P)

Andrew Pennington (P)
Michelle Mitchell (P)

Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) Staff Present: Chris Harbert, Ryan Hyde, Dawn Sokol, Wes Runnels

PaRC Staff Present: Christopher Todd, Michelle Gerrick

Guest Present: Judy Schoenly

CALL TO ORDER

This meeting was conducted through Zoom. Ms. Joan Myers Goodman called the meeting to order after quorum was established.

ADDITIONS TO THE AGENDA

Ms. Lynn Heitz suggested the addition of discussion regarding previously requested BEP / OVR customer data.

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

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION ITEMS:

JUDY SCHOENLY - Chairperson, PA Elected Committee of Blind Vendors
Historical background on BEP operators/vendors
BEP current, past, & 3rd party sites
Process of obtaining new locations

- Ms. Judy Schoenly provided information about the Randolph Shepherd Act, Pennsylvania's Little Randolph Shepherd Act, historical information about the Business Enterprise Program (BEP), many changes to BEP facilities operating in Pennsylvania since the start of the program, satellite and 3rd party vendors. A list of locations was shared with attendees, and it was noted that many locations were lost due to impacts of the pandemic.
- There are currently 18 BEP licensees in the Commonwealth with primary locations and in 2007 there were 50 BEP operators by 2013 that number went down to 38. During the 1970's and 1980's there were over 100.
- The State Licensing Agency (SLA) is responsible for designating new locations. In Pennsylvania the SLA is the Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services (BBVS) which is responsible for negotiating contracts for BEP facilities. Different State and Federal buildings are provided priority by the associated state and federal law.
- Ms. Schoenly inquired about inviting BEP vendors to join the committee. Ms. Barol explained that they recently learned many State Rehabilitation Councils have non-council members join their committees as non-voting members. Members requested that PaRC personnel provide Ms. Schoenly with the upcoming meeting information to inform BEP vendors of the opportunity to participate in the committee.
- Ms. Lynn Heitz inquired about the requested data for BBVS customers that are interested in participating in BEP. Mr. Chris Harbert, OVR reported that the requested information was reviewed and shared. It is too early to begin pulling data due to low totals and ensuring privacy of OVR customers. Mr. Ryan Hyde explained there are currently less than 10 people that have expressed interest in participating and that they will be able to begin collecting data in March of 2026 once the BEP training program begins.
- Members explained that they are aware of customers that have confirmed interest more than 1 year ago, would like to know where customers are within the process, what recruitment strategies are being presented, and what other states are doing that Pennsylvania may replicate to increase the number of participants.
- Mr. Wes Runnels, OVR explained there are currently 8 individuals in the beginning stages of the process with 4 scheduled for initial discussions that take place prior to the required assessments, in person trainings, and online trainings.

OVR UPDATES

- Members inquired about requirements for a potential participant that has left the state and plans to reapply for the Pennsylvania BEP. There are many variables to determine what steps will be required and it may be necessary for a customer returning to Pennsylvania to perform assessments and trainings due to the many changes to the program's policies and sites.
- Members inquired about opening the BEP to retail, non-government, colleges, warehouses, and other possible locations. Mr. Runnels informed attendees about which state and federal locations are given priority by the Randolph Shepherd Act and Little Randolph Shepherd Act. While BEP vendors may request to operate in different facilities, they are not given priority by the stated laws.

SCHEDULE NEXT MEETING

- Members requested that PaRC Personnel poll for the next quarterly meeting for March 13, 2026, from 10:00 AM to 11:00 AM.

Public Comment

- There was no Public Comment.

Adjourn

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