

PA State Board of Vocational Rehabilitation

Virtual Meeting via AT&T Conference Line

Minutes of Quarterly Meeting

June 4, 2020

9am – 12:00pm

State Board Members Present

Jerry Oleksiak

Shannon Austin

Mary Brougher

Joe Drenth

Mike Kiel

Peg Monaghan

John Tague

Fred Wright

Jennifer Christman

Liza Conyers

OVR Staff Present

Shelbi Smith

Cheryl Novak

Lee Ann Stewart

Melissa Hawkins

Russ Goddard

Craig Schield

Margie Duranko

Ryan Hyde

Jeff Seabury

Waleska Lopez

Others Present

Nichole Wade

Christine Adzema

Bill Trusky

Julia Barol

Dina Abudaih

Lionel Waritay

Joe Michener

William Del Toro Vargas

Passle Helminski

Matt Seeley

Jeff Iseman

Public Agenda

Welcome & Opening Remarks – Oleksiak

- Sec. Oleksiak took roll call
- Jennifer Christman introduced herself, as she is the newest member of the Board. Tom Caulfield recommended her to be part of the Board.
- Sec. Oleksiak summarized pandemic response from L&I. Unemployment has been a big challenge since quarantine started and an update will be given on that later.
- More customers were moved off the OOS wait list on 5/1/2020

Action Items

Approval of Agenda

- MOTION to approve agenda
- Tague moved, Brougher seconded
- All in favor, none opposed
- Motion carried

Approval of Meeting Minutes – March 2020

- MOTION to approve minutes
- Wright moved, Drenth seconded
- All in favor, none opposed
- Motion carried

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Public Agenda

Executive Director's Remarks – Shannon Austin

- Ms. Austin took a moment to acknowledge what's going on in the country right now. When she took the position, she never expected to be overseeing an agency through a pandemic and civil unrest. She noted that she hopes the nation comes out of this stronger.
- Due to pandemic, many Commonwealth offices started teleworking on 3/17 to ensure safety of state workers. 96% of OVR staff are still in telework status. A taskforce has been established to set priorities, address collaboration, and increase communication during quarantine. The taskforce is also looking at how to handle referrals remotely.
- Since telework started, OVR has placed over 6,600 individuals into competitive, integrated employment. As the state moves toward opening back up, hope to be able to place even more.
- Released over 5,000 people from OOS wait list. Hoping that by 7/1, there will be a rolling quarterly release of individuals from wait list.
- Another priority during quarantine has been retention and Diversity & Inclusion. OVR participated in a free employee survey related to retention. Of the 905 staff in OVR, 545 responded to survey. 273 of the 545 indicated they would like to work from home in some capacity moving forward.
- Overtime costs decreased by 40% since 2018-2019 due to consolidation/overfill process. Once the current hiring freeze is lifted, hiring priorities will help reduce overtime costs even more.
- Developed many mandatory trainings to keep staff engaged while teleworking. Also held trainings for providers.
- A Self-Care Panel was developed to provide resources to staff.
- Currently re-evaluating questions contained in the Act 26 and BSE reports.
- As of 7/1/2020, the new, approved State Plan will be implemented.
- Job jeopardy prioritization will become effective 7/1/2020. Flags have been added to CWDS to determine who is at risk of losing their job and allow them to be removed from the wait list.
- Ms. Brougher welcomed Jennifer Christman to Board and thanked Cheryl Novak for everything she does to organize these meetings. Congratulated Ms. Austin on her one-year anniversary as Executive Director and acknowledged her leadership skills. Also thanked Sec. Oleksiak for his leadership and said she's proud to be a Pennsylvanian.
- Ms. Conyers echoed Ms. Brougher's sentiments. Also asked if job retention applies to anyone with disability or only past/current OVR customers. Ms. Austin stated it is for anyone with a disability. OVR is anticipating starting a campaign with employers to communicate that out to the public. Eligibility criteria still applies, but job retention is not limited to current OVR customers.
- Ms. Austin commended Sec. Oleksiak for his leadership in L&I and how smooth the transition to telework has been for the agency. Also commended staff for how everyone has handled the transition.

Update on Unemployment Compensation – Bill Trusky

- Unemployment has risen drastically since mid-March. Over 2M regular unemployment claims filed, along with 460K PUAP claims. Approximately 2.5M total. During the three weeks prior to 3/15, there were 40K new claims. In the three weeks post 3/15, there were 1.1M claims.
- Working with skeleton staff in six offices across the state.
- Federal funding is based on level of unemployment. PA historically had low unemployment and the state moved to high unemployment overnight.

