

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

The Radisson Hotel Harrisburg  
1150 Camp Hill Bypass  
Camp Hill PA 17011

### **Minutes of Quarterly Meeting**

March 5, 2020

9:00 am – 1:00 pm

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

Jerry Oleksiak	Mike Kiel	Fred Wright	Peg Monaghan
Shannon Austin	Mary Brougher	Liza Conyers	Joe Drenth

#### **OVR Staff Present**

Cheryl Novak	Tracie Maille	Sara Gales	Stephanie Perry
David Ritter	Russ Goddard	Bridget Frascella	Ryan Hyde
Stan Swaintek	Melissa Hawkins	Shelbi Smith	Jim Marker
Lee Ann Stewart	Amy Moore	Nichole Nedinsky	

#### **Others Present**

Passle Helminski	Katie Yost	Brittany Vernalli	Cathy Lantzzy
Dan LaValla	Sharon Behun	Mary Hartley	Carole Clancy
Kay Tyberg	Janetta Green	Jennifer Schley	Neil Cashman
Gary Smith	Jeff Iseman	Lynn Heitz	Matt Seeley
Brandy Burnham	George Palmer	Dan Kuba	
Lori Tyndall	Chelsea Lotts	Steve Pennington	

### **Public Agenda**

#### **Welcome & Opening Remarks – Secretary Oleksiak**

- Sec. Oleksiak welcomed everyone to the meeting and the Board members introduced themselves.
- Since last Board meeting, there was a budget hearing before House and Senate Appropriations Committee. House is stepping up oversight in various agencies. Another testimony before Appropriations Committee is scheduled for April.
- COOP meets regularly and is preparing for possible Coronavirus pandemic.

#### **Action Items**

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

- MOTION to approve agenda
- Mr. Kiel moved, Ms. Brougher seconded
- All in favor, none opposed – motion carried

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

- MOTION to approve minutes
- Mr. Wright moved, Ms. Conyers seconded.
- All in favor, none opposed – motion carried

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Approved June 4, 2020

## **Public Agenda**

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

- Acknowledged ADA 30 and commented that OVR continues to push for rights for individuals with disabilities.
- OOS Update
  - Effective 2/1 – moved 2,000+ individuals from waitlist. 4,400+ still on waitlist
  - Ms. Perry will give update on OOS definition changes
- Budget Update
  - Federal budget passed in December
  - \$132M received
- Cost-saving measures
  - 5S Caseload Project
    - Started in December, wrapping up now.
    - Increased engagement from 74% to 91%
  - HGAC
    - Piloting motion-sensor lighting as cost-saving measure
    - FAFSA forms required for students
- In process of creating MOU with Dept. of Ed. and OLTL
- Since 7/1, closed 12,600+ cases. Currently at around 70% of goal.
- Staffing
  - Trying to bridge gap between management and labor
  - Ms. Austin has been engaging with staff in each DO; spending a whole day with them to collect feedback
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> round of interviews for OVR Deputy Director completed; have recommendation for hire
  - BBVS Director interviews completed; have recommendation for hire
  - BVRS Director interviews ongoing
  - Looking at updating job classifications
  - Exploring AWS, flex time and home headquartering as retention measures
    - AWS has been approved
  - Working with OVR Training Director to try to make onboarding and professional development more robust for staff
- Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) initiative
  - Trainings have started and will continue throughout the year
  - Working with Dr. Gines to develop a training related to D&I brokers in offices
- State Plan was approved
  - Part of the plan involved adding job retention to OOS
- RSA audit completed in August 2019
  - Currently waiting on report from RSA
- Workgroups
  - Transition getting ready to start
  - Lean – next project will be DARs
  - College Policy – waiting for fiscal projections
  - Vehicle Mod started
- Mr. Kiel asked for SSI reimbursements compared to last year
  - 2019 – \$7.5M
  - As of October 2019 – \$3.8M

## **Stakeholder Reports**

### **SILC – Matt Seeley**

- SILC State Plan
  - Forums held last year provided lots of good information that will help guide the development of State Plan
  - Once draft has been developed, hearings will be held about it
- Mr. Hyde asked Mr. Seeley to talk about the recent presentation regarding disaster preparedness
  - George Palmer led that presentation and provided a report
    - Desperate need for people with disabilities to prepare for disaster/emergencies
    - The assumption is that PEMA/FEMA will come to the rescue, but that's not necessarily the case
    - Mr. Kiel asked if Madonna Long has been consulted. Mr. Palmer said he can reach out to her.

