



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 8, 2023  
Sherlock Center / Room 017  
600 Mt Pleasant Ave, Providence, RI 02908  
8:30 AM – 11:00 AM

**Present Members:**

Chairpersons: 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, Legal Director at Disability Rights Rhode Island  
Barbara Fernandez, Secretary of SRC, Compliance Officer Human Resources, Asthenis  
Nina Fiasconaro  
Regina Connor, Chair, Governor's Advisory Council for The Blind, former Assistant Administrator, ORS  
Tracey Cunningham - Martins, CEO/President AccessPoint RI  
Jennifer Doucette, Director of Regional Transition for [West Bay Collaborative](#)  
Sharon Kochan - Senior Peer Special Education Support Coordinator/Special Education, RI Parent Information Network  
Natalia Montoya, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor II  
Christine Yankee, Vice President of Program Services at [Goodwill Industries of Southern New England](#)

**Office of Rehabilitation Services:** Joseph Murphy, Associate Director, John Valentine, Strategic Planning Supervisor, and Sharon DiPinto, Sr. Human Services Policy & Systems Specialist

**Guests:**

Christina Battista, Supported Employment Coordinator at Skills for Rhode Island's Future  
Cheryl Aldrich  
Dr. Judith Drew, Assistant Professor, Program Director Rehabilitation Counseling, Clinical Reh and Health Counseling, Salve Regina University,  
Mary Filippo  
Joan Fino  
Anne Fartura, Peer Support Supervisor, RI Parent Information Network  
Paul Harden, Director, Greater Newport Region, Rhode Island Small Business Development Center,  
Robert Kalaskowski, Assistant Director of Planning and Program Development, DLT,  
Ronald Racine, Sr. Associate Director Department of Human services  
Barbara and Jack Ringland  
Liam Shaughnessy

1. **Establish Quorum/Introductions Guests, ORS, and SRC** – Quorum met.
2. **Agenda Review/Additions or Deletions** – There were none.
3. **Approval of Minutes from January 30, 2023**

**Motion**

*Christine Yankee made a motion seconded by Jennifer Doucette and unanimously approved to accept the January 30, 2023, minutes. (Voting Members, Melissa Brusso Jane Slade, Catherine Sansonetti, Barbara Fernandez, Nina Fiasconaro, Regina Connor, Jennifer Doucette, Tracey Cunningham – Martins, Sharon Kochan, Natalia Montoya, Christine Yankee, and Christine Yankee)*

#### 4. Guest Speaker, Department of Labor, and Training (DLT) /Workforce Initiatives - Robert D. Kalaskowski

Mr. Kalaskowski presented a power point covering the highlights of the Department of Labor's Workforce Initiative. (*This power point if available upon request*)

Highlight: DLT Training Programs

- Programs to help meet internal workforce needs - direct support professional training, employer services, and incumbent worker training grants.
- Programs to help train and place individuals with developmental disabilities – Adult career and training services and community workforce partnerships.
- Incentive for employers to encourage hiring of individuals with developmental disabilities – Work immersion, work opportunities tax credits, and workforce accessibility grants.

#### 5. Honoring Former SRC Members –Jane Slade Melissa Brusso, Catherine Sansonetti

All former members were awarded with Certificates of honor for their service to the State Rehabilitation Council and those we serve.

1. Christina Battista dedicated 10 years to the Council (Representing the Statewide Independent Living Council)

Committees: The Nominating and Leadership Development and Membership and Training.

2. Dr. Judith Drew devoted 15 years to the Council (Representing a Community Rehabilitation Service Provider)

She was the Chair of the Council for 6 years, and the Vice-chair of the Council for 2 years.

Committees: Chair of the Transportation committee, and vice chaired the State Plan, Quality Assurance and Policy, and the Employment Committee.

3. Anne Fartura served with enthusiasm for 6 years on the Council (Representing the Parent Training & Information Center established under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA))

Committees: During her time on the Council, she was a steady influence on the State Plan, Policy, and Quality Assurance Committee.

4. Joan Fino devoted 12 years to the Council (Representing a parent training and information center established pursuant to section 671 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act)

Committees: She served as co-chair of State Plan, Policy, and Quality Assurance, and was on the Employment, Transition, and Nomination and Leadership Development Committees.

