



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 November 14, 2022  
Sherlock Center / Room 017  
600 Mt Pleasant Ave, Providence, RI 02908  
4:15 PM – 6:00 PM

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](#)  
Catherine Sansonetti, Vice-Chair SRC, Managing Attorney at [Disability Rights Rhode Island](#)  
Regina Connor, Chair, Governor's Advisory Council for The Blind, former Assistant Administrator, ORS (Via ZOOM)  
Tracey Cunningham - Martins, CEO/President [AccessPoint RI](#)  
Anne Fartura, Peer Support Coordinator/Special Education at [RI Parent Information Network](#) (RIPIN)  
Nina Fiasconaro, a Parent Advocate for a Child with Disabilities  
Kate McCarthy-Barnett, FEMA Rhode Island (Via ZOOM)  
Nicole Rico Serrano, Project Director, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor for the [Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation Vocational Rehabilitation Services](#) (Via ZOOM)  
Christine Yankee, Vice President of Program Services at [Goodwill Industries of Southern New England](#)

Guest: Lea Colardo, Educational Advocate – [Sherlock Center](#)  
Elisabeth Hubbard - [Disability Rights Rhode Island](#)  
Sharon Kochan - Senior Peer Special Education Support Coordinator at [RI Parent Information Network](#)

[Office of Rehabilitation Services](#): Joseph Murphy, Associate Director, Karen Davis, Administrator - Vocational Rehabilitation

1. **Establish Quorum/Introductions Guests, ORS, and SRC** – Quorum met.
2. **Agenda Review/Additions or Deletions** – There were none.
3. **Approval of Minutes from May 3, 2022**

**Motion**

*Christine Yankee made a motion seconded by Catherine Sansonetti, unanimously approved to accept the May 3, 2022, minutes. (Voting Members, Melissa Brusso, Anne Fartura, Tracey Cunningham – Martins, Jane Slade, Catherine Sansonetti, and Christine Yankee)*

**4. Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS) Director's Report** – Joseph Murphy

- ORS is in a good spot with having no waitlist and we do not see it coming back at this point, if at all.
- Personnel – There have been some changes with the Executive Leadership at ORS. Karen Davis is now the Administrator for VR, Melanie Sbardella is the Assistant Administrator - Supported Employment, Jennifer Fiske is Assistant Administrator – SBVI and in charge of The Business Enterprises Program. Staff positions need are Counselor I however we are having trouble getting applicants. There are some Interns at ORS who we hope will stay on with us.

- Building Renovations – The process is well underway with painting, new carpets, and bathroom just some of the upgrades the owner is doing to the building on Fountain Street since the State took out another lease.
- 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.
- Rehabilitation Services (RSA) – The RSA will be conducting an audit of ORS next year. Once we have more detailed information, we will be asking the SRC to help us with this.

#### **5. Co-Chairs' Report - Melissa Brusso and Jane Slade**

- Planning for the coming year would have to focus on recruitment of new membership, and then ongoing training of new and current members.
- Discussion regarding meeting via Zoom – the Council requested to have DHS legal review Open Meeting Rules as respect to this Council. Because the SRC is Federally mandated, there was some question as to the need for subcommittees to follow the open meeting laws. After review of legal and the Policy Committee, it is determined that the open meet laws due pertain the Council. The Council will continue to follow the Open meeting Regulations. The Council will investigate further legislation on emending the Open meeting regulations to allow telecommunication for acting members to attend meeting.
- The Council discussed some idea for working with ORS this coming year, focusing on problem solving for clients, looking closer at voiced concerns by client regarding VR services. Outreach for a positive change, looking to our members contact, organizations, agencies serving ORS clients, and see if there are repeat concerns that might be addressed to create positive change.
- Looking toward next year's annual report and addressing the above items, the Council could work with ORS and a client who wishes to participate and follow their progress through the system over a year.
- Joe has brought up how Vermont has rebranded their Vocational Rehabilitation website, focusing more on employment with a hope that it alleviates some of the stigma of the word “disability.” The SRC would like to help with this project once ORS starts planning. Please take some to to look at the Vermont site:  
<https://www.hireabilityvt.com/>
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#### **6. Training Committee – Melissa Brusso**

The Council is looking to hold a training event during one of the last two weeks of April. The location is unknown, but Save The Bay was suggested and will be contacted for availability. If not, then ORS has space. Membership will be asked if they are able to attend this meeting. Also helpful for this, if members have new people, they wish to bring on the Council, it would be good to let them know and have them attend this event, once planned.

Perhaps outreaching to former Charis to see what their strategy was for recruitment might be helpful. We could ask the former SRC Chairs to speak on their highlights with membership training in mind.

#### **7. State Plan, Policy, and Quality Assurance Committee – Catherine Sansonetti**

Policy committee proposed changes to regulations. The comments highlighted, Post Employment and Fee Schedules, ORS Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors qualifications, Customized Employment, and written Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE).

Moving forward, the process we brought into play with the state plan of meeting with ORS and getting the changes noted and briefed on them, really helped the committee with our reviews.

## 8. Public Comment

- Melissa Brusso spoke about the passing of Lois Curtis and her impact on our nation's effort to achieve justice for all. Because of her advocacy, millions of people with disabilities can live in their own homes and fully participate in their communities, with the services and supports they need.

From HHS.gov

“Lois Curtis is remembered as "L.C." in *Olmstead v. L.C.*, the Supreme Court decision often regarded as the *Brown v. Board of Education* of the disability rights movement. *Olmstead* recognized that the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act protect the right of people with disabilities to live in their own homes and receive services in their own communities. Lois was a child when she was institutionalized for the first time and fought for almost two decades to be allowed to return home. She and Elaine Wilson, the other named plaintiff in the *Olmstead* case, worked with attorney Sue Jamieson of the Atlanta Legal Aid Society to convince the Supreme Court that their civil rights were being violated by being unnecessarily segregated in an institution when they could and wanted to live in the community.

- Nancy Baker informed the Council that Anne Fartura was ending her six-year tenure on the SRC and that Sharon Kochan - Senior Peer Special Education Support Coordinator at RI Parent Information Network. Anne spoke briefly to the members thanking everyone for serving on the Council and that she has been honored to work with all. Anne will sit in on a few more meetings even though she will no longer a voting member.

**9. Adjournment** - The meeting adjourned at 5:55 PM.

## Motion

*Melissa Brusso made a motion seconded by Christine Yankee and unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting. (Voting Members, Melissa Brusso, Anne Fartura, Tracey Cunningham – Martins, Jane Slade, Catherine Sansonetti, and Christine Yankee)*

Respectfully Submitted,  
Nancy Baker  
Nancy Baker, Staff, RISRC