### **PaRC – Passle Helminski**

- Concern about CareerLinks
  - Happy that Ralph Roach will be taking the lead on that
  - Front-end staff at CareerLink turns over a lot and she would like to see that problem addressed
  - Self-evaluation of CareerLinks after first year is a concern
  - Staff also needs to be more thoroughly trained on how to work with people with disabilities
  - Ms. Austin said this is a national problem and through continuous engagement and as more meetings are held about this, these problems will be addressed.
  - Sec. Oleksiak asked for specific instances of people being turned away, etc. Ms. Helminski said she can provide that to him after the meeting.
- There is a federal ruling in the works and Ms. Helminski asked the Board to review that information and comment on the ruling.
  - Mr. Wright asked if Ms. Helminski can comment on emotional support animals vs. service animals. She outlined the differences.
  - Sec. Oleksiak said they will obtain these documents and distribute to Board members.
- Tracie Maille provided an update on CareerLinks
  - Replacing receptionist position with coordinator position
    - \$5/hr. pay increase
    - One key job task is to have a working knowledge of all partners to ensure customers are assisted with sign-in and completion of applications

### **ODHH – Melissa Hawkins**

- Actively working with Dept. of Health to keep D/HH community updated
- Ongoing work with US Census. DHH community has concerns about protection of information.
- Ongoing work with PA State Police on video that will be posted on their social media accounts on how to use the driver placard
- Started Act 57 town halls
- Ms. Brougher asked what interpreter concerns exist in Philadelphia. Ms. Hawkins said the main concern is unregistered interpreters showing up to assignments and demanding customer sign a release form. Many of these customers don't understand the form, and the forms are being used inappropriately.

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## **CAP – Steve Pennington**

- Recognized Ray Hoover for the work he did on the Board over the years
- Much of Mr. Pennington’s first year on Employment First Commission was spent collecting data from OVR, DHS, ODP, PDE, etc.
  - Looked at all nine Act 26 quarterly reports, 911 reports, and 2020 agency update on goals and objectives. He found that there needs to be some significant improvement in OVR reports.
    - Ms. Austin asked if he thinks the questions in the Act 26 report need to be reviewed. Pennington said yes, that would be his suggestion.
  - Focus has been on compliance and this has been a challenge. OVR needs to move past just compliance.
    - Sec. Oleksiak said compliance is a big piece so we can’t abandon it altogether or we won’t get the money we need, but he feels that we should take a step past compliance.
  - PA has provided more Pre-ETS and more varied types of Pre-ETS than any other state.
    - Ms. Conyers asked for this to be an agenda item in a future meeting.
    - Mr. Wright asked if there should be a better correlation between training and data. Pennington said that, as an example, OVR is part of Workforce, but he doesn’t see much synergy between the two entities.
    - Mr. Pennington challenged Sec. Oleksiak is to find the best way to organize and analyze data, not only to focus on operational performance accountability, but also to conduct research and evaluation and use that data to improve policies, OVR programs, and strategies.
    - Mr. Kiel asked if this data is able to provide any projections on what it means for the future. Pennington said he found the data can provide some projections, but it doesn’t go deep enough to give OVR a foundation to be able to make real changes. He would like to hear from some of these data collectors to see how this process actually works.
    - Ms. Austin said this is already in process and as the project moves forward, some clarification should be available to us. Pennington was glad to hear this, but L&I needs to take the lead to develop ways to correlate and share data across agencies. He would also like to see someone in each district office who can answer questions related to the data. He would also like to see one person who understands the Workforce system who can focus their efforts on this data collection/correlation/sharing. Sec. Oleksiak said OVR is aware of this and is moving in that direction. Mr. Hyde said he agrees with Mr. Pennington on this, but each time a data position is filled, another one is vacated so it’s been hard to keep this moving.
    - Ms. Conyers asked if it’s possible to partner with academic institutions to address this issue. Sec. Oleksiak said the Keystone Command Center has been discussing barriers and how to address them. These barriers can hinder progress on important projects.

## ***Topics for Discussion***

### **Bureau of Special Education (BSE) Update – Carole Clancy**

- This year, the bureau has allocated 17 grants to support students with disabilities to achieve competitive integrated employment and next year anticipate providing up to 20 grants for school districts to do the same.

