



State of Rhode Island
Department of Human Services, Office of Rehabilitation Services
STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

To work with the ORS assuring that all Rhode Islanders with disabilities are able to obtain and keep meaningful and satisfying employment.



SRC Meeting May 4, 2021

Zoom Conference

8:30 AM –10:30 AM

Present Members: Dr. Judith Drew, Chair SRC and Program Director, Rehabilitation Counseling Program at [Salve Regina University](#)
Catherine Sansonetti, Vice-Chair SRC, Chair, State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance Comm. Attorney at [Disability Rights Rhode Island](#)

Jack Ringland, Secretary SRC, representing the RIDD Council and Co-Coordinator of [RI Cross Disability Coalition](#)

Christina Battista, representing the [RI Statewide Independent Living Council](#)

Melissa Brusso, Educational Advocate for the [Paul V. Sherlock Center on Disabilities](#)

Jennifer Doucette, Director of Regional Transition for West Bay Collaborative

Anne Fartura, Peer Support Coordinator/Special Education at RI Parent Information Network (RIPIN)

Barbara Fernandez, Operating Officer for Public Health Hub and Pharmacy

Nina Fiasconaro, a Parent Advocate for a Child with Disabilities

Joan Fino, Social Worker and Liaison at Rhode Island Primary Care Physicians

Nicole Rico Serrano, Project Director, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor for the [Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation Vocational Rehabilitation Services](#)

Jane Slade, State Transition Coordinator at the [Department of Education](#)

Christine Yankee, Vice President of Program Services at [Goodwill Industries of Southern New England](#)

[Office of Rehabilitation Services](#): Ronald Racine (Associate Director), Natalia Montoya (Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor II), Joseph Murphy (Administrator, Vocational Rehabilitation), John Valentine (Quality Assurance Supervisor) and Linda Deschenes, (Assistant Administrator of Operations)

Guest: Cathy Andreozzi, Founder of [Tori Lynn Andreozzi Foundation](#)

Regina Connor, Chair, Governor's Advisory Council for The Blind, former Assistant Administrator, ORS

Tracey Cunningham, Chief of [Employment Services at Division of Developmental Disabilities \(DDD\)](#)

Kate McCarthy-Barnett, [FEMA Rhode Island](#)

Keri Rossi-D'entremont, Assistant Dean of Students, Accessibility, and Inclusion at Disability Services Rhode Island College

1. Establish Quorum/Introductions Guests, ORS, and SRC – Quorum met.

2. Agenda Review/Additions or Deletions – There were none.

3. Approval of Minutes from March 9, 2021

Motion

Jack Ringland made a motion seconded by Christine Yankee and approved with one abstention from Jennifer Doucette to accept the March 9, 2021 minutes. (Voting Members – Christina Battista, Melissa Brusso, Dr. Judith Drew, Anne Fartura, Barbara Fernandez, Nina Fiasconaro, Joan Fino, Jack Ringland, Catherine Sansonetti, Nicole Rico Serrano, Jane Slade, and Christine Yankee) (Jennifer Doucette abstained)

4. ORS Director's Report – Ronald Racine

- Courtney Hawkins, the Director of the RI Department of Human Services is resigning. She was a very in-tune Director and worked well with ORS. She made the time to see how things worked in the field. Her departure is a big loss.
- Waitlist – ORS has removed everyone from Categories I, II and III. There is a short waiting time for Category III. Currently those coming on in this category are waiting about one month for services to start. This is a significantly positive change from two years ago when the Waitlist had all categories closed.

- Personnel – There had been a hiring freeze, but now ORS will have an opportunity to post ten to twelve positions, primarily Counselors. In the first round, four counselors and four senior counselor positions will be posted and then several staff positions will then be posted.
- Ron thanked Judi for all her work and leadership on the SRC over the past years.

5. Comprehensive Needs Assessment (CNA) Update - John Valentine

ORS has completed the draft of the CNA and sent it to the SRC. The SRC CNA committee will review the draft and then they will get together for a meeting on May 21, 2021, to collaborate and finalize the report.

6. SRC Leadership Vacancies – At the last meeting, the Council Leadership weighed the merits of having co-chairs and agreed that it would be worth trying. Having co-chairs allows the workload to be lessened and it brings two different perspectives to the work development of the Council.

