# PA State Board of Vocational Rehabilitation Minutes of Quarterly Meeting

June 6, 2024

10 a.m. – 1:34 p.m.

Hybrid meeting with in-person access at the Erie DO at 3200 Lovell Place, Erie PA

## State Board Members Present

Secretary Nancy Walker

Fred Wright

Kevin McDonough

Peg Monaghan

Jennifer Christman

Joe Drenth

Mike Kiel

Bruce Schwartz

Liza Conyers

## OVR Staff Present

Ryan Hyde

Chris Harbert

**Others Present**

Nichole Wade

## Public Agenda

### Welcome & Opening Remarks – Nancy Walker

* Board meeting called to order at 10:01 a.m.
* Acknowledged today as the day we landed in Normandy and all who served and had sacrificed their lives for their country. Shared her families’ stories on this day.
* Welcomed interns to the commonwealth this past Monday. Thrilled to have an intern work with L&I Executives this year as well.

## Action Items

### Approval of Agenda

* MOTION to approve agenda
* Conyers moved; Kiel seconded
* All in favor, none opposed
* Motion carried

### Approval of Meeting Minutes – March 2024

* MOTION to approve minutes & remove Joe Drenth from attendee list
* Christman moved; Wright seconded
* All in favor, none opposed
* Motion carried

### Approval of September 2024 Meeting Date & Location

* MOTION to approve date & location; tentatively schedule in Philadelphia and move to remote if low attendance
* Wright moved; Conyers seconded
* All in favor, none opposed
* Motion carried

### Approval of Audiological Services Policy #24-200.01

* MOTION to approve Audiological Services Policy #24-200.01
* Christman moved; Conyers seconded
* All in favor, none opposed
* Motion carried

### Approval to Exempt all HGAC Services from FNT Requirement

* MOTION to approve; for Next 12-Month Period, Effective 7/1/24, unless otherwise extended by recommendation by OVR Executive Director and approval by State Board
* Schwartz moved; Wright seconded
* All in favor, none opposed
* Motion carried

### Approval of Discussion of Student Aid Index (SAI) and OVR Post-Secondary Training Funding for 2024-2025; Approval of Updates to College & Other Post-Secondary Training Policy for SFY24-25 Tuition Reimbursement

* MOTION to approve; replaces “Expected Family Contribution” term with “Student Aid Index”, per FAFSA, and makes negative number 0.
* Schwartz moved; Wright seconded
* All in favor, none opposed
* Motion carried

### Approval of Disability Innovation Fund Grant Proposal

* MOTION to approve; purchase advanced driving simulators and to staff OT who is training on how to use the devices at each IU
* Wright moved; Conyers seconded
* All in favor, none opposed
* Motion carried

