

## **Pennsylvania State Board of Vocational Rehabilitation**

The Woodlands  
1073 Highway 315  
Wilkes-Barre PA 18702

### **Minutes of Quarterly Meeting**

June 13, 2019  
9:00 am – 12:30 pm

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

Jerry Oleksiak	Joe Drenth	Ray Hoover
Liza Conyers	Mike Kiel	
MJ Bartelmay (via phone)	John Tague	

#### **OVR Staff**

Lee Ann Stewart	Tammy Burke	Bridget Sandrowicz	Greg Riedlinger
Shelbi Smith	Cindy Mundis	Doug Rand	Ryan Hyde
Jill Moriconi	Stan Swaintek	Nichole Nedinsky	Cheryl Novak
Mike Huber	Maureen Taylor	Ralph Roach	
Heather Nelson	Amber Phillips	Shannon Austin	

#### **Others Present**

Wendi Buzzanco	Warren Knight	Brenda-Ann Gillis	Joanne Manganello
Silvia Buzzanco	Lynn Heitz	Michael Gillis	Seth Acosta
Joe Lee	Tom Brown	Denise Corcoran	Harriet Go
Nick Tasz	Linda Mackey	Connie Schen	David Goldstein
John Horst	Brian Mackey	Dave Szymanowski	Brittany Vernalli
Donna Sedar	Alicia Santiago	Mark Zink	Bob O'Brien
Jessica Sassaman	Jennifer Schley	Bob Fox	Steve Pennington
Cindi Brown	Alivia Weidler	Dale Verchich	Kristin Grim
Keith Williams	Cortney Lakis	Corey Nelson	Dawn Daignault
Joe Michener	Nicole Clakeley	Kelly Martini	Jeff Iseman

#### **Welcome – Secretary Oleksiak**

- Secretary Oleksiak welcomed everyone and asked all Board members to introduce themselves.
- Sec. Oleksiak also announced that Mr. O'Brien, Executive Deputy Secretary for L&I, was joining the panel for the day and Mr. Bartelmay was joining by phone.

#### **Action Items**

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

- MOTION to approve the agenda
- Ms. Conyers moved, Mr. Drenth seconded.
- All in favor, none opposed – motion carried.

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

- MOTION to approve minutes

Final Minutes, June 13, 2019  
Approved September 12, 2019

- Mr. Hoover moved, Mr. Tague seconded.
- All in favor, none opposed – motion carried.

### **Opening Remarks, Executive Director’s Remarks – Secretary Oleksiak, Shannon Austin**

- Secretary Oleksiak discussed the search for new OVR Executive Director:
  - There were over 1700 hits on website, narrowed down to 77 qualified individuals. 16 individuals accepted interviews, one dropped out, so 15 interviews were conducted. Interview panel brought that down to four, and Shannon Austin was the unanimous choice of the panel.
  - In the Executive session of the last Board meeting, Ms. Austin was unanimously approved by the Board.
- Ms. Austin wished everyone a good morning and said she is excited to lead OVR through this time. She feels she has been well-incorporated with L&I, which will benefit OVR as she transitions into her new role. She said many things will be addressed during this meeting that have impacted OVR, particularly related to fiscal matters. OVR has been evaluating, and will continue to evaluate, financial needs and what can be decreased/eliminated so that OVR can run most effectively and efficiently. Ms. Austin said she has a heart to bridge the gap between the executive and management teams and to establish a strong relationship between the two. She would like to see the agency maintain consistency of services and she thinks there is an opportunity to expand and create meaningful partnerships/collaborations with employers. She also looks forward to engaging with her internal staff, as well as key stakeholders. Ms. Austin thanked everyone for the opportunity to be present today and she hopes she can move the agency forward and fight on behalf of individuals with disabilities.
- Secretary Oleksiak recognized Mr. Hyde for doing an outstanding job as Acting Executive Director.

