



State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations  
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 December 1, 2020**

**Zoom Conference**

**3:30 PM – 5:30 PM**

Present: Dr. Judith Drew, Chair SRC and Program Director, Rehabilitation Counseling Program at [Salve Regina University](#)  
Catherine Sansonetti, Vice-Chair SRC, Attorney at [Disability Rights Rhode Island](#)  
Jack Ringland, Secretary SRC, representing the RI Developmental Disability Council and Co-Coordinator of [RI Cross Disability Coalition](#)

Community members/CRP members:

Christina Battista, representing the [RI Statewide Independent Living Council](#)

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

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

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

Nina Fiasconaro, a Parent Advocate for a child with Disabilities

Paul Harden, Director of the [RI Small Business Development Center](#), at URI

Allison Hitte Robinson, Program Coordinator, for the [Office of Disability Services](#) at CCRI Knight Campus

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

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

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

Office of Rehabilitation Services:

Ronald Racine (Associate Director), Natalia Montoya (Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor), Joseph Murphy (Administrator, Vocational Rehabilitation), John Valentine (Quality Assurance Supervisor) and Linda Deschenes, Assistant Administrator of Operations

Guest: Cathy Andreozzi, Founder of [Tori Lynn Andreozzi Foundation](#), Regina Connor, Chair, Governor's Advisory Council for The Blind, former Assistant Administrator, ORS, Michael D. Macedo, LCSW, Clinician at Comprehensive Community Action Program (CCAP), Beth Rioles, Administrator (DDS)

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

**2. Agenda Review/Additions or Deletions**

**3. Approval of Minutes from October 13, 2020**

**Motion** Jack Ringland made a motion seconded by Anne Fartura, and unanimously approved to accept the October 13, 2020 minutes. (Voting Members – Christina Battista, Melissa Brusso, Jennifer Doucette, Dr. Judith Drew, Anne Fartura, Nina Fiasconaro, Paul Harden, Jack Ringland, Catherine Sansonetti, Nicole Rico Serrano, Jane Slade and Christine Yankee)

**4. Summary of Follow-ups from Meeting**

- Council will follow-up with Beth Rioles through Ron Racine regarding the situation with Administrative Law Judges
- Jane Slade will, when available, update the Council on outcome data regarding students with disabilities that leave high school up to one year after their graduations.

**5. Update on DDS and Discussion of Relevant Topics / SSI/SSDI - Beth Rioles, Administrator (DDS)**

Disability Determination Services (DDS) is a unit within the Office of Rehabilitation Services. DDS is the state agency which determines the medical eligibility of Rhode Island residents (children and adults) who have applied for cash benefits under the disability programs administered by the Social Security Administration (SSA). The two SSA disability programs are Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) (Title II) and Supplementary Security Income (SSI) (Title XVI). The DDS is responsible for collecting medical evidence of record and determining whether the claimant is disabled and/or blind as defined by the Social Security Act.

What is a "Medically Determinable Impairment"? - A medically determinable physical or mental impairment is an impairment that results from anatomical, physiological, or psychological abnormalities which can be demonstrated by medically acceptable clinical and laboratory diagnostic techniques. A physical or mental impairment must be established by medical evidence consisting of signs, symptoms, and laboratory findings, not only by the individual's statement of symptoms.

The Disability Determination Process - Most disability claims are initially processed through the state DDS. RIDDS processes on average of 150 claims per 34 Disability Examiners. All claimants' cases go to the State for evaluation of the case, and after that approximately 25 % go for Federal Quality Assurance review. If the Federal review finds concerns, the case is returned to DDS with a Correction Action Plan. DDS has a 94% accuracy on the decisions by Federal review. The accuracy rate for DDS is measured at this Federal level.

An area DDS is working to improve on is processing time of decisions for claimants at the State level.

If a claim is denied, subsequent appeals of unfavorable determinations may be decided in the DDS, or by administrative law judges in SSA's Office of Disability Adjudication and Review (ODAR).

*Question related to the Administrative Law Judges.*

President Trump has signed an executive order moving the hiring of Administrative Law Judges from the competitive service into the excepted service, giving the president and agency heads broader latitude in appointments, does this concern the DDS regarding fairness of decisions?

*Beth Riales, Yes, there are concern that if these judges were politically appointed there might be some influence from their politics regarding the program.*

The Council's concern is if there are judges whose political mission is to deny benefits to people, there will need to be strong advocacy to prevent this. The Council will continue to watch this and deliberate further depending on how the Biden administration reacts to this.