## Public Agenda continued (1)

### Executive Director’s Remarks – Ryan Hyde

* Happening this week. Internship kickoff on Monday went smooth. A great group of young people with diverse backgrounds and disability types. Happy to meet them and thinks they will all be great.
* Met with google executives virtually and about job search and interview prep with AI. Asked if they would be interested in participating in Summer Academy programs and sent follow-up information. This year will have classes on generative AI and hopeful to have google participate on that in the future.
* Spoke on North Hampton community college. Had a great presentation and had Giant come in as an employer with people with disabilities and employer accommodations. Makes sure accommodations happen and has worked with OVR in the area. Had a young man talk about experience with a University and OVR and how his life has blossomed since then with the help of OVR and ODP. Did some team building stuff with participants and will be 2 more of those this summer.
* Yesterday HGAC held an active shooter drill. Thanked the team and the participation of local authorities, police, EMS, Hospital staff. It was a community event and worked on communication amongst the teams.
* PA Combined State Plan has been approved this morning. Thanked Jim Whitonis on his hard work and the PARC for their involvement on this as well.
* CSAVR Earlier this spring. Engagement remains a high focus across the nation to get people in quickly. WIOA focuses on creating lifelong skills and that 5 core indications are meant to drive outcomes throughout the nation.
* Staffing remains a concern nationally. Every state is taking this on differently but still remains a challenge.
* New commissioner for RSA-Dante Allen? – Came from California and interested in coming to visit OVR in the future. Talked about AI and what the future will hold with that and that VR needs to be thinking about AI and service provision model. Spoke about partnerships and said we should find ways to partner and always looking for more partners. He is asking states to share more success stories.
* Running about 53% of customers below the age of 25. Direct result of the PreETS Services we offer. Serviced about 15000 students in the last quarter in PreETS.
* 66% of customers have some form if cognitive or psychosocial disability.
* Priorities in staffing and churn. Replacing a lot of people who have been promoted. Working with OA on targeting offices who may need more hiring assistance. Bachelor’s position, got specification from OA and reviewing to provide final feedback. After that OA will need to finalize then send to union for review.
* Remain optimistic that we will receive approval for additional state funding. Next year possibly doing a bigger ask to cover staffing increase and other expense costs.
* Federal budget a big concern. We were flat funded and have a lot of things in the works. Official amount of money we lost out on is 12.79 million dollars. We are a mandatory program, and we normally experience an increase every year. With personnel cost rising, shared services rising, Programs rising. Last year over 300 million returned doing reallocation process.
* Other big concern is current federal fiscal budget and that also has VR program flat funded. If this happens will miss out on another 15 million dollars give or take.
* Other concern is our SSA reimbursement process. Last year record breaking 18 million earned. This year right under 10 million. Cases that we are closing out now were started before or right during the start of pandemic, so spending was down.
* Paused additional improvement projects at HGAC. Not able to proceed with Dorm Renos at this time due to flat funding. Focusing on smaller things at this time.
* Reallocation process available In July. This year’s amount will likely be less than last year and heard rumors that Texas and Ohio will not be returning any reallocation. There may not be as much available for the nation due to all states being flat funded. Have not decided on official number yet but looking to pursue about 30 million dollars and have the money to match.
* Trying to align rates with ODP. Proposed new rates with supported employment. Increased several years ago and new rates may go into effect in July pending approved. Tracking that and trying to determine if we can continue to align with those rates.
* Plans to decrease spending.
* Working on updated Pre-ETS guidance and continue to seek the max amount of SS reimbursement. Reviewing existing programs for outcomes and sustainability and hear suggestions on how to control costs or retool a program entirely.
* Grant writing and implementation. SWTCIE award to achieve In Pittsburgh and first enrollment will be Sheetz. This is for the west. The contract has been bid in the East and are waiting for a signature process on the contract for the vendor.
* Pathways to partnerships grant in its first year. Lots of paperwork. Pre-conference and training to build skill sets for people working with Pre-ETS students. A lot of agreements involved in this and thanking everybody for their help with this.
* National Rehab Leadership Institute is next week. This is the second session this year and this one is a deep dive into the rehab act and time management. Will have 2 more sessions after this one and has a group project to work on to present with the Fall.
* Under RSA monitoring since 2019. 1 finding left in a monitoring stage. RSA says we can maintain our statistical production on making people eligible in a timely manner. Hopeful to close this out this fall.
* MyWork kicking off randomly. Will probably have around 1000 kids getting paid work-based experience. DCNR Outdoor Corps kicking off as well as summer academy in Penn State.
* Schwartz asked a question about allocation of funding. Hyde spoke on the federal allocation is based on the state year but multiple fiscal years are involved.

### State Board Task Force Committee Update – Mike Kiel

* Met since the last board meeting. Primary concerns remain the attendant care crisis. Had a meeting OLTL and ODP and they are receptive and explained a little more about the structure. Concern that it is not an efficient way to get people the care they need, many people involved. ODP employment rate about 18%, MCO employment rate is 2%.
* Charged with evaluating the act and making sure duties are fulfilled. Chris Harbert has been a great help with this process. Chris is continuing to pursue the committee aspects. One of the recommendations was to consider including an executive committee to give Chris more direction between meetings.

