

## **PA State Board of Vocational Rehabilitation**

Virtual Meeting via AT&T Conference Line

### **Minutes of Quarterly Meeting**

March 11, 2021

9am – 12:30pm

#### **State Board Members Present**

Jennifer Berrier  
Shannon Austin  
Mary Brougher

Theo Braddy  
David Mann  
Mike Kiel

Joe Drenth  
Fred Wright  
Peg Monaghan

#### **OVR Staff Present**

Shelbi Smith  
Cheryl Novak  
Lee Ann Stewart  
Stephanie Perry  
Ralph Roach  
Melissa Hawkins  
Rod Alcidonis

Jeremiah Underhill  
Sara Gales  
Jill Moriconi  
Doug Rand  
Beth Ann Fanning  
Kim Robinson  
Tara Okon

Beth Harris  
Jeff Seabury  
Jesse Crum-Lasko  
Russ Goddard  
Susan Jares  
Kathryn Hill

#### **Others Present**

Ellen Strom  
Matt Seeley  
Steve Pennington  
Passle Helminski  
Matt Flinner  
Jeff Iseman  
Jessica Adams  
Julia Barol  
Nichole Wade

Mohona Siddique  
Jen Hipps  
Courtney Harless  
Maryann Benedict  
Charles Lansberry  
Cristy Rachau  
Lisa Svidron  
Lisa Mathis  
Joe Michener

Mike Grier  
H. Fitzmaurice  
K. Tuttle  
Lisa Francese  
Jay Harner  
R. Lambert  
Tara Mullen  
Anthony Chan

#### **Public Agenda**

##### ***Welcome & Opening Remarks – Berrier***

- Ms. Berrier welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked everyone for participating.
- COVID caused unemployment numbers to be at their highest last spring, but has since recovered significantly. 5.3 million initial applications for UC.
- Rolling out new program to hire 500-1000 individuals to provide customer service to PA residents in a call center setting. This will benefit UC programs and OVR in finding jobs for individuals with disabilities.

#### **Action Items**

##### ***Approval of Agenda***

Final Minutes, March 11, 2021  
Approved June 3, 2021

- MOTION to approve agenda
- Mr. Drenth moved; Mr. Kiel seconded
- All in favor, none opposed
- Motion carried

### ***Approval of Meeting Minutes – December 2019***

- MOTION to approve minutes
- Ms. Brougher moved; Mr. Mann seconded
- All in favor, none opposed
- Motion carried

## **Public Agenda**

### ***Executive Director’s Remarks – Shannon Austin***

- Closed Order of Selection - OVR is in the process of getting a cash flow statement in order to remove another group of customers from the waiting list.
- Currently have 3,137 on the wait list. Of those, 1,469 have already been approved to come off the list.
- Corrective Action Plan is in beginning stages. It was submitted beginning of January and approved by RSA on 2/19/21.
- Ms. Austin and Carole Clancy have put together a podcast, and hope to release in April.
- There will be a series of webinars in April related to MOUs.
- The PDE MOU will be housed on PATTAN website. Also will include additional resources that are being developed for transition aged youth. A separate “transition resource website” is in development and eventually the MOU and related resources will be kept there.
- In beginning stages of Servant Leadership training for DAs and ADAs in all district offices.
- Diversity & Equity Initiative (DEI) program is picking up again. Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) for this will be launched soon.
- An OVR newsletter being developed.
- Ms. Brougher said the newsletter sounds like a great idea to tell OVR’s story.
- Mr. Kiel asked for more information about customers coming off the wait list. Ms. Austin said Jeremiah Underhill will give more information on this later in the meeting.

### ***Deputy Director’s Remarks – Jeremiah Underhill***

- OVR is committed to digital accessibility. Looking to secure Zoom licenses, more Adobe licenses, and the DocuSign program.
- Working on obtaining hiring freeze exemptions to get some critical positions filled. Most of the positions in the pipeline are customer-facing positions. This will help with customers coming off the wait list because there will be more counselors available, so customers won’t have to wait even longer after coming off the list.
- Mr. Braddy asked if OVR is looking to obtain Zoom access for use with customers or just internal use. Mr. Underhill said it will be used across the board for anything.

## **Stakeholder Reports**

### ***PaRC – Passle Helminski***

- PaRC's last full council meeting was on 2/17/21.
- The Council approved the *School to Work Transition* policy with recommendations.
- Eight new members were appointed in late January.
- Will be working with OVR on the 2-year modification to the State Plan.
- Social media committee has been very active and looking to hire a new webmaster to improve the website and outreach.
- A new PaRC email address has been created.
- CareerLink committee has elected a new Chair (Rob Wallington).
- Erie DA, Jack Hewitt, helped form an ad hoc committee for CareerLinks in Northwest PA.
- Annual report is available on the PaRC website.
- The next full council meeting will be held on 5/12/21, and will be virtual.