- Staffing numbers have also been based on historically low unemployment. 312 new staff were added since quarantine.
- Mr. Tague asked about the status of upgrading the computer system. Mr. Trusky said that the system has only been down a total of 12 hours throughout quarantine. He also said the main problem with the current system is the inability to pivot quickly.
- Mr. Wright asked if there is a special hotline for people that haven't been receiving their benefits. Mr. Trusky said no, they don't have a hotline, but they do have chat and email. He also offered his own contact information if someone needs to speak with someone directly, as long as they haven't heard from someone in the UC office in at least four weeks.
- Mr. Kiel said the numbers are daunting and the job the office is doing is incomprehensible and encouraged Mr. Trusky and all UC staff to keep up the good work.
- Sec. Oleksiak asked if the office hours for blind and visual services is the same for deaf and hard of hearing customers. Mr. Trusky said he didn't have that information but can get it. Ms. Austin thanked Mr. Trusky for ensuring the necessary accommodations were in place early on for people with disabilities.

Stakeholder Reports

CAP – Report provided by Matthew Seeley on behalf of Steve Pennington

- Preparing an overview of state agencies that provide services for people with disabilities or collect information regarding disabilities.
- CAP has assembled a group of transition service providers, leaders in the disability community, and legal experts familiar with transition to review and comment on the OVR/BSE MOU. CAP is committed to working with OVR to develop an MOU that eliminates barriers for students and reflects the Governor's initiative for Employment First.

SILC – Matthew Seeley

- Thanked OVR for support with Independent Living State Plan. Plan will be submitted end of June and take effect in Sept/Oct.

PaRC – Passle Helminski

- The May PaRC full council meeting was cancelled due to the pandemic. The meeting will be rescheduled for June 24 and will be held virtually.
- Thanked Sec. Oleksiak for getting Robert Wallington on the Council to replace Fred Wright.
- Three other people are waiting to be appointed to council. PaRC is also looking for a veteran to serve on Council.
- Subcommittee meetings have been happening regularly via phone, and they have finalized their goals and budgets for the upcoming year.
- Asked if the ILOB workgroup meetings have begun.
- Looking forward to an update on CareerLink accessibility reviews.
- Mr. Kiel said at last meeting the issue of service animals vs. emotional support animals was discussed and asked if there was an update. Ms. Helminski said the comment period to Department of Transportation has closed. Mr. Kiel said he thought an email would be going out to Board members with more information on that. Ms. Austin said she will follow up on that and get back to the Board members.

ODHH – Melissa Hawkins

- Videophones for UC are available from 8am-4pm Wed. and Fri. 6/17, extending longer if needed. Average about 25-30 applications each day using this method. Working on addressing issue of hard of hearing staff needing captioned phone or amplified phone system.

- Ms. Hawkins has been working at FEMA most of the week.
- Commended the Governor's office for use of interpreters and captioning during press updates to make sure deaf and hard of hearing individuals have access to all information regarding COVID-19.
- Mr. Tague commended Ms. Hawkins and ODHH for the work they've been doing through the pandemic.
- Ms. Brougner asked if something like Connect Direct offered by CSD is being looked at since there is more of a demand. Ms. Hawkins said there will be more use of Zoom meetings and CDIs for interpreting services.

OVR Bureau Director Reports

HGAC – Jill Moriconi

- Closed the Center back in March.
- 60 students graduated at the end of April.
- New term started 5/4.
- Since the Center is a vocational school, a certain percentage of instruction must be completed hands-on. In-person classes are planned to resume by 7/20.
- 60% of staff have been teleworking. About a quarter of the staff are not currently working.
- CARES Act allowed students to receive checks to assist them with the disruption to their instruction. Eligible students received \$1400. Another portion of that Act will go directly to the Center.
- A hiring exemption from the hiring freeze allowed a key management position to be filled.