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- There have been meetings with OVR and BSE to develop an MOU. Both OVR and BSE came to the table with the same enthusiasm, so the creation of the MOU proved to be easier than anticipated. Working on creating guidance for the field. The hope is that this partnership will help address some of the concerns in the field.
  - Sec. Oleksiak asked how this will work. Ms. Clancy said both agencies have their own regulations, so right now, teachers send invitations to OVR to participate in IEP meetings. This is flooding OVR because the resources are not available to attend every single meeting. One goal is to have a decision tree that will outline when OVR should be involved. Another goal is to ensure the data being collected for OVR is measuring what is required to be measured. Looking at the questions in the Act 26 survey is a good recommendation.
  - Ms. Austin said it's important for OVR and BSE to be on the same page and have consistency across the agencies.
  - Mr. Drenth asked for a bit more information on the grants for the districts. Ms. Clancy said districts apply for grants based on certain criteria. These grants need to be developed with programs in mind that are completely integrated.
  - Mr. Kiel asked if OVR counselors have the ability to attend IEP meetings remotely to possibly be able to attend more meetings. Ms. Clancy confirmed that this is an option being explored. Ms. Austin also said a big piece of that is having enough notice in advance.
  - Ms. Maille said a persistent concern of OVR is availability of parents to sign all necessary forms, and perhaps a comprehensive packet up front to streamline the process would be a good option. Ms. Clancy said she will take that back and look into it.
  - Mr. Iseman asked if all 500 districts will be included in the grants in the future. Ms. Clancy said that is the goal.
  - Mr. Iseman asked if people other than just OVR staff could connect remotely. Ms. Clancy said this is an option.
  - Mr. Wright asked what the average caseload is for an OVR counselor. Ms. Austin said a viable caseload is around 100. Ms. Lantzy also asked about the counselors working with school districts. Ms. Austin said it varies and asked Ms. Perry to speak to that. Ms. Perry said, on average, there are roughly 150-200 cases for the transition counselors. David Ritter said caseload size is one thing, but with regard to attending an IEP meeting, the invitations are often sent out whether there is an open case or not, which can add to the difficulty in getting to all meetings. Ms. Austin said OVR is required to serve eligible and potentially eligible customers, so the number of IEP meetings to attend is sometimes too much to handle.
  - Ms. Conyers was happy to hear about the efforts to decrease duplication of work and asked for the grant information.
  - Ms. Brouger asked how the Board can be involved in the next step of developing the MOU. Ms. Clancy said the Board will certainly be consulted moving forward.

### **CareerLink Accessibility Review Discussion – Dan Kuba, Bridget Frascella**

- Federal standards requiring accessibility haven't been enough to ensure accessibility at all CareerLinks, so they are looking at the Governor's Employment First initiative. Need to ensure every Pennsylvanian has access to services, but what will that look like at the CareerLinks? ADA compliance reviews will be done at all CareerLinks, in conjunction with OVR.
- The self-evaluation process includes utilizing the CAT kit to look at ADA requirements. Mr. Kuba said once they saw the kit, they wanted to look at the trainings being offered and how

to push this out to the CareerLinks. Each Workforce Board should have one of these kits, and additional kits are being purchased for some regional managers and OVR staff as well.

- Each time an evaluation is done, the results will be reported to Mr. Kuba's office and then discussion will occur on how to fix any issues. Funds have been set aside to help cover expenses necessary to ensure compliance.
- Exterior, parking, drop-off/pick-up locations, interior, section 508 all evaluated for compliance.
- Also looking at providing some sort of resource document for front-desk staff to be able to serve customers as they enter the facility.
- Working with OA to ensure sound policies/procedures are being followed in CareerLinks.
- Customer complaint system being developed to streamline that process.
- Mr. Kiel asked for clarification on front-line staff turnover rates. Mr. Kuba said to help with that, they are launching a complete review of service delivery system. All CareerLink partners will have access to trainings developed following the review to keep consistency.
- Mr. Wright asked if evaluations are done before opening CareerLinks or after they've already opened. Mr. Kuba said it happens before and during operation.
- Ms. Conyers asked if trainings will be in-person and if it's possible for Board members to attend. Mr. Kuba said initial will be in-person and Board involvement is welcomed.
- Mr. Drenth asked if complaint system will be anonymous. Mr. Kuba said it absolutely will be anonymous.
- Ms. Brougher appreciates that each main part of accessibility is being evaluated, but what is the plan to ensure the technology piece of it is in place? Mr. Kuba said all computers, licenses, programs are being replaced and updated. CareerLink staff are also expected to report when devices/software need updated or replaced.
- Mr. Pennington asked Ms. Lantzy if anyone within L&I has vetted the approaches to evaluate CareerLinks to ensure consistency. Ms. Lantzy said that is ongoing. Mr. Pennington also mentioned that transportation to and from services such as CareerLinks is also a part of accessibility.
- Mary Hartley asked if there are deadlines for physical accessibility of the facilities. Sec. Oleksiak said that question would be best answered by DGS, but he can look into that.
- Janetta Green commended Mr. Kuba and Ms. Frascella for this work and asked who the vendor will be for the trainings. Ms. Frascella says it will be Anne Champs.
- Ms. Helminski asked how those CareerLinks performing self-evaluations will be held accountable. Mr. Kuba said there is a contract evaluator in the northwest doing a complete review of the comprehensive site as well as the mobile sites.
- Mr. Iseman asked if the CareerLink website accessibility is being evaluated as well. Mr. Kuba confirmed that it is. Mr. Iseman also asked if accessibility also extends to bathrooms. Ms. Frascella said yes, the entire CareerLink is being evaluated.
- Mr. Kuba said all of this is expected to take place in 2020.