### ***SILC – Matt Seeley***

- Asked for any help they can get in filling their Board openings.
- SILC's State Plan was submitted in December and has been approved.

### ***ODHH – Melissa Hawkins***

- COVID has caused a backlog of Interpreter Registrations but ODHH continues to work through processing those.
- Collaborating with DOH to create a handout that will be available at hospitals, vaccine distribution sites, community health clinics and more.
- PA Treasury video phone is now staffed two full days a week. ODHH recently became aware of issues with the Treasury department's call center and is working to develop training within the call center to ensure that those who call via relay, videophone, or alternate means reach someone who is knowledgeable with assistive phones.
- ODHH/OVR unexpectedly came into funding from General Government Operations (GGO) state funds to ensure continuation of SSP services. Funding allows for ten hours of SSP services to a deafblind individual per month. Free SSP training is being held this weekend and will continue April-June. 15 individuals are registered for the training.
- Partnering with PA Registry for Interpreters of Deaf to offer workshops over the next few months. These workshops will give CEUs to registered and provisional interpreters in PA.
- Mr. Braddy thanked Ms. Austin for keeping SSP a priority and asked Ms. Hawkins if SSP goes beyond just employment for people who are deafblind. Ms. Hawkins said it is not specifically employment related.
- Mr. Drenth asked how many clients are deafblind and how many SSPs are currently trained. Ms. Hawkins said there are 17 deafblind receiving services and four active SSPs in the western part of the state, but she did not have the numbers for the eastern part of the state.

### ***CAP – Steve Pennington***

- Provided an overview of history of Pre-ETS within OVR. Would like language added to the *School to Work Transition* policy on the difference between Pre-ETS and Transition, and how OVR will coordinate and collaborate with providers.

## **Action Items**

### ***Approval of Final Draft of School to Work Transition Policy – Kim Robinson***

- Background info related to policy:
  - Revising the policy started back in 2019.
  - RSA has reviewed the policy.
  - Entered into a technical assistance agreement with federal partners.
  - Workgroup included members of labor, management, CAP, SBVR, PaRC, and Central Office staff.
  - Completed the MOU with PDE. This will include a toolkit.
  - Public comments were collected on the policy and shared with Board. Most addressed minor corrections and removal of redundant info. There were some suggestions related to doing a public information campaign, and not revisions to the policy itself.
  - Most significant revision made was related to the referral process to OVR. It was indicated that the section wasn't as clear as it could have been – confusion surrounding age group and some definitions. Added examples of when it would be appropriate to open an OVR case early.
- MOTION to approve policy
- Mr. Braddy moved; Ms. Brougher seconded
- All in favor, none opposed
- Motion carried

## **Topics for Discussion**

### ***Update on OVR Vehicle Modification Policy Workgroup – Tara Okon***

- Began working on revision in January 2020. Ms. Okon took over workgroup lead in January 2021.
- Draft policy revision will continue to cover vehicle mods but also driving services which will include adaptive and nonadaptive driving.
- Researching pre-driving services.
- Goal is to better define these services to provide them more consistently across the state.
- Hope to present draft to Board in September 2021, accept public comment in October 2021, present final draft to Board for approval in December 2021.
- Mr. Braddy asked if agreement with providers requires proof of quality driving equipment of vehicles for students and customers. Ms. Okon said they are just starting to develop the provider agreement, but that is something they are looking at. Mr. Braddy recommended special attention be given to ensure the equipment is up-to-date.

### ***Update on Supported Employment Policy Workgroup – Doug Rand & Beth Ann Fanning***

- Revised timeline for development of policy. Targeting July 2022 for go-live for the field.
- Hope to present draft to Board in September 2021, accept public comment October/November 2021, and present to Board for approval in December 2021.
- Looking to include simplifications of service options and flow to make it easier for staff to handle processes and keep things flexible for customers and also to improve how customer job stability is measured.

### ***Introduction to the Commonwealth's Digital Accessibility Program – Ellen Strom***

- Digital accessibility is not just the right thing to do – it is the law.
- Digital accessibility structures content so that people who use AT get the same information and experience as those who do not.
- Ten components make up a viable digital accessibility program. Some examples are:
  - Is accessibility considered in government decision making processes?
  - Do you have channels in place to get feedback on the experience?
  - Is there a policy in place?
  - Are industry standards like 508 addressed?
  - Budgeting for necessary requirements/accommodations?
  - Testing against industry standards? Using automated testing tool? Manual testing?
- Following multi-year strategy.
- Must have a training program in place that addresses each role.
- Digital accessibility maturity assessment planned to see where each department falls within accessibility. Roadmaps will be put in place to make sure everyone is thinking about and planning for improving accessibility year after year.
- Selected an accessibility management platform – role-based training, tool-based training, topic-based training.
- Starting with pilot in each IT delivery center, then will roll out to the rest of the agencies.
- Updated accessibility policy to better define things and add the maturity assessment and roadmaps.
- Accessibility platform and roadmaps will start to roll out in 2022, with yearly updates to roadmaps and assessments.
- Mr. Drenth asked if issues are found, can people contact someone to report those issues? Ms. Strom said she is open to that, but in the long-term, she would like to identify a group to take those comments and respond to them.
- Mr. Drenth asked if accessibility training is currently part of State employee onboarding. Ms. Strom said there is some awareness training, but aside from that, nothing else exists in that area at the moment – it is something she is looking to add.

