

**Department of Human Services  
Office of Rehabilitation Services  
State Rehabilitation Council**

**Minutes March 11, 2008  
4:00 P.M. – 6:00 P.M.**

Present from State Rehabilitation Council: Dr. Kate McCarthy-Barnett, Stephen Brunero, Rocco Bruno, Rick Costa, Domenic DiOrio, Susan Donovan, Joseph Ferreira, Jeanne M. Giroux, Anne LeClerc, Lucille Massemينو, Vincent Rossi, Catherine Sansonetti, J. David Sienko, Herbert Weiss

Present from Agency: Laurie DiOrio, Patricia Keating, Ronald Racine

Guests: Dan Evangelista

**1. Call to Order and Introductions** - The Chair called the meeting to order at 4:00 P.M.

**2. Additions or deletions to the Agenda** – none.

**3. Approval of Minutes**

**Motion**

H. Weiss made a motion seconded by D. DiOrio and unanimously accepted, to approve the minutes from the February 12, 2008 meeting.

**4. Old Business**

**1. Chairs Report** – D. Sienko

- **The National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC)** has sent out to all the SRC's drafts of its mission statement, core values, and by laws. We have had a chance to review and now we need to discuss and vote on whether we support this resolution.

*"Therefore to be resolved that the Rhode Island Rehabilitation Council supports the mission, vision, core values, and goals of the NCSRC, and our council's participation, which includes decision making when representing our council at scheduled meetings, for the purpose of increasing the effectiveness of individual councils and strengthening the public vocational rehabilitation system in our country."*

It is proposed that the Council approve this resolution after discussion.

**Motion**

D. Sienko made a motion seconded by J. Ferreira and unanimously approved to endorse the resolution that supports the mission, vision, core values, and goals of the NCSRC with the following comments.

1. Ethics and conflict of interest relating to, ARTICLE III MEMBERSHIP Section C – Ethics, 2, *"Members are expected to publicly identify any potential conflict of interest prior to discussion and voting processes."*

Suggested - also add – "a consultant or anyone who has a fiscal benefit from the state rehabilitation agencies."

2. Check signing relating to, ARTICLE V GOVERNANCE Section B – Officers, 2, 3, 4, 5, "*The responsibilities of the Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary, and Treasurer include... the care and custody of all monies belonging to the Coalition; shall be solely responsible for such monies or securities of the organization; shall cause to be deposited in a regular business bank or trust company a sum not exceeding \$ 25,000, with the balance of the funds of the Coalition deposited in a savings bank except that the SC may cause such funds to be invested in such investments as adhere to the Michigan banking laws; must be one of the officers who shall sign checks or drafts of the Coalition; shall provide financial statements at the quarterly SC meetings which will be included as part of the minutes; and shall exercise all duties as relevant to the role of the Coalition Treasurer.*"

Suggested - that there be two signatures for large checks. And some minimal amount of money designated as a limit for only one person to be able to sign that check, anything over that would require two signatures.

3. Decorum relating to, ARTICLE IV. OPERATIONS Section A – Meetings, "*The Coalition Chair (Article V, Sec. B, 2) shall preside at all Meetings, ensure decorum and remain impartial. Any person, including a Coalition member, may be excluded from a Coalition Meeting, or the Coalition Meeting may be recessed by the Coalition Chair to avoid undue disruption.*"

Suggestion - the exclusion terminology is 'subjective' and should be 'objective'. It could lead to the majority closing out a meeting and not listening to the minority. In essence, they could rule that a person's outspokenness on a viewpoint was disruptive.

- **State Plan Updates**

The Policy Committee reported that everything is moving along with the review of the draft State Plan.

The Chair noted that having the timeline for the State Plan has made things easier for everyone involved. He commended both ORS and the Policy committee for getting this system in place. In years to come, this work will continue regardless of who comes on the Council.