### **Stakeholder Reports**

#### **SILC – Jeff Iseman**

- SILC got their one-year sequence of the State Plan for Independent Living signed for one year.
- At the SILC’s May Board meeting, Ryan Hyde gave an OVR update and answered many questions. Secretary Miller from DHS was also there and answered some employment questions. ODP is supposed to be putting out some guidance on what they are doing and how OVR is involved. Michael Gamel-McCormick from Senator Casey’s office also provided an update at that meeting.
- There were representatives from two of the local CILs at today’s SBVR meeting and Mr. Iseman asked them to provide brief updates.
  - Denise Corcoran is the Executive Director of ARCIL, which covers Luzerne, Carbon, and Schuylkill counties. When she first started, ARCIL was funded at \$250K per year and now they’re funded \$206K per year. They’re hoping to get back to the original level of funding. In May 2018, ARCIL provided transportation to 402 riders and in May 2019, 703 riders. ARCIL’s vans are accessible and run 24 hours/day, 365 days/year.
  - Keith Williams is the Advocacy & Outreach Coordinator at the Scranton CIL. Mr. Williams echoed Ms. Corcoran’s comments and concerns regarding funding. He also urged everyone to keep people with disabilities and employment at the forefront of any policy and direction that OVR develops.

## **PaRC – Bob Fox**

- PaRC has reviewed the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) with OVR staff, and agreed to have members participate in OVR's Vehicle Mod Policy and Order of Selection (OOS) workgroups.
- Members have worked to update the State Plan as it relates to OVR's intention to close the Order of Selection, and have collaborated with OVR to determine goals and priorities for the next four-year plan.
- Members met with legislators in April to discuss OVR's fiscal crisis and request an increase in funding.
- PaRC's next quarterly meeting is 8/21/2019 in Harrisburg.

## **CAP – Steve Pennington**

- CAP has provided comments to the Board on the OOS, recognizing that closing the OOS is going to have a negative impact. Their approach was to look at whether the justification in the PA Bulletin was correct and accurate. CAP's stance is that the justification was not correct and CAP does not agree that the blame should be placed on the anticipation of an influx of PETS customers. The problem is that OVR does not have a PETS policy. According to the law, the State must develop and maintain written policies covering the nature and scope of each of the VR services, of which, PETS is the first services identified. If there is no policy, there is no way to manage it.
- Mr. Pennington stated that, over the last couple of months, there has been less willingness on L&I's part to talk to CAP. He hopes there is an opportunity to repair the relationship because the last thing he wants is for CAP's voice not to be heard.
- Secretary Oleksiak said he does disagree with some of Mr. Pennington's comments, but they will talk more about it at a later time.

## **Public Agenda**

### **Update on Governor's Budget Proposal – Secretary Oleksiak**

- Budget is due 7/1, and this year, there is a real possibility that the budget might be on time.
- Mr. Hyde had approached the Secretary with some dire predictions about OVR's budget and Secretary Oleksiak pushed Mr. Hyde to make sure the numbers he presented were accurate. This led to the creation of a cross-agency team and regular meetings with the Governor and his staff. As a result of those meetings, the Governor put a \$2.4M increase for OVR into his budget proposal.
- OVR has maxed out on match funds and has been contacting the Governor's office frequently to see if some adjustments could be made so that Federal matching dollars could be drawn down, but it doesn't seem to be a possibility.
- In terms of reallocation funds, states have been giving less money back, which means there is less money for OVR to tap into.
- Cost-Saving Measures
  - Secretary Oleksiak clarified that, while it may have been mentioned as a cost-saving measure, merging BBVS and BVRS was never a serious consideration. This does not mean, however, that this or any other issue will not be on the table if the financial situation continues to worsen.
  - During his tenure as OVR Acting Director, Mr. Hyde began making what administrative changes he could within OVR.

