



Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC)

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OVR Policy & State Plan / Customer Satisfaction Committee Minutes for June 24, 2026, 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM

Members Present (P)

Not Present (NP)

Lynn Heitz (P)
Cindy Duch (P)
Susan Tomasic (P)

Julia Barol (NP)
Passle Helminski (P)
Michelle Mitchell (NP)

Christie Cyktor (P)
Julianna Rodrigues (NP)
Andrew Pennington (P)

Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) Staff Present: James Whitonis, Ralph Roach, Chris Harbert

Project Staff Present: Chris Todd, Michelle Gerrick

CALL TO ORDER

This meeting was conducted through Zoom. Ms. Lynn Heitz called the meeting to order at 11:00 AM after a quorum was established.

ADDITIONS TO THE AGENDA

Ms. Lynn Heitz suggested the addition of discussing the accessibility of virtual meeting platforms.

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA AND PAST MINUTES

MOTION was made by Ms. Passle Helminski to approve today's agenda with additions and past meeting minutes. Ms. Cindy Duch seconded the motion. All were in favor.

DISCUSSION ITEMS:

Committee Chair / Vice Chair for Fiscal Year (FY) 2026-2027

- Ms. Lynn Heitz nominated Mr. Andrew Pennington for Committee Chair for Fiscal Year (FY) 2026-2027. Mr. Pennington accepted the nomination. Ms. Lynn Heitz nominated Ms. Passle Helminski for Committee Vice Chair, and Ms. Helminski declined the nomination due to another member's interest in the position. Ms. Christie Cyktor nominated Ms. Cindy Duch for Committee Vice Chair. Ms. Duch accepted the nomination.

MOTION was made by Ms. Passle Helminski to elect Mr. Andrew Pennington as Committee Chair for FY 2026-2027. Ms. Christie Cyktor seconded the motion. All were in favor.

MOTION was made by Ms. Passle Helminski to elect Ms. Cindy Duch as Committee Vice Chair for FY 2026-2027. Ms. Christie Cyktor seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Small Business Ownership as a Vocational Goal for OVR Customers Policy

- Mr. Andrew Pennington reviewed concerns that the Client Assistance Program (CAP) previously presented about the Small Business Ownership as a Vocational Goal for OVR Customers policy to the State Board of VR and OVR.
- Ms. Lynn Heitz shared that the policy was written in 2016, prior to the pandemic, and may need to be revised to include updated language regarding home-based businesses that often provide opportunities for significant income. Members agreed that the policy needs to include clearer definitions and updated language regarding what is determined as a hobby, the development of business plans, the review and denial processes, streamlining the District Offices' pathways to complete the process, business viability determinations, counselor training, necessary paperwork and other requirements.
- Mr. Chris Harbert informed members that Mr. Ryan Hyde, Executive Director, is aligned with concerns previously shared by CAP and has informed Secretary Walker. The Small Business program and policy is currently being reviewed by OVR's Bureau of Central Operations and is slated as a future project for OVR staff currently on leave.

MOTION was made by Ms. Passle Helminski to recommend that OVR create a workgroup to review the Small Business Ownership as a Vocational Goal for OVR Customers policy and that a member of the PaRC Policy Committee be included in that process. Ms. Susan Tomasic seconded the motion. All were in favor.

OVR Updates

- Mr. Jim Whitonis provided updates regarding recently received feedback from the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) regarding Diversity, Equity, Inclusion (DEI) language for the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA).

Texting-based Customer Satisfaction Surveys

- Ms. Heitz explained that she signed up to receive the new texting-based survey to try out the new system. She received a text from an unfamiliar area code and accidentally deleted the text. Ms. Heitz recommended that perhaps a familiar phone number could be used and customers could be informed of the survey process in advance by the counselor to avoid similar issues.
- Mr. Ralph Roach reported that OVR, Deloitte, and the Office of Chief Counsel continue to work on legal consents and permissions for setting up the survey's automated functions. Next steps include development of Standard Operating Procedures and sharing that information with the PaRC and stakeholders. Members

agreed to continue to monitor and request continued updates during future committee and Council meetings.

- Mr. Andrew Pennington inquired about the number of customers that are still in the Trial Work Experience (TWE) that may be impacted by the memo regarding presumed competence explaining that TWE must be completed by the end of the Fiscal Year, July 1, 2026. Mr. Harbert informed committee members that he will follow up with the requested information. Members requested that PaRC staff ensure this topic be included on the next meeting agenda.
- Members shared accessibility concerns with Microsoft Teams virtual meeting software, recommending that Zoom be used for Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) meetings. Mr. Chris Harbert explained that he will escalate the concerns to OVR's Bureau of Central Operations. Members also suggested that the CAPTCHA verification process be removed when Teams must be used for virtual meetings due to accessibility concerns.

Schedule next meeting

- Members requested that staff poll for the next meeting for July 21, 2026, from 11:00 AM to 12:00 PM.

Public Comment

- Mr. Jim Whitonis, OVR, thanked Ms. Heitz for her many years of service to the PaRC and assistance as Committee Chair with PaRC's work on the State Plan, Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) and other collaborative projects. PaRC members and staff also acknowledged Ms. Heitz for her service to the Council as her term ends in July 2026.

Adjourn

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