- **Mailing list for Annual Report**

We have targeted the key Legislators, Congressional Delegation, State Legislators, chairs of key Legislative committees, and other groups. Now, thanks to H. Weiss, we have a copy of Media Guide and can use this to further our outreach.

## **5. New Business**

- **Guest Speaker Program** - Daniel J. Evangelista, Associate Director, DHS  
Division of Veterans Affairs & Pat Keating, Veterans Affairs Liaison, ORS

Daniel J. Evangelista

The Rhode Island Division of Veteran's Affairs exists to assist Rhode Island veterans and their survivors and/or dependents by providing a wide range of social, medical, rehabilitative and burial services. The Division of Veterans Affairs is part of the Department of Human Services. The Division of Veterans Affairs consists of the Veterans Home located in Bristol, the Veterans Memorial Cemetery located in Exeter, and the Office of Veterans Affairs located in Cranston.

*The Veterans Home in Bristol* - currently houses two hundred thirty two (232) residents. Of them thirty two (32) were homeless. The Veterans Home consists of 260 nursing care beds in three skilled and semiskilled units and two ambulatory care units and two ambulatory care units with an additional 79 beds. Specific services provided at the facility include: nursing and medical care; a new, fully-certified

Alzheimer's Care Unit; a full compliment of rehabilitation services; activities therapy; on-site dental, x-ray and pharmacy services; transportation to and from Veterans Administration (VA) hospital clinics; social, chaplaincy and volunteer services.

Our Veterans Transitional Supportive Program is a special six-month program for homeless veterans designed to help them become self-supporting. Services include substance abuse treatment, work therapy, case management, individual and group counseling, medical and psychiatric follow-up and after-care planning.

The Rhode Island Veterans Home is more than just a building - it is a community in every sense of the word. Residents, staff, volunteers and the families of residents contribute to making it a place where veterans receive top-notch care in a warm, friendly, yet dignified environment.

There is a library on campus, as well as a gift shop, a bank, a barbershop and a beautician. Religious services for all denominations are provided and many activities, including movies, crafts, card games, bingo, birthday parties and cookouts take place on a regular basis for the enjoyment of our residents.

As part of the Department's RI Transition, Independence and Employment (RITIE) project to promote quality activities for our state's veterans, the Veterans Home has joined forces with the Bristol/Warren School District and the University of Rhode Island Master Gardener Program.

*The Veterans Memorial Cemetery* - Across the bay the Division of Veterans Affairs maintains a dignified and solemn military cemetery on 265 acres in Exeter, Rhode Island. The cemetery serves as a final resting place for Rhode Island veterans who have served their country honorably during wartime and their eligible dependents. As of this February we have twenty four hundred (24,000) internments. We just received six million (6) dollars, one hundred (100%) percent funding, for improvement.

*The Office of Veterans Affairs* - The Rhode Island Veterans Affairs Office offers benefit counseling including a variety of social services to Rhode Island armed forces personnel, veterans, and their dependents who are seeking assistance.

This office processes all applications for admissions to the RI Veterans Home and will conduct home visits, if needed, for those veterans applying for admission. Other services handled by this office include casework, counseling, referral, budget management, and completion of claims (i.e. pensions, compensations, social security).

The Veterans Affairs Office also provides information needed for the admission team at the Rhode Island Veterans Home to assign the proper level of nursing care to the veterans it serves. In addition, staff at the Veterans Affairs Office work with all state veteran services organizations to assist veterans with their requests for services.

With the onset of the war we have increased our services and there has been a shift in our focus to employment rather than on rehabilitation and education. This could be problematic. We are seeing more veterans coming home with severe hearing loss and Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSS) than in the past wars. These are serious disabilities and will require more rehabilitation services. There are approximately five hundred sixty one thousand (561,000) veterans who have a sixty (60%) percent disability status. And of them three hundred and eighty eight thousand (388,000) are not in the workforce. With seventy (70%) percent of disabled veterans not in the workforce something is needed; and that is where Vocational Rehabilitation is important. It is my job to get these individuals to use VR services. Using our VA Vocational Rehabilitation program in conjunction with ORS's program is key for many of our veterans.