- Strategic hiring: Every position was evaluated and only those with the most need to fill have been posted. He's trying to keep the complement under 800, not including HGAC, and the current complement stands at about 783. Because of this, OVR has been able to save \$875K over a six-month period.
  - Reduced overtime by \$336K
  - Reduced travel by \$120K
  - Reduced training by \$24K
  - Evaluating summer programs/academies, which are high-dollar programs, to see if they should continue
  - Restructuring PETS model
  - Strategic planning, looking at service costs and what has been effective
- OVR's expenditures are anticipated to outpace the resources
- PETS holds up a large sum of money. District offices are required to produce budgets for PETS and \$8M was requested through the period of July through September to cover summer programs/academies (which accounts for \$4M) and general PETS services. Most of the Innovation & Expansion contracts are fading out, with only two left after October, but another \$1.9M is expected to come in for them. Personnel costs for PETS staff is expected to come out to \$2.6M. Total PETS expenses are anticipated to be \$31M.
- 10/1/18 to present: \$39M has been allocated, \$28.5M has been expensed, \$10.4M remaining to expense.
- Based on projections, OVR needs \$96.2M total and is currently trying to fill a gap of \$20.4M.
- No anticipated savings for the month of July
- OVR is getting a larger-than-expected June reimbursement of \$1.7M, with \$400K per month being the average. However, following a larger reimbursement like this, the next 1-2 months tend to be lower than average.
- OVR needs to put a limit on the amount spent in State funds between 7/1 and 9/30 to avoid negatively impacting the ability to match. Mr. Kiel asked what that threshold is. Mr. Hyde said \$30M or more must be available for Federal match, otherwise it would cause a cash-flow issue.
- PETS questions from Board:
  - Mr. Drenth asked where OVR stands in terms of a PETS policy. Ms. Austin said managers have already been informed of the model OVR is working toward and there is a plan in place to get that started by 10/1. This will incorporate training with staff, providers, key stakeholders. Utilizing ERCs and BSOD team in part of the delivery of services is being considered. Weekly meetings are held with managers and staff. School districts and Providers have been surveyed. Mr. Drenth clarified that his question was aimed more at how staff are being trained to keep PETS costs down and if there is a way to make sure the costs don't exceed the 15% that Federal law requires. Ms. Austin said the 15% is a floor, not a ceiling, but she thinks a presentation on what the new model is going to look like would be beneficial, and would give the Board an opportunity to see how OVR plans to utilize technology and job shadowing for students. Mr. Drenth asked if the model includes ways to prevent PETS costs from overtaking OVR's original mission. Ms. Austin said that looking at what has been done historically, assessing what partnerships should be developed, and watching national trends and other VR systems is more beneficial than speculating on what *could* happen.

The agency realizes that the direction must be adjusted to make it sustainable over a long period of time and, with that, is in constant contact with WINTAC for support.

- Mr. Tague asked if there is an internal workgroup working on a PETS policy. Mr. Hyde said there is a workgroup to update the Provider Agreement, but he does agree with Mr. Pennington that a PETS policy needs developed. Mr. Drenth asked to create a Board subcommittee to assist in developing that policy. Secretary Oleksiak said a subcommittee will be created, similarly to how the ad-hoc committee for the State VR Act was formed.
- YTD as of 5/1, 26,746 students were served in the PETS program. This number is expected to climb and could reach 28K.
- 3,485 IEP meetings have been attended, with Wilkes-Barre attending 527 of them.
- OVR is not only facing a financial issue, but a personnel shortage as well. Determining how to prioritize funding to ensure enough people are hired and there is enough money to authorize whatever the plan dictates is very important.
- Workgroup has been looking at the Training Policy for about one year. Since they are aiming for 2020 implementation of that policy, it is hoped that a draft will go out to the Board and the public for comment in Fall 2019.
- Vehicle Mod Policy is also being looked at for updates.
- Reduced brick and mortar costs by moving certain DOs to smaller offices and CO will probably be absorbed back into the L&I building within the next year or two.
- Ms. Conyers asked if closing OOS will lead to reduction of providers and if customers will even bother applying for services. She suggested the Board write letters to the Governor and associated committees. Secretary Oleksiak said a letter should be sent to the Federal government as well and that he will ask Cathy Lantzy to draft a letter to be approved by the Board. Ms. Conyers also suggested defining and monitoring points of impact and believes that OVR needs a cross-silo approach.