BCO – Ryan Hyde

- Working on job retention, which was a big lift systematically in CWDS. Staff training on that will be held in a few weeks.
- Closely monitoring budget as end of FY approaches. Working to clean up open commitments, get missing invoices from vendors, roll over POs, etc.
- Monitoring OOS. Telework makes moving cases along a little more difficult.
- Funding is down significantly. PETS also reduced because of school closings, etc.
- Exploring virtual options for summer programs, as well as offering programs with mitigation restrictions.
- RSA-911 changes go into effect 7/1 and were given to Deloitte to update in CWDS.
- Working to issue guidance on telework, and to procure supplies for those who aren't currently able to telework.
- Have not yet received RSA monitoring report due to quarantine and no timeline yet as to when that will be received.
- Mike Kirby leaving OVR in a few weeks.
- Mr. Iseman asked how many people are still on OOS waiting list. Mr. Hyde said there are approximately 2000 that have not yet been moved off list. Mr. Iseman also asked if CARES Act funds have been received for VR services, assistive tech, or CILs at this time. Mr. Hyde said not that he is aware of.
- Ms. Conyers asked if new recruitment strategies (such as adding bachelor's degrees) have a rollout timeline and if there is a committee/group dedicated to that. Mr. Hyde said there have been some very preliminary discussions with HR looking at what other states are doing, but something like that will take some time to be initiated. Ms. Austin said OVR has initiated conversations with HR about possible recruitment strategies such as creating career ladders, hiring people with bachelor's degrees. Ms. Conyers asked about a possible partnership with PSU. Ms. Austin said OVR's current recruiter has been engaging with other universities and

there has been interest from them regarding partnerships, as well, so it's something that will be considered. Mr. Tague said he's in support of Liza's suggestion.

- Julia Barol stated that on 5/4, RSA released an FAQ document regarding providing services during COVID-19 and asked if OVR will be releasing guidance regarding remote supports. Mr. Hyde said he believes that is being discussed and developed. Ms. Austin said she believes something like that will be going out sometime next week. Ms. Barol said the individuals they support need to be able to make their own educated choices.

BVRS – Stephanie Perry

- Overview of OOS training:
 - As a result of the training, each DO created an accountability plan focused on implementing new priority categories.
 - Hoping to resume the OOS workgroup no later than August 2020.
- BVRS complement update:
 - Hattie McCarter has been working on accurate agency complement using a phased approach. Goal is to understand recruitment needs. Phases 1 and 2 completed as of May.
 - 665 staff, 79 vacancies.
 - \$2M in overtime.
 - Phases 3 and 4 will consist of future projections of hiring, demographics and populations that need to be served. Quarterly review with HR, fiscal, OVR mgmt.
- COVID-19 has presented many challenges to BVRS and OVR. Ms. Perry acknowledged BVRS regional managers for their hard work during quarantine.
- Waleska Lopez asked when the information from the RSA monitoring will be available. Mr. Hyde had difficulty hearing her and asked her to reach out to him after this meeting.

BBVS – Stan Swaintek

- Social workers were able to follow up with customers in the ILOB program. Purchasing system for VRTs has transitioned to bulk-buying. Able to send equipment out to people by sending certain staff to offices to obtain equipment and ship it to customers. Also have been hosting virtual instructional services to customers.
- Addressed Ms. Helminski's question regarding the ILOB workgroup. Workgroup participants were identified prior to quarantine but no meetings have happened yet. Hoping to get started soon.
- In-person summer programs are cancelled this year, but the team is working on developing a virtual Summer Academy. Looking at hosting 20-30 kids in that initiative.
- Mr. Drenth thanked Mr. Swaintek for his years of service, congratulated him on his upcoming retirement, and asked where the process stands for selecting the new BBVS Director. Ms. Austin said the recommendation has been made, one layer of approval has been obtained, and we are waiting on next layer of approval. Mr. Swaintek may return once position has been filled to help with new Director's transition into the role.
- Mr. Drenth asked if there is a plan to do a personnel evaluation specifically for BBVS because he's still hearing that there aren't enough BBVS staff in district offices. Ms. Austin said BVRS was the only bureau with complement issues due to the overfill process. Complement is constantly being evaluated to determine where positions are needed the most, but BBVS complement will be looked into more closely in the near future.

Public Comment

- Jeff Iseman asked if there is any way to know how many UC claims are from OVR customers. Sec. Oleksiak said he doesn't know if that is something that is tracked. Ms. Lantzy said the

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application does not ask if the individual has a disability, so it's not something that is being tracked. Ms. Austin said there is a way to get an idea of those numbers as long as individuals have disclosed disability status, but she will reach out to Mr. Trusky to see if those numbers can be obtained.

Wrap-Up

Closing Remarks – Secretary Oleksiak

- Thanked everyone for attending.
- Next meeting on September 17 in Pittsburgh, if the pandemic allows for an in-person meeting.

Adjournment

- MOTION to adjourn
- Brougher moved, Kiel seconded.
- All in favor, none opposed.
- Motion carried.
- Meeting adjourned at 11:45am.