



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 3, 2022
Sherlock Center / Room 017
600 Mt Pleasant Ave, Providence, RI 02908
8:30 AM – 11:00 AM

Present Members:

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

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

Vice-Chair SRC

Cathy Andreozzi, Founder of Tori Lynn Andreozzi Foundation

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

Jennifer Doucette, Director of Regional Transition for [West Bay Collaborative](#)

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

Kate McCarthy-Barnett, FEMA Rhode Island

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

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

[Office of Rehabilitation Services](#): Ronald Racine (Senior Associate Director DHS), Natalia Montoya (Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor II), John Valentine (Strategic Planning Supervisor) and Linda Deschenes, (Assistant Administrator of Operations), Sharon DiPinto (Sr. Human Services Policy & Systems Specialist)

Guests: David Boyer, Legal Director at [Disability Rights Rhode Island](#)

Dr. Judith Drew, Chair SRC and Program Director, Rehabilitation Counseling Program at Salve Regina University,

Catherine Sansonetti, Managing Attorney at [Disability Rights Rhode Island](#)

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

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

3. Approval of Minutes from February 7, 2022

Motion

Christine Yankee made a motion seconded by Jennifer Doucette, approved with one abstention from Catherine Sansonetti, to accept the February 7, 2022, minutes. (Voting Members, Cathy Andreozzi, Melissa Brusso, Jennifer Doucette, Anne Fartura, Nicole Rico Serrano, Jane Slade, and Christine Yankee)

4. Co-Chairs' Report - Melissa Brusso and Jane Slade

- COVID - We want to take the time to remind members why we exist and that every voice is important. The members come from diverse backgrounds, and this is what makes the Council so helpful to ORS and the consumers they serve. During the COVID crisis the SRC met the challenges and membership was added, with almost 100% attendance, much of it due to ZOOM meetings. The ability to hold our meetings that way was a boom to our Council and to many other councils in the state. We are hopeful that current legislation will pass that will allow for changes in the Open Meeting laws to allow ZOOM meeting once again. The reality now is people are unable to attend in-person meetings and our membership has dropped. Recruitment is key, and during the summer we ask that all members seek out one new member to come to our fall meeting to see if they would like to join our Council.

- COVID also challenged our networks and partnership with ORS, however, things worked well during the tough times. ORS collaborated well with its clients to utilize many different alternatives to continue communications and work with students and adult consumers. In some ways, the pandemic opened new and more efficient means of collaborating with clients.
- Schedule – A draft schedule was presented to the membership before the meeting for their review and a brief discussion occurred. At this time the membership agrees to the schedule and after some adjustments, and location finalizations, the schedule will be posted on the Secretary of State’s website.
- Your Voice -Too often we are not able to share or make sure the voices we all represented are heard. This is a reminder that you can be engaged as much as you want on the Council. It is important to attend and be focus on subcommittee work. If you have ideas and want to bring them to the Council, please do. We are empowered to make sure employment needs of people with disabilities are served.
- Subcommittees - If anyone wants to suggest initiating a new subcommittee, then this is something to bring to the membership. If there is something we need to keep a pulse on, bring it up. We do not want to dismiss standing committees but want to make the best use of everyone’s time and to focus on areas of need.
- Vote for Vice – Chair – The Council was given 45 days’ notice to the need of selecting a new Vice-chair. At the time of this meeting, it became known that Catherine Sansonetti would be able to come back to her seat on the SRC. Catherine was unanimously re-seated as Vice chair of the SRC and Chair of the State Plan, Policy, and Quality Assurance committee.

Motion

Anne Fartura made a motion seconded by Christine Yankee and unanimously approved to accept Catherine Sansonetti as the Vice-chair of the SRC. (Voting Members, Cathy Andreozzi, Melissa Brusso, Jennifer Doucette, Anne Fartura, Nicole Rico Serrano, Jane Slade, and Christine Yankee)

(Chairmanship of committee is not a membership vote, thus not required)

5. Guest Speaker David Boyer, Legal Director at Disability Rights Rhode Island

Dave Boyer is the Legal Director DR RI. His experience in the protection and advocacy network began in Florida where he was the Director of Investigations. Most recently he was a Managing Attorney at the National Disability Rights Network, and he has experience in both in training and litigation on topics to include criminal justice, community integration, housing, and P&A access and standing. He is eager to work with the SRC if needed and hopes to learn more about the Council’s partnership with ORS.