Concern: Motivation to get veterans to utilize the services. Many are afraid to lose their benefits, although that doesn't happen, if they go back to full-time employment. Also, the benefits being paid out to them are

not much but unfortunately just enough to keep them from being eligible for other services such as food stamps. Another problem, concern, is there is a long lag-time from when veterans come home to the time they may actually be ready to get rehabilitation services.

Patricia Keating – ORS Veterans Affairs Liaison

ORS works with the Veterans Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) program, we offer services that the other might not and vice versa. We also work with veterans who are not eligible for the VR&E program. ORS tries to compliment the two programs. We have had a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Veterans Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment since December 2005.

VR&E's primary benefit program is vocational rehabilitation services for veterans who have a service-connected disability. To receive services a veteran must be found both eligible and entitled, for veterans that do not meet those requirements ORS is there to assist them.

ORS and VR&E together provide the following services:

- comprehensive rehabilitation evaluation to determine abilities, skills, interests, and needs
  - vocational counseling and rehabilitation planning
  - employment services such as job-seeking skills, resume development, and other work readiness assistance
  - assistance finding and keeping a job, including the use of special employer incentives
  - if needed, training such as On the Job Training (OJT), apprenticeships, and non-paid work experiences
  - if needed, post-secondary training at a college, vocational, technical or business school
  - supportive rehabilitation services including case management, counseling, and referral
  - independent living services
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- **ORS Director's Report - S. Brunero**

Fiscal - The Council for State Rehabilitation Administrators (CSAVR) I went to the New England meeting where it was reported that the federal program is facing significant cutbacks. The state budget situation is also looking at large cutbacks.

Work First Initiative – there was testimony regarding this yesterday and many advocates complained it is going to be hard for people to get gainful employment in twenty four (24) months. There is a concern that an estimated nineteen hundred (1900) individuals that will come through this program will have disabilities. This will put a greater emphasis on needed rehabilitation services but with the budget situation and losses of personnel, ORS will not be adequately staffed to handle this large number. DLT, ORS, and DHS will have to work together to try to develop a system to address those needs.

Personnel – there have been more notices of retirements. Three more people, two counselors and one management individual are leaving. There may be more notices once we learn the details for balancing the budget. The Governor has a proposal to reduce retirement benefits and employees who have enough years may decide to leave now in hopes to keep their benefits intact, this could be problematic. We are already short-handed, positions are not being filled, and now if we lose those employees with the greatest experience we face a brain drain. ORS staff is doing double and triple duty. People are stepping up but I don't know how long it will last. We are doing everything we can to maintain the integrity of the program

to meet the needs but with the cuts it is increasingly difficult. There is some concern about the overall effects this year. Right now we are trying to keep positive.

Steve has written a proposal to create a work first unit within ORS to assist the Department in this initiative while taking into consideration the needs of individual with disabilities.

The Statewide Comprehensive Needs Assessment (SCNA) is well underway., Kathleen Grygiel and Karen Davis the ORS Supervisor in charge of Quality Assurance have initiated a work group to work hand in glove with the SRC in the creation of a 2008 SCNA.

## **6. Notices**

Next SRC Meeting Tuesday May 13, 2008

Time: 8:30 A.M. – 11:30 A.M.

Location: Crowne Plaza, (Wickford room) 801 Greenwich Ave., Warwick, RI 02886

State Plan Public Hearing Thursday June 5, 2008

1:00 P.M. - 3:00 P.M.

Location: Warwick Public Library (Large Meeting Room (Rm 101)  
600 Sandy Lane, Warwick RI 02889

## **7. Public Comment - None**

## **8. Adjournment – The meeting was adjourned at 6:00 P.M.**

Respectfully Submitted,



Nancy L. Baker, Staff  
State Rehabilitation Council