The Council will be sent a thirty-day notice regarding the Slate of Officers. Anyone wishing to nominate anyone else for these positions may contact Nancy with the nomination. In no less than thirty days, the Council will meet via ZOOM, (as per Council's desire), and vote on the Slate of Officers presented in the formal correspondence.

The Council moved unanimously to select the following members for its Slate of Officers.

Barbara E. Fernandez as Secretary
Catherine Sansonetti as Vice-chair
Melissa Brusso and Jane Slade as Co-chairs

If anyone else is interested in one of these positions or would like to nominate someone else (with their permission) please let Nancy Baker know.

7. Chair's Report - Dr. Judith Drew

Judi thanked everyone for all the work done by the members. And plans to stay on with the Council as an advisor to leadership and active committee non-voting member.

8. New Business

* Disability Rights RI (DRRI) being selected as a grant recipient. DRRI is getting a grant from the US Administration for Community Living through the Federal Department of Human Services, which funds their protection advocacy for individuals with developmental disabilities. The small grant is for the protection and advocacy agencies to disseminate credible information about COVID-19 vaccines into the disability stream community. DRRI will utilize this grant to get information out as well as help people get vaccine appointments, get transportation to and from appointments, and to work with community partners to maximize the coordination of these resources. There is a possibility that this will lead to a multi-year award. There will be more information to come on this.

* Plans for the Fall Award Ceremony for Departing Council Members & SRC Outstanding Service Award - There are several people who have been on the SRC for many years that are leaving at the end of this meeting. Their terms are ending, and they cannot stay on as voting members. These members are Christina Battista, Judi Drew, Joan Fino, Jack Ringland, and Paul Harden. The suggestion was made to hold an in-person meeting (if possible) this fall to honor them. New Council leadership will work to schedule this event.

* Update Related to Post-Secondary Education and Equity for People with Disabilities - Keri spoke about a new Bill before the General Assembly related to the Rhode Island Promise scholarship, which when first proposed in 2017, provided up to two years of free community college tuition to eligible Rhode Island residents. When introduced, the program had a sunset provision that would have ended it with the graduating high school class of 2020. The new Bill would make this two-year free tuition permanent. In addition, a new resolution in the amended language of the Bill would also change the requirements slightly to allow students with disabilities to keep their scholarship, even if it takes more than two years to graduate. It will be helpful for students who need to take a reduced course load and any students who are eligible under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This is important for equity and pathways, so people who have disabilities are not excluded from choosing post-secondary education to help for future jobs.

Members can write testimony or sign up to speak to advocate for any Bill when it comes up before the Assembly.

(Update - Since this meeting, The Rhode Island Promise scholarship is on its way to becoming law. The Bill making the scholarship permanent is headed to Gov. Dan McKee's desk after it was approved by both the House of Representatives and the Senate.)

9. Correspondents – The Council responded to Proposed Guidance; Frequently Asked Questions: Criterion for an Integrated Employment Location in the Definition of “Competitive Integrated Employment” and Participant Choice [Docket ID ED–2021–OSERS–04].

The Council only had two days to respond. The response keyed in on competitive employment. It will be interesting to see if they revise the FAQ. (*Membership received copy of letter*)

10. Public Comments – There were none.

11. Adjournment - The meeting was adjourned at 10:00 AM.

Motion

Jack Ringland made a motion seconded by Judi Drew and unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting. (Voting Members – Christina Battista, Melissa Brusso, Dr. Judith Drew, Anne Fartura, Barbara Fernandez, Nina Fiasconaro, Joan Fino, Jack Ringland, Catherine Sansonetti, Nicole Rico Serrano, Jane Slade, and Christine Yankee)

Respectfully Submitted,
Nancy Baker
Nancy Baker, Staff, RISRC

Addendum to May 4, 2021, meeting minutes.

On June 8, 2021, at 4:05 PM the Council voted unanimously, via ZOOM and paper ballots, to confirm the following Slate of Officers to be sent to the Governor for request of appointment.

Barbara E. Fernandez as Secretary
Catherine Sansonetti as Vice-chair
Melissa Brusso and Jane Slade as Co-chairs