### **Legislative Update – Neil Cashman**

- There is nothing as of now that is on the floor that would relate to OVR and the Board, but Cashman stated he would use this time to allow for questions and feedback.
- Ms. Conyers asked if Mr. Cashman had any insight on any other agencies being asked to testify at oversight hearings. Mr. Cashman said he is not aware of any other oversight hearings, but Labor committees have determined they'd like to look at OVR and Labor Law Compliance. As to why it's happening, there were some questions during the budget process regarding Labor Law Compliance. Sec. Oleksiak said OVR and Labor Law Compliance have a good story to tell regarding lack of resources, so being asked to appear before the committees is a great way to get that word out.

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- Mr. Iseman asked if Mr. Cashman is the person to ask for L&I's perspective on any bills being presented. Mr. Cashman said yes, if there's an impact on PA/L&I/OVR.

### **OOS Update – Stephanie Perry**

- Ms. Perry recognized the members of the Order of Selection workgroup for their work.
- Sara Gales completed training for all staff related to OOS and resulting paradigm shifts.
- Currently only releasing MSD customers from waitlist. Ms. Perry detailed the definitions of the OOS categories.
- There are up to 7,000 individuals on the waitlist, and OVR is hoping to be able to release about 4,500 customers from waitlist on 4/1. 1762 customers were released from the waitlist on 2/1, with 289 of those customers now placed into a plan status. \$95,000 in VR funds were obligated to serve those customers since 2/1. Approximately 95% of the individuals on the waitlist are MSD.
- Mr. Drenth asked where the blind/visually impaired community falls on the list of figures. Ms. Perry said 90 individuals who are blind are MSD, 136 individuals who are visually impaired are MSD, and two individuals who are deafblind are MSD. Mr. Drenth said this seems to be low in comparison to BVRS. Ms. Perry said there has been a decrease in referrals which could be the cause of the low numbers.
- Mr. Drenth asked for clarification on how the number of individuals to take off the waitlist was calculated. Ms. Austin said it's determined based on a variety of factors, including OVR's budget and cash flow, how many open cases there are, average amount spend per customer, etc.
- Ms. Brougher asked what status 30 is. Ms. Perry explained it's a case closure based on either being unable to contact the customer or the customer not being interested in services.
- Ms. Brougher asked for typical ratio of BVRS to BBVS cases. Mr. Swaintek said there are typically 2,000-2,500 BBVS VR cases open at any given time. Mr. Drenth said he thinks that BBVS is typically about 1/10<sup>th</sup> of BVRS cases.
- Ms. Brougher asked if the new categorization process has yielded something different than the 95% MSD from the old method. Ms. Perry said there were several recommendations made by the workgroup, and the least invasive ones were implemented to start. There is now a decrease in how many individuals are being classified as MSD, which was the goal.
- Ms. Brougher said she's troubled by the fact that OOS was closed in June and OVR is already facing the impact of what that means – losing customers and interest in coming to OVR. Sec. Oleksiak said, to some degree, advocates have to be relied upon to get the word out that OVR is still open for business. He agreed the reputation of OVR will likely have to be repaired when the OOS opens. Ms. Brougher asked if there is anything the advocacy community can do to help expedite the OOS opening. Sec. Oleksiak said he's hesitant to comment on that at this time, but work is being done with the Governor's office.
- Lynn Heitz asked how only 1% of customers taken off the waitlist are from BBVS. Ms. Swaintek said removal from the waitlist is based on date application was made, and not on disability or other factors.
- Mr. Pennington asked how many of the customers that have come off the waitlist have contacted OVR and are now back in the system. Ms. Perry said once customers are released from waitlist, counselors have ten days to get in contact with those customers. Then, OVR has 90 days from when that list was distributed to put those customers into planned status.