### ***Action Item***

#### **Approval to Close Order of Selection**

- MOTION from Mr. Tague that the Board approve the temporary closure of the OOS, upon approval from RSA.
- Mr. Hoover seconded.
- Board discussion:
  - Mr. Tague said this is the most difficult motion he's ever made but he does not see any other options. He said OVR staff has done a tremendous job squeezing every possible dollar out.
  - Mr. Hoover said he agrees with Mr. Tague. It is just something that must be done.
  - Mr. Drenth said he has concerns about the OOS closure. His stance is that it goes against the Governor's Employment First Initiative because it will only postpone VR services and doesn't solve the underlying financial problem. He thinks it takes the heat off making changes that will lead to long-term solutions.
  - Secretary Oleksiak stated that he understands Mr. Drenth's concerns, but said that OVR has already begun the process of making the kinds of changes that Mr. Drenth rightfully says need to be made. He assured the Board that as long as he is in office, there will be no easing up on the pressure to reopen OOS as soon as possible.

- Mr. Kiel said Mr. Drenth is right – this is not a solution; however, this is the least of all evils.
- Mr. Rhoten admitted he came to this meeting expecting to oppose the closure, but after Mr. Hyde’s presentation, he doesn’t think the Board has any choice other than to support the closure.
- Mr. Drenth asked if any of the public feedback was included in Mr. Hyde’s presentation, but may have been skipped over due to time constraints. Secretary Oleksiak responded that it was separate from this presentation, although it was discussed in the informational meeting with the Board the night before. Mr. Drenth said that sending the materials to the Board the day of the meeting is inconvenient, as it does not allow for adequate time to review. Secretary Oleksiak agreed, but explained that the Governor’s office had to approve the materials before they could be shared with anyone.
- Mr. Tague asked what the general tenor of the public comments was. Ms. Verchimak said that, just like everyone else has been saying at this meeting, no one wants to see this happen. OVR’s response was that the agency will do its best to mitigate and the hope is that this closure would be as temporary as possible.
- Secretary Oleksiak asked if any suggestions were provided in the public comments. Ms. Verchimak said nothing was recommended that OVR was not already considering.
- Public Comment:
  - Mr. Pennington said that closing in the last quarter of FY2019 just moves the problem to 2020. He also said that it is conceivable that the OOS will never reopen. He feels that this does not fix anything, it just aggravates and complicates what is coming in FY2020.
  - Marsha Drenth asked the Board not to close the OOS, as it will negatively impact the disability community.
  - Connie Schen opposes the closure because she does not want the blind community to lose access to services.
  - Dave Szymanowski said he wishes that some of the information presented at this meeting was made available to the public beforehand. He believes there are options other than closing the OOS, such as clustering to help define who needs the services most and what can be done to provide those service. He asked why the 15% floor for PETS can’t be the ceiling. Secretary Oleksiak explained that the 15% is mandated by the regulations, which indicate there cannot be a ceiling.
  - Lynn Heitz told her OVR success story and said that if the OOS is closed, it creates the perception that OVR does not care about the disability community.
  - Wendi Buzzanco said she is the mother of a daughter who is blind and she understands both sides of the story – she understands the budget problems and the service problems – but she is here to fight for her daughter’s needs. She asked if the suggestion to redefine the OOS and to determine who needs services most is going to go into effect. She also asked if OVR is looking into partnering with outside providers to continue services for customers.
  - Warren Knight asked the Board to imagine waiting a whole year for services.
  - Tom Brown said that closing the OOS is not a good idea and he is concerned with the word “temporary” as it relates to the closure. That is an unknown set amount of time – it could be months, it could be years. He also mentioned that, while he knows it is not under consideration, OVR should not merge BBVS and BVRS.

- Harriet Go told her OVR success story and said these services need to continue for the young disability community so they can be successful, too.
- Donna Sedar stated that she thinks there was not enough time/consideration given to the public comments, which made it difficult for the public present at this meeting to provide alternatives to closing the OOS.
- Secretary Oleksiak asked if there is any further discussion from the board, and there was none. All but one Board member was in favor, one Board member (Mr. Drenth) opposed.

### ***Topics for Discussion***

#### **Discussion of Potential BBVS/BVRS Merger**

- Mr. Drenth said that rumors of a merger caused him, along with members of the blind community, to form a workgroup to look at why BBVS should be separate from BVRS. The costs associated with blindness rehabilitation are higher due to Braille, assistive technology, O&M, etc. that are not paid for by medical programs/insurance. Specialized and separate services are necessary. This workgroup is developing a position paper signed and endorsed by many stakeholders.
- Mr. Tague said that, as long as he is on the Board, he would never support the merger.
- Ms. Conyers stated that she has never recommended the merger, but she does want to encourage everyone to keep commenting and raising concerns, not only about this, but about the OOS closure, as well.