## Stakeholder Reports

### PaRC – Paul Fogle

* A couple projects they are working on. Biggest one is doing a deep dive in the Customer Satisfaction surveys. Concerned about the lack of response rates for these surveys. Through some consults with MA state rehab council we are looking to see what can be done here in PA and talking to Ryan and Chris about this.
* Had a meeting a couple weeks ago. Heard from the Admins in Altoona and thanked them for their time. Appreciate local offices talking about their works.
* Working on getting approval for reappointments of council members. Have 2 appointees pending in the governor’s office. Not sure when this will get pushed through.
* Met last week with state legislators about position papers. Meetings went well.
* Chris Harbert is invaluable to the council and is very thankful for his support and leadership and echoes the need for help for Chris.

### SILC – Jeff Iseman

* Office moved in early April. Now a 300 Corporate Drive suite 205B Camp hill PA 17011. 717- 829-2708 is their new phone number.
* Website under construction at this time and checking with contractor on progress to get it up and running. If you need something feel free to email.
* Thanked OVR and Treasury for getting the funds out to them in a timely manner.
* Did a walk for healthy community and raised some resource development fund for this.
* Working with HGAC on trainings with their staff and working with OVR on their grants. Timelines and roles modified a bit but continuing to work on this.
* Have SPIL (state plan for independent living) public hearing in April and that went well. Board approved state plan at their last meeting and is awaiting signatures. Due June 30, 2024
* Mentioned continued participation with PARC, ODHH advisory committee.
* Need for additional rate increases in Pre-ETS and supported employment. Continue to monitor something about subminimal wage.
* Did a presentation on Transportation in Pittsburgh. Appreciated Ryan attending this presentation.

### ODHH – Melissa Hawkins

* Attending more and more events to be more visible to the public. Recently attended an event at a school in Philadelphia. Asked to present on Act 57 and how it affects school aged kids and the presentation was very well received. Looking forward to having more opportunities to educate the public
* Started bimonthly webinars for the community on topics that are relevant. Focused on effective communication with individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing or deaf/blind.
* Hosted the attorney general’s office and spoke on scams, identity theft, fraud. How to identify scams or frauds and some popular frauds in the community right now. Spoke on what to do if you are a victim of this.
* Completed first full year of SSP. 4768 hours was the results of community hours provided to deaf/blind individuals across the commonwealth. Provided these hours to 71 individuals.
* 2 trainings planned in the fall, one on the East side of the state and one of the West side of the state.

### CAP – Andrew Pennington

* Question for Hyde – What does the FNT go down to? Questioned numbers and Hyde did not have the numbers off the top of his head.
* CAP attended various meetings and discussed expiration of board motions. Has some concern with regard on how customers will deal with the fallout from it. CAP concerned about how DO and customers will be able to adapt to the financial changes in Policy.
* Recommended that OVR look into the language of this and waiver/ funding.
* Hyde stated - FNT Policy is almost finalized and will be moved into public comment in late summer/early fall. Have to issue a memo after today and will put guidance into place for staff about waiver and the process.

## Public Agenda continued (2)

### Bureau Director Report Follow-Up – Jill Moriconi, Marci Katona, Dawn Sokol, Denise Verchimak

* No questions/discussion

## Topics for Discussion/Action Items

### Erie District Office Highlights – Jack Hewitt

* Erie DO covers 7 counties in NW PA. They have 39 staff members. As of the end of May they worked with 3607 people between VR and Pre-ETS.
* 2357 people worked with in VR. Provided facts on goals being met or over exceeded.
* Received many referrals on adults/students/youth.
* Received 89% compliance for eligibility for the program year.
* Have completed 1455 status 10s.
* Provided numbers on plans and completion of annual reviews. 85% completed for the program year
* Have 2 business service counselors. One of them attend 2 employers new hire orientations to talk about OVR and services we provide. Have adapted training programs in the CNC profession and 1 student completed this last year and obtained a job in the field.
* Autism counselors working with each county’s ID and supports coordinators.
* Working with local CILs and working with both directors to establish office space for the staff to meet with the customers and staff who come in there. Involved with Careerlink and workforce as a board.
* Completed 3450 services with Pre-ETS. Well exceeded their assessed goals.
* Did 579 events with students and services provided where 4349 students attended.
* Partnered with CVS stores and pharmacies to work with students to provide an employment experience.
* Casandra Falkenhagen spoke on their staff and employment and new employees that on onboarding this month. Has a vacancy for an OM position but it is a hard position to fill and are currently working with contractors.
* Excited about bioptic driving program. Will remove barriers for transportation to those who qualify. Once the person is determined eligible, they will be trained while using the device and have 65 hours of accompanied driving. Has had one successful customer complete this and obtain his bioptic driver’s license.
* Works hard on involved Pre-ETS students in services and have 3 completed paid work experiences this summer.
* Collab with Keystone Blind assoc. Early stages of planning a job fair at a conference in September. Attending a conference in state college in November.
* Erie is doing very well in reaching their goals and are looking forward to improving even more.
* VR Program met their goal for the year. All exceeded their goals for the year. Using contractor for OM so keeping track of their closures.

