**April 17, 2025 minutes**

**Statewide Rehabilitation Council**

**Business and Employment Opportunity (BEO) Committee**

1:00 – 2:00 pm

**Attendees:**

* + **SRC Members:** Steve LaMaster (Committee Chair), Dawn Clark
	+ **MRC staff:** Amy Karr
	+ **Other individuals present:** Sarah Wiles (Client Assistance Program [CAP])
	+ **Absent BEO Committee Members:** Joe Bellil, Naomi Goldberg (CAP)

The meeting was held remotely.

The meeting was called to order at 1:05 pm.

# Introductions and announcements (as needed)

The agenda time of two hours is the max time. For the June meeting, we have 60 minutes slated.

# Approval of meeting minutes

No minutes were approved at this meeting.

# State Plan FY25 Recommendations Discussions

Disability Employment Tax Credit (DETC)

Mr. LaMaster reviewed the history of the Disability Employment Tax Credit (DETC). It rolled out two years ago. MassAbility is tasked with its promotion. There has not been a lot of promotion of it to date.

The FY25 recommendation was to develop a strategy of getting the word out. Not a lot of progress was made because the DETC could not be marketed before MassAbility’s name change. Now that the name change has occurred, there are less resources for marketing. Not many certifications for the DETC have been received.

Mr. LaMaster will meet with Joe Reale to make an infographic about the DETC. The infographic should start from the person with a disability applying for and getting the certification, to the time the employer files their taxes. He recommends that MassAbility uses this infographic to help get the word out. Every MassAbility participant should get certified unless they opt out. Mr. LaMaster would like to suggest that MassAbility sets a target number of people to get certified within the year. Vocational rehabilitation counselors (VRCs) and other MassAbility staff can help determine that target number.There is a need to make people with disabilities know this is available. Career Services vendors should know how to help participants get certified. Ultimately, it is on the person with a disability to get certified and inform their employer about this.

Self-employment

At the previous BEO committee meeting, self-employment data was presented. Data revealed that of the approximately 39 people with the goal of self-employment, 98% achieved their goal. Mr. LaMaster wanted to suggest that we learn more information about the characteristics of these participants, such as their preparation and what types of jobs/businesses they developed. However, Commissioner Wolf did say the data was not clean and is not that informative.

CAP has noted that some participants seeking self-employment do not have sufficient baseline knowledge about what is required for success in a self-employment endeavor. How prepared are participants to pursue self-employment? What needs to happen? What resources does MassAbility have? How much effort can MassAbility allocate towards getting the participants seeking self‑employment prepared?

It was noted that in the past the SRC did make a recommendation about self-employment that MassAbility (then the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission, or MRC), did not accept. Now it is an area that MassAbility is working on and the SRC focuses recommendations on.So, Mr. LaMaster would like to make a recommendation for FY26 regarding self‑employment.

Mr. LaMaster suggested that MassAbility work with Vermont to learn about their effective practices and develop strategies to allocate their scarce resources to help the predicted number of people seeking self‑employment. It was noted that there is a lot of self-employment in the state of Vermont, and the laws may differ somewhat there.

Should self-employment services emphasize helping participants get ready for self-employment? Things such as market analysis, a business plan, etc.? Maybe when a person says they want to be self‑employed, the first task, even before writing up the Individual Plan of Employment (IPE), should be to provide 30 minutes of education for the participant. This could include information such as the number of small businesses that start that fail vs succeed, and the importance of work and knowledge in areas in addition to the product or service that will be sold, such as market analysis, a business plan, and finance.

Mr. LaMaster will be speaking to Kate Biebel and Commissioner Wolf about these current areas of recommendations. He will try to ensure that the recommendations we submit for FY26 are in the areas that MassAbility is focusing on.

MassAbility’s priorities for FY26:

* Taking what learned from NextGen services, which serves 18 to 30 year olds and prioritizes placing them in STEM jobs, and integrating that into Career Services.
* Enhancing business relationships and strengthening relationships with employers.
This may be an area that the BEO Committee might want to make a recommendation on. Mr. LaMaster would like to have representatives from business associations or chambers of commerce either join the committee or to speak at committee meetings about the needs of employers and allow that to inform and influence the development of stronger relationships with employers.

Mr. LaMaster will be meeting with Ms. Biebel and Commissioner Wolf tomorrow, April 18th. They will have opinions about what the SRC does and does not do. The SRC and its recommendations are not bound by their opinions. However, if the SRC can align what we are doing and our recommendations with what MassAbility is doing the work will be more collaborative.

Mr. LaMaster asked if anyone had recommendations for his meeting with Ms. Biebel and Commissioner Wolf, or if anyone thought the recommendations were missing the mark. Members were positive about his thoughts and overall work with the committee.

Mr. LaMaster predicts it will be more difficult to get people with disabilities into competitive employment because it is hard to predict what will happen in the economy due to tariffs. Consumer confidence is sinking, fewer big purchases will be made, the economy will begin to recede. But we must focus on the fact that employers still need qualified candidates to do the work. It will be more difficult, but we do not want job seekers to despair.

Mr. LaMaster will send the recommendations to Joe Bellil to be reviewed at the State Plan Committee meeting, and will send a copy to the BEO Committee members.

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The next BEO meeting is on June 12th at 1:00 PM

The meeting was adjourned at 1:33 pm.