### ***Standing Reports***

#### **BCO – Ryan Hyde**

- BCO is in the process of updating fiscal procedures and the Board will receive a copy of that once completed.
- OVR is eliminating a line in Vehicle Mod Policy that was determined to not be allowable, per RSA's technical assistance.
- Updating the four-year combined State Plan.
- RSA monitoring is occurring the week of 8/12.
- Mr. Hyde thanked everyone for being respectful and understanding while he was Acting ED.
- He also acknowledged all of OVR and Cindy Mundis especially, as she is retiring after 26 years with the agency.

#### **HGAC – Jill Moriconi**

- HGAC has been busy with different events every month, including job shadowing in March, Autism Awareness Walk and resource fair in April, Barrier Awareness Day in May, PETS summer academy in June with a second one in July.
- Graduation for 59 students was in April and over 100 new students have arrived for the new term.
- HGAC hopes to keep referrals going through the OOS closure and has seen a 13% increase in admissions in the first quarter of the FY.
- HGAC was awarded a \$20K grant through PLCB to educate students about responsible drinking.
- Awarded a grant to fund the welding program.
- JARI has applied for a \$52K grant to provide training for individuals in the community in maintenance fields. Will hear back in July if the grant is received.

### **BVRS – Denise Verchimak**

- Ms. Verchimak was going to present on how OOS will work if RSA approves the closure, but will hold off due to time constraints. The presentation is included in the Board books, so she encouraged the members to look that over and she will spend some time on this topic at the next Board meeting.

### **BBVS – Stan Swaintek**

- BBVS has some job openings in the leadership team as a result of Ms. Austin's promotion, Lynn Heitz's departure as District Administrator in Philadelphia DO, Shelly Faust-Jones's retirement, and ILOB specialist Susan Neff's departure.
- Summer programs are continuing
  - Junior Summer Academy
    - 22 middle school students at Kutztown University for a week
    - Partnership with BSE, who funds the majority of the program
    - Costs OVR roughly \$450 per student
  - Summer Academy
    - 2 weeks this year instead of 3 weeks
    - 27 high school students at Penn State University
    - Cost dropped from \$16K to \$9-10K
  - Overbrook Academy
    - 11 students
    - OVR pays for two weeks and Overbrook is paying for the third week

### ***Topics for Discussion (ctd.)***

#### **OVR Summer Internships – Ralph Roach, Bridget Sandrowicz**

- On 6/3, 25 college students started their first day of a 10-week paid internship.
- An OJT was coordinated and seven CILs are participating in that internship program. OVR covers the cost and accommodation requests for the interns. Both part- and full-time positions are offered.
- Commonwealth Summer Internship is in its second year collaborating with OA to provide paid internships for OVR-eligible students. Rate of pay is \$13.56/hr. at 37.5 hrs. per week. Over 50 students applied, and that was narrowed down to 25 interns. Bi-weekly classes related to disability are offered and the students will be able to tour the Governor's mansion.
- Mr. Hyde said these programs are helping to teach OA how to hire more people with disabilities, and how to make sure job postings/tests are accessible. It also helps supervisors learn about people with disabilities and realize it's not a big deal – they're just like other employees.

### ***Public Comment***

- Marsha Drenth said she has concerns about ODHH's last report and wonders what ODHH is doing in the community. Ms. Austin said she understands the concerns and thinks that ODHH has struggled to capture everything the agency is doing and there is room for improvement.
- Dave Szymanowski asked if the public will have access to the OOS public comments for review. Ms. Verchimak said a summary document will be developed and shared on the L&I/OVR website and in an email sent out to stakeholders.

- Mr. Drenth commented that he has received some negative reports from OVR staff who have not been receiving their ADA accommodations on time and that needs to be looked into. Secretary Oleksiak said he is aware of some of those issues and he and Mr. Drenth can talk privately about that for follow-up.

### ***Adjournment***

- MOTION to adjourn
- Mr. Kiel moved, Ms. Conyers seconded.
- All in favor, none opposed – motion carried.