### **Employment First Update – Mary Anderson Hartley**

- Provided background information on Act 36
- The Employment First Commission would like to know how OVR plans to meet goals and address the problem with sheltered workshops.

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- There are duplications in data; OVR and other agencies are likely counting the same person as being employed.
- Aware of discussions with PDE on how to better collect this data.
- Pointed to disparities in certain regions. What does OVR know about what is working and what is not working.
- The Commission would eventually like to see real-time data.
- Mr. Drenth commented on being able to use de-identified data being collected by other agencies to assist in OVR's data collection. Ms. Hartley agreed that this could be an option. Ms. Conyers asked how that would be managed. Ms. Hartley said discussions have been happening regarding that. Ms. Hartley said one of the suggestions has been a public-facing dashboard that can collect that data. Sec. Oleksiak said that data sharing is something OVR would like to have happen, but there is always the challenge of what the Government allows us to share.
- Ms. Brougher asked if progress is being made to make the Commonwealth the best place for people with disabilities to work. Ms. Hartley said more is being done now between OA and OVR than ever before and there will be follow-up with OA on a quarterly basis to identify where they are in their process to remove employment barriers.

### ***OVR Bureau Director Reports***

#### **HGAC – Jim Marker**

- Welding program
  - 15 trainees, 13 of them gained welding jobs.
  - JARI offered HGAC a six-month building maintenance program for 10 or 11 individuals from the surrounding area who will be trained in building maintenance concepts, techniques, and information and helped to obtain jobs in the local community.
- New Director of Education – Jim Thomas.
- Union relations
  - Continue to meet with unions on as-needed basis.
- Forming focus groups comprised of students and staff to look at how to offer better, more streamlined programs.
- Mr. Kiel asked for employee complement of HGAC. Mr. Marker stated it is currently at 155, with 3-4 more staff starting soon.
- HGAC has taken precautionary measures in light of the coronavirus issues.
- Ms. Conyers asked if the new building maintenance program includes students with disabilities. Marker said they are all non-disabled students.

#### **BVRS – Stephanie Perry**

- BVRS is currently at 578 staff, out of a total complement of 666. Continuing to work with Hattie McCarter and HR on recruitment.

#### **BBVS – Stan Swaintek**

- Interview process for a new Bureau Director has been completed and a recommendation has been made. Also looking to fill two vacant Central Office Specialist positions for Special Programs and ILOB.
- Got final approval to start ILOB workgroup.

#### **BCO – Ryan Hyde**

- RSA released an update on Pre-ETS; public comment period under way now.



- Working on a data-sharing agreement with ODP regarding people served under Section 511 who are also engaged with ODP
- Summer internship program expanding to Pittsburgh this year. There will also be a summer internship program with CILs.
- In regard to existing facility accessibility issues, there's an accessibility advisory Board within L&I Mr. Hyde has been serving on for a year; it is chaired by former Executive Director Bill Gannon. Members include codes compliance officers from L&I, architects from the community, etc. The Board approves/denies variances (if something does not meet construction codes) and the process can be complicated because of various ordinances, geography of the surrounding streets and landscape, etc.
- Ms. Brouger asked if there will be more things that can be paid for out of Pre-ETS funds that will ease the burden for the agency. Mr. Hyde said there are a variety of things, but must be mindful of that spending because the things that will help OVR spend the Pre-ETS funds could also help *overspend* those funds.

### **Public Comment**

- Kay Tyberg stated that she supports the disaster preparedness initiative because she has been involved in five disasters in her lifetime. Reinforced importance of additional funding and staffing for ODHH. Employers are often out of touch with what it means to hire people with disabilities, and she's seen many individuals turned away due to the need for multiple accommodations. She brought attention to the D/HH community experiencing difficulties with buildings that require individuals to press a button to speak with someone to let them enter.

### **Wrap-Up**

#### **Closing Remarks – Secretary Oleksiak**

- Next meeting Thursday, 6/4 in State College. Specific location details will be shared.
- Print-out with websites mentioned earlier are available on the way out.

#### **Adjournment**

- MOTION to adjourn
- Mr. Wright moved, Ms. Conyers seconded.
- All in favor, none opposed – motion carried.
- Meeting adjourned at 1:00 pm.