### ***Update on Lean Practices in PA – Matt Flinner***

- Mr. Flinner is tasked with improving adoption of Lean culture within L&I.
- Provided brief overview of concept of Lean.
- Lean within L&I:
  - 60% of L&I staff have received Lean training
  - 166 completed or ongoing Lean projects within L&I – 80 completed, 82 ongoing

- Did some customer experience work within UC
- Looking at workforce grants process
- Lean within OVR:
  - Working on CWDS improvements
  - 61% of OVR staff have received Lean training
  - OVR has 52 projects submitted
  - OVR has 6 projects submitted per 100 employees
  - OVR is way ahead of other agencies in L&I, but still have some areas for improvement
  - Expect to have a new process in place to gather Lean suggestions within the next three months.
  - Improving OVR customer experience will take place over the next two years.

## **OVR Bureau Director Reports**

### ***HGAC – Jill Moriconi***

- All programs back in operation since March.
- Openings in all programs for summer term starting in May.
- Looking to increase referrals outside of OVR and increase number of students without disabilities.
- Started third workforce development program with JARI.
- Meeting next week on veterans leadership program and looking to partner with local VA.
- Looking to expand offers outside of normal M-F, 8am-4pm class schedule.
- Accreditation delayed for another year.
- Working on focus groups to look at how to improve service delivery to individuals who are blind or visually impaired. Board and Stakeholders can expect emails asking for suggestions.
- Mr. Braddy asked about student vaccinations. Ms. Moriconi said at this time, vaccines are not offered through the center but many students have been utilizing their own doctors for that. Any student that expresses interest and meets eligibility can ask the Center for help in obtaining an appointment and transportation to a local vaccination site. She also reported that there have been zero positive cases in the Center.

### ***BVRS – Stephanie Perry***

- Currently at 58% of yearly customer employment goal.
- Staffing: 19% vacancy rate (16% direct line staff, 3% management and clerical staff).

### ***BBVS – Rod Alcidonis***

- From the end of April through June, BBVS will be piloting training series on creation of accessible documents for BBVS staff.
- BEP licensees continue to work as well as possible during COVID. BEP will receive \$400k as part of COVID relief package. Developing plans to modernize BEP and launch training opportunities for licensees. Working to update policies.

- STRIVE On Program launched 3/4/21 with 33 students and so far, and has proven to be a positive experience. Spring session focuses on self-advocacy, employability, and AT. Planning to offer another session in the fall.
- Back in November, received approval for O&M staff to provide limited services to customers. Procured necessary PPE for those staff and as of 3/8/21, staff have been authorized to provide services to students entering college, individuals who live alone, and individuals seeking to retain employment.
- SSP is a high priority within BBVS.

### **BCO – Ralph Roach**

- BSOD is looking at future career pathways post-COVID.
- BCO staff are working closely with James Martini and statewide workforce development teams to prepare a response in 2022 geared toward implementation of new state plan.

### **Public Comment**

- Julia Barol, President of PA APSE
  - Read statement from chapter saying they are committed to working closely with OVR.
  - Ms. Austin said OVR echoes the sentiment of being committed to working together.
- Jeff Iseman, PA SILC
  - SILC's approved state plan can be found at SILC website and can also be emailed out to anyone who would like a copy.
  - Asked if the advisory group related to BBVS will be restarting. Mr. Alcidonis said meetings have been taking place and have been announced on the OVR website, as well as in local newspapers. He also said they can work together to make sure Mr. Iseman receives meeting invites in the future.
  - Asked for an update on numbers related to people with disabilities filing UC claims. Ms. Austin said she can ask if Bill Trusky from UC can come to a future Board meeting to give another update on that.
- Jessica Adams – Deaf Stone Services
  - Thanked Ms. Austin and Ms. Hawkins for their support of the SSP program.
  - Looking to hire full-time staff person to help with scheduling needs.
  - Recruiting more SSPs and looking at interpreter training programs.
  - Helped with five deaf blind individuals to match them with SSPs for the COVID vaccine.

### **Wrap-Up**

### **Adjournment**

- MOTION to adjourn
- Mr. Braddy moved; Mr. Kiel seconded
- All in favor, none opposed
- Motion carried