6. Honoring Ronald Racine for Service to the SRC – Melissa Brusso spoke about Ron’s years of service to the Council starting back in the early 200s and continuing today. Other members also reminisced about his eagerness to assist the SRC with anything and his easy ability to deal with the most demanding situations. His constant efforts to partner with the Council for the benefit of serving the ORS clients, over the years, were always appreciated. The Council is saddened to lose him to the DHS however we know he is not far away should we need him. The SRC commends him for his hard work and dedication to those we serve and wishes him the best at his new positions with the Department of Human Services. (The Council presented Ron with a State Rehabilitation Council Honorary Service Award - With sincere appreciation and respect for his years of dedication to the State Rehabilitation Council and our partnership with the Office of Rehabilitation Services to better the lives of those we serve. Given on May 3, 2022)

- Ron has accepted a new position at the Department of Human Services (DHS). He will have supervision over the Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS), Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), and Child Services. His last day at ORS will be the 25th of February. Ron has been with ORS for 27 years and on the SRC for most of that time. He spoke about the good working partnership he has had with the SRC, and how beneficial it has been for the consumers ORS serves.

7. Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS) Director's Report – Ronald Racine

- Personnel Positions Filled, Joe Murphey is now Associate Director at ORS. Interviews for Joe’s old position were done last week.
- Funding - ORS had a significant amount of COVID funding that has helped us open our Waitlist as well as fill positions and have the funds for services.
- ORS Facilities – ORS had DHS clients coming to Fountain Street, which created stress on the system, it was challenging. DHS clients will not be going to ORS as of next week, this will allow us to better serve our client base. ORS office reopening has been somewhat of a logistical challenge, but clients really needed our walk-in services. Some workers have had success with off-site and electronic counseling, but many found it difficult to not meet in person. We are gradually getting to the point where we will do primarily in person and virtual will be used as a fill-in, not a regular

operational way. We are still trying to find that balance, as are other agencies. COVID changed things forever, some of the changes are turning out to be good for clients, others not so much.

8. COVID - 19 The effects on Services - Natalia Montoya

There were positive things to come out of the pandemic. Implemented virtual meetings to continue services and IEP meetings via ZOOM made it so much easier to make several appointments in different schools in one day. It also allowed students, their parents, ORS Counselors, and School personal to all attend the meetings. This worked very well for most people since it was easier to get everyone together. Naturally, many parents were not working or working from home, so this added to the increased ability to attend the meetings.

The electronic paperwork process improved. Due to the pandemic, there were fewer clients, less travel thus more time for ORS to improve and streamline our paperwork procedures.

ORS employment team had more time to collaborate with employers as did the Counselors. With less referrals we were also able to work on new strategies and concepts with employers and re-establish or strengthen those relationship, improving their knowledge of our services such as consulting.

Not everything was positive during and due to COVID. There has been an increase in anxiety and other mental health issues. Many clients are finding it difficult to go back to work. Some clients found virtual meetings did not work for them, they do better face to face. It helps us to develop a better relationship with these clients. There was a decrease in applications but increase with Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS).

Lack of social skills due to the isolation has risen; these students are going to have a challenging time dealing with work situations.

Lack of vendors due to COVID - 19 (who cannot find workforce to stay), the labor market is shaky.

9. Policy Report – Catherine Sansonetti

Our committee worked with leadership on the Council to develop and get a position letter to Governor's Commission supporting changes in the Open Meeting regulations to allow the continuation of Virtual meetings. Our committee had better attendance during COVID but the downside of that was some people did not come back once we had to meeting in person. We saw ZOOM meetings as positive and highlighted it to Governor's commission. We would like to have a hybrid situation in the future.

State Plan – Committee met with ORS relying on an old procedure reviewing section by section and ORS telling us of the changes, and why they were made. We did it over ZOOM, but the meeting was too long. Moving forward this would work if we broke the session up into smaller increments of time.

This year there will be policy revisions for our review and as soon as we know we will try to employ the model we used before meeting with ORS to go over things.

Regina Connor and Judi Drew offered to work on the Committee.

10. New Business – Judi Drew

Judi sits on The Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling Coalition (VRCC) which is composed of nine professional organizations working together on issues vital to the rehabilitation counseling community and profession. The VRCC is the largest voice of rehabilitation counseling professionals in the United States. The purpose of the coalition is to ensure that people with disabilities have access to the best-qualified rehabilitation counseling professionals

We are having a rehab counseling identity crisis, there needs to be minimal levels of education, master's degree, and to be funded, training grants provided are not enough, there are challenges for students to get to college. We are not getting pockets of minority people to be counselors, because they cannot afford college.

Current rehabilitation counselor curricular standards and the 2023/24 revision currently under way by the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). CACREP are making people choose forty-eight credits or sixty credit programs, so some universities are not getting accredited. They want the clinical plus to get credit action.

11. Correspondents – There were none.

12. Public Comments – There were none.

13. Adjournment - The meeting adjourned at 11:15 AM.

Motion

Melissa Brusso mad a motion seconded by Jennifer Doucette and unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting. (Voting Members, Cathy Andreozzi, Melissa Brusso, Jennifer Doucette, Anne Fartura, Nicole Rico Serrano, Jane Slade, and Christine Yankee)

Respectfully Submitted,
Nancy Baker
Nancy Baker, Staff, RISRC