



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 January 30, 2023  
Sherlock Center / Room 017  
600 Mt Pleasant Ave, Providence, RI 02908  
4:00 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, Legal Director at [Disability Rights Rhode Island](#)  
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](#)  
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](#)

Guest: Lea Colardo, Educational Advocate – [Sherlock Center](#)  
Elisabeth k. Hubbard – Assistant ADA Coordinator for Employment Services, [Governor's Commission on Disabilities](#)  
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, Natalia Montoya, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor II, John Valentine, Strategic Planning Supervisor

1. **Establish Quorum/Introductions Guests, ORS, and SRC** – Quorum met.
2. **Agenda Review/Additions or Deletions** – There were none.
3. **Approval of Minutes from November 14, 2022**

**Motion**

*Regina Connor made a motion seconded by Christine Yankee, and unanimously approved to accept the November 14, 2022, minutes. (Voting Members, Melissa Brusso, Tracey Cunningham-Martins, Jane Slade, Catherine Sansonetti, Regina Connor, Jennifer Doucette, Kate McCarthy-Barnett, Nicole Rico Serrano, and Christine Yankee)*

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

- Fountain Street Remodeling Project - The remodel is in the middle stages with the 8<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> floors done and others almost done. The first floor is slated last for completion. Last week J. Murphy took members of the executive leadership around for a brief tour of the completed work. The work done already is very professional and appealing and a much needed updating to the working areas of the building.
- ORS Proposed Changes to Regulations - There was a discussion and follow-up on ORS 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. There will be a public hearing, and notice will be given to the SRC in case there are more remarks that the Council wishes to address to ORS.

- Marketing of ORS - Discussion about the methods used by Vermont to 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 is being formed at ORS to start working on this to see if it can be done in Rhode Island.
- Personnel - ORS has two new hires for VR Counselors, both of whom were in the internship program at ORS. Services for the Blind is thinking about the same type of internship to fill the Orientation and Mobility Specialist position. 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 - 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 late February or the beginning of March. Services For the Blind and Visually Impaired (SBVI) will be integrated this summer and the management information system is compatible for visually impair counselors.
- Annual Report – Membership received the report. Anyone wishing to have it digital can contact N. Baker.

#### **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.
- May Breakfast meeting – It was agreed that the meeting will be at the Paul V. Sherlock Center in the interest of saving funds. A guest speaker suggested by J. Murphy was Robert Kalaskowski, Program Development Chief at State of Rhode Island. Also, perhaps we could get a Counselor and Client to speak about their success with VR services and Job Placement. If members have someone else in mind let N. Baker know.
- J. Murphy 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. The SRC Quality Assurance Committee would be a good working partner for this project, and it would give the Council membership another goal for the coming year. Please take a look at the Vermont site: [HireAbility Vermont](#).
- Officer Elections – J. Slade will be stepping down as Co-chair after the May breakfast meeting. She will continue on the SRC. At the March meeting a slate of officers will be presented, and members will have thirty days to add names to it before the vote at the May meeting.

#### **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 will be at ORS to keep costs down. A poll will go out to membership for dates for a training meeting. It would be helpful if members having new people to bring on the Council, have them attend this event.

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

- Policy committee response to proposed changes to regulations - The comments the committee highlighted were, Post Employment and Fee Schedules, ORS Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors qualifications, Customized Employment, and written Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). (SRC comments attached) ORS has gotten back to us and has agreed to make the changes we put forward. (ORS comments attached).
- Open Meeting Regulations - C. Sansonetti is updating the comments to the Governor’s Commission on Disabilities and will have them out this week by the deadline. Last year the Council sent a letter to the Governor’s

Commission on Disabilities (GCD) about the Open Meetings Act (OMA), Gen. Laws. R.I. § 42-46, specifically the expiration of Executive Order 21-72 which allowed meetings covered by the law to occur telephonically or virtually. We wrote to support reinstatement of the above-mentioned Executive Order and/or other action that would accomplish its purpose and effect. Ours, other commissions, and organizations urgings unfortunately did not help, and the COVID exemptions to the OMA expired without renewal.

We are again given the opportunity to comment on a new OMA proposed regulation change that the GCD wishes to put in place of their current practice. This would help people with disabilities continue to attend and participate in meetings without having to be physically present. Currently if someone wishes to attend meetings via telecommunications and wishes to continue to be active on a commission or council, they must have a doctor's letter stating how their disability negatively impacts their ability to be in-person at meetings and they basically are home--bound.

The new proposal would take the doctor out of the loop and allow the individual to let the GCD know that they have a disability, and their health would be negatively impacted if they attended meetings in-person due to their disability. The Director of the GCD, with a vote of GCD members, would then grant the person a one-year waiver allowing them to attend meetings as an active member via telephonically or virtually.

Comments will be accepted until the close of business this Wednesday February 1, 2023. If members have comments, please get them over to N. Baker by the deadline.

\*\*\* The SRC may want to form an ad-hoc advocacy committee on this topic moving forward.

**8. Public Comment** – There were none.

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

### **Motion**

*Christine Yankee made a motion seconded by Regina Connor and unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting. (Voting Members, Melissa Brusso, Tracey Cunningham-Martins, Jane Slade, Catherine Sansonetti, Regina Connor, Jennifer Doucette, Kate McCarthy-Barnett, Nicole Rico Serrano, and Christine Yankee)*

Respectfully Submitted,



Nancy Baker, Staff, RISRC