### Updates on Supported Employment – Jennifer Radick

* Doing training on policy for OVR and our supported employment providers. Has been able to see this through many different ways.
* Spoke on herself and her background and education. Spoke about her internship and how much she loved VR right away. Worked as a counselor and provided any assistance she could for her clients to secure and maintain employment.
* Started as an employment specialist in 1997. Learned a lot and was successful in placing individuals in competitive employment. Became a manager in training and job development, job coaching, case management, and many other things.
* Came to OVR in 2018 after the rollout of the new and current policy. Worked hands on with the providers that were authorized for services.
* Draft policy revision being started.

### CTI at HGAC Safety and Security Improvements and Planning – Jill Moriconi

* Different types of safety and security. Stives to provide a safe environment for students and employees.
* Approach this in a comprehensive manner and scheduled activities happen year-round to minimize risks on campuses and ensure any complaint is investigated resolved asap.
* Annual activities that are conducted include Operations manual review of procedures, response plans, code of conduct review, Professional development, ALICE training and drills, fire alarm testing, and submitting a campus crime report.
* Awareness, observation, and rehearsal of staff is very important. Safety training is a main priority for staff, and they annually have a safety week. During that week they learn about many topics such as first aid, internet safety, suicide prevention, crisis support, and many more topics.
* Term Based Activities for students to have the tools to adjust to campus life and making wise decisions for safety and wellbeing. They are given key card access and information on many resources for their safety. Provided emergency contact numbers for security and nurses.
* Quarterly/Monthly Activities ensure accountability measures. This also facilitates continuous improvement efforts.
* Daily Activities are frequent communications with the students through rounds by security and dorm staff to address any ongoing issues or student needs.
* Significant security features were added to the facility in 2008. Reviews done in 2020 and 2021 led to numerous upgrades and improvements.
* They have secured the building with card reader access. Added many surveillance cameras on campus. Ballistic materials on windows, emergency kits including Narcan for staff to use should need.
* Security is scheduled on staff 24/7/365 to ensure the safety of all occupants and are led by high qualified leaders who are extensively trained.
* Listed credentials held by some staff members and security teammates.
* Security department and leadership team are always engaging in professional development and maintain current and relevant knowledge.
* Held an active shooter drill this week and many partnerships were involved. Routinely invite all partners to come onto campus to familiarize themselves with the ins and outs of the campus for an effective response. Always making sure they were up to date to counter any threats.

## Public Comment

* Lynn Heitz
	+ Concerned about way to customers at BBVS at OVR offices are treated. FNT policy for HGAC waived however HGAC has one program that a completely blind person can complete. Most customers at BBVS are college students and will be affected by the FNT. The DIF grant that the board approved is for high school students, what are they going to do for students who are blind or low vision, will they pay for an Uber or Lyft. Wanted to bring up the BVRS has rehab counselors for the deaf and when they are hired OVR pays up front for them to have interpreters right away. When a blind person is hired, they must pay out of pocket for any interpreter plus transportation to the meetings. They can apply for reimbursement however it takes 3-4 months to get the money. Why are employees treated different at BVRS than BBVS as well as the customer base. The needs of individuals at BBVS are just as important as BVRS. Ryan spoke about a practice of the readers many years ago.

## Adjournment

* MOTION to adjourn
* Kiel moved; Schwartz seconded
* All in favor, none opposed
* Motion carried
* Meeting adjourned at 1:34 p.m.