



Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC)

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Legislative & Public Awareness Committee Minutes for May 21, 2026, from 11:00 AM to 12:00 PM

Members Present (P)

Not Present (NP)

Christie Cyktor (P)
Passle Helminski (P)
Michelle Mitchell (P)

Lynn Heitz (NP)
Dorian Rhodes (NP)

Julia Barol (P)
Julianna Rodrigues (P)

OVR Staff Present: Chris Harbert

PaRC Personnel Present: Chris Todd, Michelle Gerrick

CALL TO ORDER

This meeting was conducted through Zoom. Ms. Christie Cyktor called the meeting to order after quorum was established.

ADDITIONS TO THE AGENDA

Ms. Passle Helminski suggested adding to the agenda discussion of recent meetings attended with the organization named Transit for All Across PA.

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA AND PAST MINUTES

MOTION was made by Ms. Passle Helminski to approve the agenda with additions and past meeting minutes. Ms. Julianna Rodrigues seconded the motion. All were in favor.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION ITEMS:

Discussion and Possible Recommendation for Letter of Support Regarding VR Funding

- Ms. Passle Helminski informed attendees about her attendance at recent transportation advocacy meetings. Members agreed on the importance of the work of the organization named Transit for All Across PA. They are holding meetings with Legislators on June 3, 2026, and help prepare attendees with mock interviews, questions for Legislators, and informational packets.

- Members reviewed the draft letter of support regarding the additional \$1 million in funding being proposed to support the Specialized Services for Adults and Children (SS-A/C) program and the Support Service Professionals (SSP) program. Members agreed the letter was well written and had no changes or additions. Ms. Christie Cyktor explained that the letter is based upon information provided by OVR regarding those programs along with feedback received during meetings with Legislators in April and May 2026. PaRC members were provided guidance to share the letters with State Senate and House leadership during budget discussions planned for early June 2026. The letter will be sent on behalf of the PaRC Legislative & Public Awareness Committee due to recommendations received by members during Legislative meetings to share the letter with Legislators in early June.

MOTION was made by Ms. Passle Helminski to move the draft letter of support forward to the PaRC Executive Committee. Ms. Julia Barol seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Discussion of Committee Goal #2 to Increase Advocacy on Behalf of Returning Veterans with Disabilities Seeking Employment and Supports

- Members reviewed Legislative Committee goal #2: Increase advocacy on behalf of the returning Veterans with disabilities who are seeking employment and employment supports through Pennsylvania state services. Members recommended that they provide invitation for a Veteran organization to present during the August 12, 2026, PaRC Full Council meeting.
- Members reviewed recommendations provided by Council member Mr. Dorian Rhodes in advance of the meeting, including several areas that could have a meaningful impact:
 - Expanding employer education on hiring Veterans with disabilities, including awareness of reasonable accommodations, recognition of transferable skills, and the overall business value of Veteran talent
 - Developing mentorship or peer-support initiatives that connect transitioning Veterans with professionals already established in the workforce
 - Increasing outreach to local colleges, trade schools, and apprenticeship programs to build clearer and more accessible pathways into sustainable careers
 - Encouraging employers to review hiring practices and job descriptions to eliminate unnecessary barriers that may unintentionally exclude qualified candidates
 - Promoting greater awareness of available state and federal resources that support both Veterans and employers throughout the hiring and employment process
- Members inquired if there are any current programs and efforts from the Commonwealth Technical Institute at Hiram G Andrews Center (CTI at HGAC). Mr. Chris Harbert, OVR, will inquire with leadership and follow up with any information received. Ms. Michelle Mitchell explained that she is aware of many colleges and

universities that have specialized initiatives regarding Veteran advocacy including clubs or college support programs. Ms. Christie Cyktor explained that she will reach out to friends that are involved with different Veteran organizations and urged committee members to do the same prior to the next committee meeting. Mr. Harbert will inquire with the OVR Executive Director and contact the Governor's Policy Office regarding the Commonwealth's Department of Military and Veteran Affairs (DMVA).

Discussion of Centers for Independent Living (CILs) Funding

- Members discussed information previously received that a change to the Centers for Independent Living (CILs) funding to a reimbursement process was not due to an Executive Order provided by a previous administration but through the Commonwealth's Management Directive regarding the administration of grants from 2018. Members explained that prior to this change CILs received grant funding up front which helped to ensure services were provided to individuals with disabilities continuously without being impacted by a budget impasse.
- Members requested information on the reason the management directive was implemented resulting in the change to a reimbursement model. Members also requested information on if the state funded and federally funded CILs must follow the reimbursement model and how surrounding states administer their grants for CILs. Mr. Harbert informed attendees he will forward the committee's questions to the Executive Director and follow up.

Schedule next meeting

- Members requested PaRC staff poll for a meeting to be held on June 25, 2026, from 11:00 AM to 12:00 PM.

Adjourn

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