5. Paul Harden served with dedication for 13 years on the Council (Representing Business, Industry and Labor)

Committees: He co-chaired the Employment Committee, and sat on the Nominating and Leadership Development, Transportation, and State Plan, Policy, and Quality Assurance Committees.

6. Jack Ringland honorably devoted 10 years to Council (Representing disability advocacy groups representing a cross section of individuals with physical, cognitive, sensory, and mental disabilities)

He was the Secretary of the Council

Committees: He Chaired the SRC Awards Committee, and he sat on the Nominating and Leadership Development, Membership Training Committee, and State Plan, Policy, and Quality Assurance Committees.

#### 6. Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS) Director's Report – Joseph Murphy

- Fountain Street Remodeling Project - The remodel is done. The project was well done with painting, new carpeting, and new restrooms for all floors. The end result is genuinely nice. Our third-floor unit did a bit of wonky personalization, but it works. The work was done professionally, and it was a much-needed update to the working areas of the building.
- ORS Proposed Changes to Regulations – There were no comments on the proposed changes from the public so there will be no hearing. response to SRC comments on ORS Proposed Changes to Regulations. The comments were straight forward and ORS' response, already addressed with the Council, was also straight forward and responsive to the State Plan and Policy Committees concerns. ORS has taken all SRC comments into consideration and made the changes which have since been approved by the SRC. Categories 1,2 and 3 on Order of Selection – minor changes to number of disabilities.
- Marketing of ORS – ORS is working to duplicate Vermont's re-brand their vocational services in a more employment-minded look to help reduce the stigma of "disability and rehabilitation" for potential employers. HireAbility Vermont, changes have yielded a noticeable increase in new referrals and hires. A marketing committee has formed at ORS to start working on this to see if it can be done in Rhode Island. The rebranding efforts will be discussed with a communications specialist then bring it to the next phase. At this time, we do not know how long this is going to take. Once we have more planning down the SRC can assist with this major project.

- Personnel - ORS has two new hires for VR Counselors, both of whom were in the internship program at ORS, however one of the new hires is already leaving to take a position in Virginia. ORS is also looking at other New England states to see what the pay-rates are compared to Rhode Island to be competitive with them for new hires.
- MIS System – Has been delayed for over a year due to the awful roll-out in Wyoming. ORS is close to working live with the new MIS system. Still waiting to integrate parts of the data. Planning to have it working in October. Services For the Blind and Visually Impaired (SBVI) will be integrated the spring of 2024 once the management information system is compatible for visually impair counselors.

#### **7. Officers Report – Melissa Brusso and Jane Slade**

- We will be working on the recruitment of new members this year. Nancy will send out recruitment materials in June.
- We will plan a training event. It will hopefully be done in June or July and for those that cannot make it in person, we will record it on zoom for them.
- Officers for next year. We will seek people to step into office positions. Right now, we believe a co-chair is needed. Nancy will send out an ‘officers’ duty’ fact sheet in June. At the fall meeting we will vote on a new slate of officers.
- Schedule – A draft schedule will be worked on over the next month and then presented to the membership for comments.
- This is Jane Slade’s last meeting as the co-chair of the SRC. The Council is grateful for her work over the past few years.
- The council voted to approve Liam Shaughnessy as a new member. His as well as an updated membership appointment list will go to the Governor at the end of June or early July.

We want to thank everyone for their work this year and wish folks a nice summer.

#### **8. Correspondents – There were none.**

#### **9. Public Comments – There were none.**

#### **10. Adjournment - The meeting adjourned at 11:15 AM.**

#### ***Motion***

*Regina Connor made a motion seconded by Catherine Sansonetti and unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting. (Voting Members, Melissa Brusso Jane Slade, Catherine Sansonetti, Barbara Fernandez, Nina Fiasconaro, Regina Connor, Jennifer Doucette, Tracey Cunningham – Martins, Sharon Kochan, Natalia Montoya, Christine Yankee, and Christine Yankee)*

Respectfully Submitted,  
*Nancy Baker*  
 Nancy Baker, Staff, RISRC