# Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC)

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## PaRC CITIZEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE (CAC) AD HOC COMMITTEE

## Meeting Minutes for September 9, 2026, 2:00 PM to 3:00 PM

| Members Present (P) | | Not Present (NP) |
|---|---|---|
| Andrew Pennington (P) | Christie Cyktor (P) | Cindy Duch (P) |
| Passle Helminski (P) | Julianna Rodrigues (P) | Michelle Mitchell (NP) |

**Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) Staff Present:** Chris Harbert

**PaRC Staff Present:** Christopher Todd, Michelle Gerrick

**Guests Present:** Brian D'Amico, Angel Torres, Christine Hunsinger

### CALL TO ORDER

This meeting was conducted through Zoom. Mr. Andrew Pennington called the meeting to order after quorum was established.

### ADDITIONS TO THE AGENDA

There were no additions.

***MOTION was made by Ms. Passle Helminski for approval of the agenda and past meeting minutes. Ms. Cindy Duch seconded the motion. All were in favor.***

### DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION ITEMS:

### CONTINUE TO REFINE A PREFERRED OPTION AND DEVELOP ACTIONABLE RECOMMENDATIONS / REVIEW MEMBER-IDENTIFIED POTENTIAL RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING CAC OPERATIONS

- Members reviewed written considerations which included a regional structure of either three or six areas of the Commonwealth. This would also include public virtual meetings, leadership comprised of an individual from each OVR District Office, standing agendas for all regional CACs, and a time limit for attendee

comments of three minutes. Public Comment and customer concerns would be brought to the attention of OVR District Offices with the goal of improving services. District Office leadership would also be provided with opportunities to share information, and the CAC meeting minutes would continue to be posted on the PaRC website.

- Members shared agreement with many of the written suggestions and had concerns with a regional model that was previously discussed. Ms. Cindy Duch explained that a potential regional model may help with increasing participation and engagement.
- Ms. Passle Helminski provided the suggestion of having an OVR staff person who currently works with and has access to the PaRC, State Board, OVR, and other stakeholders coordinate the CAC operations.
- Mr. Chris Harbert provided feedback to address meeting comments including considerations of staggered meetings and the amount of quarterly CAC meetings for each region and District Office. BBVS and BVRS Directors are very much interested in receiving feedback from the public and CAC meetings. The State Board remains very interested in the reporting structure to ensure feedback is handled appropriately. OVR's Central Office involvement is being planned in the feedback sessions.
- Ms. Julianna Rodrigues shared the importance of having meetings held in both a virtual and in person format. Members agreed that a hybrid format both in person and virtual is important.
- Mr. Pennington provided the following considerations for CAC operations, including a hybrid model of responsibilities for both the PaRC and OVR.
    - OVR would designate District Office liaisons to participate in CAC meetings, respond to recommendations, and support recruitment.
    - PaRC's administrative support model responsibilities would include meeting coordination, schedules, membership and meeting records, meeting minutes, accommodations, communications, website content, and social media outreach.
    - CACs would meet quarterly with accessible hybrid format options; a statewide forum would bring together the CAC Chairs and OVR leadership with District Office representatives and PaRC members to review previous discussions and any issues that may be systems wide or local.
    - The reporting structure would include each CAC reporting to the District Office and the PaRC. The PaRC would provide annual summaries to OVR leadership. Expected benefits would be to improve customer engagement, community participation, and Employment First outcomes.
    - OVR would establish CACs in each District Office as they are currently structured and utilize the PaRC for centralized administrative support.
    - Each CAC would be comprised of at least 10 to 15 members and require that

at least 51% of members are individuals with disabilities and/or current or former OVR customers.

- The goal would be to strengthen the customers' voice, improve community outreach, support service improvement, enhance communication, and promote inclusion within services.
- This model is intended to evenly distribute responsibilities to all entities involved. PaRC would take some of the burden from District Offices by providing outreach and administrative functions while District Offices would be required to actively participate in meetings, provide response measures to recommendations and concerns, develop an escalation matrix, and provide feedback to the CACs.

- Members explained that these considerations would support OVR with receiving customer concerns and providing District Offices with an opportunity to respond accordingly. Members shared that another potential outreach mechanism to consider would be Customer Satisfaction Survey responses, informing customers of opportunities to provide additional input through the CACs.
- Members and attendees discussed considerations of time availability and financial components. Considerations include regional versus local meetings and monthly versus quarterly meetings.
- Members agreed to have the Committee Chair compile a written document of the considerations discussed today and to review them during the next Committee meeting to ensure that actionable recommendations are moved forward by PaRC regarding CAC operations.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

- Ms. Christine Hunsinger stated that she is concerned that the Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services District (BBVS) offices may be overshadowed by other concerns shared during a larger regional meeting.
- Mr. Angel Torres stated that Mr. Pennington provided a great outline of considerations. He said that OVR has access to customers and can contact them about their case noting that CACs do not have that ability due to confidentiality concerns.
- Ms. Christine Hunsinger stated that Mr. Pennington's considerations will require further thought, noting that increased engagement could be coordinated through additional platforms without compromising customer confidentiality and that OVR could include an option for customers to be contacted for additional feedback in its process.

**REVIEW AND CONSIDER INCORPORATING PREVIOUSLY DISCUSSED PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT COMPONENTS INTO THE COMMITTEE'S OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Members emphasized the importance of establishing mechanisms for receiving OVR's responses to concerns raised by transition students, OVR customers, and families, noting that a lack of responses has previously led to increased frustration.

- Based on the committee's discussions on CAC operation and public engagement, Mr. Pennington will create an overall tiered structure of recommendations in preparation for the next Committee meeting.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

- Ms. Christine Hunsinger stated that individuals who are blind or have low vision frequently raise concerns about the accessibility of the Commonwealth's website and responding to surveys. She suggested that these concerns be explored further and noted that an accessible website/customer survey would be helpful.
- Mr. Angel Torres agreed that increased OVR responses to customer concerns and inquiries would help with increased engagement.
- Mr. Pennington read a public comment submitted by Ms. Suzanne Erb regarding the use of Microsoft Teams during CAC meetings. The comment suggested using Zoom for these meetings, noting that it would be more accessible and would make it easier to facilitate the meetings.
- Mr. Brian D'Amico requested data regarding the Customer Satisfaction Surveys on the percentage of surveys sent and customer responses received. In response, Mr. Chris Harbert said that he would follow up with that information.
- Mr. D'Amico inquired about a plan for CAC funding and expressed concern that additional CAC operating expenses would be passed on to the taxpayers. In response, Mr. Harbert said that there is currently no funding plan specifically for the CACs, as the expenses for CAC operations are recurring.
- Mr. D'Amico stated that monthly CAC meetings would be too frequent and that holding meetings every other month would be ideal. He noted that regional meetings would not be effective, as they would limit opportunities for input from each local CAC.
- Mr. D'Amico emphasized the need to identify and address three challenges affecting CAC operations: attendance, OVR staffing, and budget. Potential solutions could include OVR's cooperation in ensuring that District Office Administrators participate with the local CACs. Mr. D'Amico also emphasized that each CAC should take responsibility for ensuring that information about meeting dates, meeting details, and materials is made available to the public through PaRC staff and the PaRC website.

**SCHEDULE NEXT MEETING**

- Due to time constraints, a poll will be sent via email to determine the date and time of the next meeting.

**ADJOURN**

- The meeting was adjourned at 3:05 PM.