



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 Informal Meeting March 18, 2024

ZOOM

4:00 PM – 6:00 PM

This was an informal meeting to meet and greet and catch up on National and state affairs. There was no official roll call, voting, or decision making.

Present Members: No rollcall.

- 1. Establish Quorum – No rollcall.**
- 2. Introductions Guests, ORS, and SRC**
- 3. Approval of Minutes from November 6, 2023 – Minutes were not voted on but will be at the May Meeting.**
- 4. The Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS) Director's Update –Karen Davis**
 - Personnel – At this time, we have a staffing shortage that, if not resolved, may begin affecting our ability to give timely services to clients. We are struggling with vacancies, soon to be at ten, primarily for Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors. Our Counselors are working 50 to 75 client caseloads, and if we are successful with the rebranding initiative, these numbers are expected to go higher.
 - The staffing shortages are due to several factors, competition from other states and programs, a smaller pool of candidates, and an increasing number of states dropping the Master's degree requirement. The ORS has recently lost three Rehabilitation Counselors due to these issues. At this time, our supervisors are covering the vacancies but that is not a sustainable plan. There are currently seven open positions.
 - Due to the lack of qualified candidates for vacancies, the ORS continues to explore multiple ways to restructure the Rehabilitation Counselor position while maintaining the Master's Degree Requirement. If methodology is developed that might allow for recruitment efforts of candidates who might have a Master's Degree in a related field, the ORS will work with the SRC and State Personnel to bring that change forward. The ORS has received over 200 hundred applications with only a few having master Degrees in Rehabilitation Counseling. The ORS will start to look at applicants with BS in the related fields in order to fill openings. Additionally, to be competitive with other New England states, we are working to change pay increases for Counselors 1 and 2 and the addition of a new level of Counselor 3, as well as re-working the Administration salaries. All of these plans will need to be approved by the Union and State Administrators.

Question from Council – Could ORS hire retired Rehabilitation Counselors on a part-time basis?

Karen will check with Ron Racine and get back to the Council.

- The New Case Management System – The system's name is, "Informed," and it went up on November 27th. There is a customer service representative at the ORS from the company, Libera, which made the system, for the first few months to help make sure we have a smooth transition for our clients and staff.

We are working with Libera to add additional functions that were on the older system, which are not on this new one. The data collection is working as well as 911. As with anything new, there have been issues, and staff training is continual at this time.

- Consumer Satisfaction Survey – John Valentine
ORS sends out monthly survey each month, sorted by last names, to active training status, or currently working but case not fully closed. Since we started doing this the response rate has improved.

Highlights

- Client and Parents like virtual meetings
- Phone and email communications preferred over written.
- Outreach done within one day for 50% of clients, and 2 days for 40%. (Even with our vacancies these numbers have stay constant)
- Rising numbers of respondent from 65% to 75% declaring they are on SSDI or SSI. Of respondents, 7 out of 10 indicated they had good access to benefits counseling when they needed it.

Reminder – The 2025 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA), which drives the State Plan is gearing up. This year we want to focus on out-of-school youth, and underserved populations. *The Council will collaborate with the ORS on this.*

5. Chairs' Report - Melissa Brusso

- We are continuing to actively recruit new members. We would like to acknowledge two new candidates here today, Jason Mollo, the Sr. Manager, Global Talent Acquisition Operations & Corporate Recruitment. And Rene Rico, Clinician at Eleanor Slater Hospital. The Council graciously welcomes you and your insightful input to our work. The Council still needs representation for Business, Industry and Labor, a category particularly important since the ORS functions to help person with disabilities obtain employment. We are still waiting for a representative from the Department of Education. The Executive Leadership may need to send a formal letter to RIDE to speed this process along. Still looking for one representative from the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) and from the State Workforce Development Board.

Reminders

- As discussed in our last meeting it would also be important for the Council to recruit former clients of ORS and/or their family members as well as underserved populations. And it would be nice to have someone who works with occupational, physical or speech therapy.
- Suggestions made that in addition to the usual outreach, the Council should target employers that the ORS has awarded in the past, as well as industries sectors in the Cyber Security industry, Tax Consultants, Med Techs, New England Tech, and supermarkets.
- National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils Spring Conference – at this point it is uncertain if we will have representation at this event.
- May Breakfast meeting – Disability Rights Rhode Island will preset at this meeting. They will discuss a new APP for clients, as well as supportive decision making, and access to ORS services,

5. Public Comment

- Rhode Island Parent Information Network seeks input and advocacy for a BILL that restores the requirements that schools obtain written parental approval before changes can take effect children with disabilities. SECTION 1. Chapter 16-24 of the General Laws entitled "Children With Disabilities [See Title 16 Chapter 97 — The Rhode Island Board of Education Act]" is hereby amended by adding thereto the following section: 16-24-1.1. Parental consent required. This act would outline the requirements and

process for local education agencies to get written parental consent before conducting an evaluation, reevaluation, making an initial placement or changes in placement or the individual education program of a student in a special education program of services. Section 16-24-1.1(1) would take effect upon passage. The remainder of this act would take effect on July 1, 2025.

Highlights

- To further ensure informed parental consent, parents shall receive evaluation reports 19 and other relevant written materials that will be considered at the IEP meeting, including proposed 20 goals and objectives for the IEP if they have been drafted, at least three (3) calendar days prior to attending an IEP meeting at which those materials will be discussed. To address parental scheduling needs, parents can agree to the sharing of this material less than three (3) calendar days ahead of the IEP meeting. All materials provided shall comply with legal requirements for language accessibility.
- Increase the evaluation window to 63 days to balance that 3-day window. The LEA's timeframe for conducting initial evaluations and convening a meeting (as 26 described in 200-RICR-20-30-6.7.2(A)(1)(b)) and for conducting reevaluations and convening a meeting (as described in 200-RICR-20-30-6.7.2(C)(1)(b)) shall be extended from the current sixty (60) calendar days to sixty-three (63) calendar days.
- In order that parental consent be properly fully informed, parents have the right, upon request, to observe any placement proposed for their child if the child is identified as eligible for 1 special education services.

7. Adjournment - The meeting adjourned at 6:00 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Nancy L. Baker

Nancy Baker, Staff, RISRC