## **6. ORS Director's Report - Ronald Racine**

Waitlist - There are no more people on the Category I Waitlist. ORS is working to get clients in Category II off the Waitlist, there are currently 56. Once they are removed ORS will work to get the 36 clients in Category III off the list. This process should take 4 to 5 months, if everything goes well. This is a big difference from where ORS was just two year ago when the Waitlist had all categories closed.

*There was a question about how the waitlist works, and what the Waitlist categories are.*

Rhode Island VR must provide a full range of vocational rehabilitation services, as appropriate, to all eligible individuals who apply. In the event these services cannot be provided to all eligible individuals, in this case due to limited funding, the agency must implement an Order of Selection Policy. Under Order of Selection, priority will be determined during the eligibility process based on how significantly your disability impacts your ability to work. Individuals with the most significant disabilities are selected first to receive vocational rehabilitation services.

Clients are served in the following order as funding allows:

- Priority Group 1- Individuals with the most significant disabilities
- Priority Group 2- Individuals with significant disabilities
- Priority Group 3- All other eligible individuals

*This is a detailed page answering those questions: <http://www.ors.ri.gov/OOSWaitlist.html>*

## **7. Updates on Governor's Coaching Corps and Let's Get Back to Work - Joe Murphy**

Brief History: In 2018 the Let's Get Back to Work Initiative began. It was formed to eliminate the Silo Effect in the rehabilitation and employment communities in RI by having all state agencies and provider networks linked together. Since COVID-19, there is a new initiative called Back to Work RI, which is very similar to the Let's Get to Work Initiative.

- Back to Work RI will focus on those receiving unemployment benefits and the state's more vulnerable communities, with the objective of assisting those in need and ensuring that the economic comeback leaves no one behind.
- ORS is no longer working with the Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center (WINTAC), but they had helped us provide technical assistance on a wide variety of subjects including customized employment, supportive employment and an

integrated resource team model, which is in use at the Department of Labor and Training (DLT) in the Disability Employment Initiative (DEI). The DEI is a person-centered plan that aims to improve education, training and employment opportunities and outcomes for youth and adults with disabilities who are unemployed, underemployed and/or receiving Social Security disability benefits. Person-centered plans examine the obstacles to work while the Governor's newer program emphasis help for those who have lost work or businesses due to COVID-19. This has been a great way to get people to the table to explore new ways of merging services to end SILOs.

- The Governor's Coaching Corps will be training 30 – 35 Navigators (career coaches) using The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) money. ORS involvement is important to help make sure the Navigators have a focus on people with disabilities but there has been a delay in getting ORS involved, not at ORS' end.

ORS has just spoken to other agencies, to get further funding to help lessen the negative impact of COVID-19.

ORS anticipates this will continue to be something we need to update the Council on, it is a slow process, but we are hopeful things will start to click.

Joe Murphy commented that ORS continues to remind DLT that our agency could help coach the new Navigators when they are hired, but ORS has not heard back from DLT. ORS also has a Business Engagement Team working to get ORS' name out there to partners in business community. ORS is also involved in Disability IN – US program, and Massachusetts has invited RI to their program. Disability IN is the leading nonprofit resource for business disability inclusion worldwide.

#### **8. Chair's Report - Dr. Judith Drew**

- Update on the Community Rehabilitation Providers section of the Comprehensive Needs Assessment for 2020. The draft is almost complete and will be sent to John Valentine. Judi thanked everyone who has been working on this project; Catherine, Melissa, Christine, Barbara, Nina and Nancy.
- ORS/SRC Annual Report is due by mid-December. Nancy has sent out a request for members to update their biographies and for committee chairs to process their annual reports.

**9. New Business** - Michael D. Macedo talked about his road to the SRC and his wanting to be on the Council. He was welcomed and will be a member once appointment is approved by Governor. He will be advocating and representing Individuals with physical, cognitive, sensory, and mental disabilities.

Mike is a local licensed Clinical Social Worker and Psychotherapist. He currently works for Comprehensive Community Action Program and The Inner You Counseling Center. Mike has Asperger's Syndrome among other diagnoses, which he uses as tools to better empathize with and treat his clients, many of whom have Autism Spectrum Disorders and mood disorders. Mike is also an autism advocate, public speaker, and published writer, and hopes to build connections throughout the State, and nationally.

**10. Public Comments - There were None.**

**11. Correspondence - There were none.**

**12. Adjournment** - The meeting was adjourned at 5:15 P.M.

**Motion** – *Catherine Sansonetti made a motion seconded by Jack Ringland, and unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting. (Voting Members – Christina Battista, Melissa Brusso, Jennifer Doucette, Dr. Judith Drew, Anne Fartura, Nina Fiasconaro, Paul Harden, Jack Ringland, Catherine Sansonetti, Nicole Rico Serrano, Jane Slade and Christine Yankee)*

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