**State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) Executive Committee Meeting Minutes**

**August 7, 2025**

**4:00 - 6:00 pm ET**

**Attendees:**

* **Executive Committee Members:** Heather Wood (SRC Chair), Joe Bellil, Naomi Goldberg (Client Assistance Program [CAP]), Steve LaMaster, Doug Mason
* **Other SRC Members:** Tay Silveira
* **MassAbility (MBY) Staff:** Kate Biebel, Amy Karr
* **Others Present:** Dawn Clark,Sarah Wiles (CAP)
* **Absent Executive Committee Members:**

Please Note: This meeting was held remotely.

**The meeting was called to order at 4:03 pm by the chair.**

**Approval of Meeting Minutes:**

Chair Wood asked if there were any corrections for the minutes for the December 2024, January 2025, February 2025 and March 2025 meetings. Mr. Mason motioned for approval, Ms. Goldberg seconded. The December 2024, January 2025, February 2025 and March 2025 meeting minutes were approved with no corrections.

**UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

1. Membership Update – Sahara Defensor

There are no major updates. Chair Wood will be meeting with two vocational rehabilitation counselors (VRCs) who have expressed interest in filling the vacant Qualified VRC seat.

The reappointment paperwork for SRC member Rebecca Davis has been sent to the governor’s office.

**NEW BUSINESS**

1. Meeting technology updates – Heather Wood
   1. Ensuring security for Zoom SRC Quarterly meetings

Starting at the September Quarterly meeting, Chair Wood will ask one or two people to monitor the meeting waiting room and interact with anyone whose names we do not recognize. Those who agree to this role will be assigned as co‑hosts and will be able to admit people and remove people from the meeting. Having someone in addition to Chair Wood and Ms. Karr able to do this will help prevent disruptions such as what occurred at the May 1st meeting to discuss Order of Selection.

* 1. Updated meeting invite policy

In the past calendar invites were sent to everyone on our mailing lists. Now, only appointed members and MassAbility staff will receive the actual calendar invites. This is consistent with the practice of other boards like ours.

1. Committee Reports

* Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) Council – Doug Mason

The council last met two weeks ago. It was a short meeting with the purpose of notifying the members that the council will be changing its name because of the political environment.

The next meeting on August 19th will be in person. Commissioner Wolf will be there. The council will vote on the new name of the council. This will be the first in person meeting of the council.

* Business and Employment Opportunity (BEO) Committee – Steve LaMaster

The committee last met on June 12th; it has not met since the June Quarterly meeting.

On July 31st a working group of some BEO Committee members and others, along with Joe Reale from MassAbility, met to discuss a draft document aimed at briefly explaining the Disability Employment Tax Credit (DETC) and summarizing the steps necessary to obtain certification. Mr. Reale was going to find out if it is possible to change the language about requirements for disability documentation on the DETC application. This will likely be discussed at the next BEO Committee meeting.

The next BEO Committee meeting in on August 14th at 1:00 pm.

* **State Plan Committee – Joe Bellil**

The committee last met on April 16th. The June meeting was canceled. There is no update since the June Quarterly meeting.

At the next meeting we will look at the FY26 recommendations and MassAbility’s responses. We will also start talking about the process of collecting committee reports for the 2026 Annual Report.

The next meeting of the State Plan Committee is on August 20th at 11:00 am.

* **Consumer Satisfaction Needs Assessment Committee (CSNAC) – Heather Wood**

The committee last met on June 2nd. The is no update since the June Quarterly meeting.

At the next meeting the committee we hope to be able to discuss the most recent yearly survey results for staff, employers and vendors/providers.

The next CSNAC meeting is on August 25th at 5:00 PM.

1. MassAbility update – Kate Biebel
   * Connect: The time from application to getting to an office is 25 days. This is down from 93 days, so we feel very good about that. We have been receiving a lot of good feedback about the assisted intake form; people who use that get in much more quickly.
   * Career Services: We are in the interview phase for two pretty big positions, the Director of Business Relations (former position of Bill Allen) and the Director of Career Services Operations (former position of Jessica Cimini). One is moving more straightforward than the other, but both are big priorities.
   * Federal landscape/funding: There is no news, we are continuing to wait. It appears we will be funded at FY24 levels, but we have not seen specifics yet. We are concerned that we have some mandates that will become unfunded mandates, which will be another potential cut into our base. As previously mentioned, we get no federal funds to account for staff raises.

There are reallotment funds available, which is surprising. MassAbility put in a large request. If received, we would build up our war chest to address the issue of salary increases. We have had to cut in terms of spaces, provider contracts, but the salary increases are a cost that keeps accruing. MassAbility has slowed its hiring. Some positions are intentionally not being filled. We have asked district managers to choose which positions to fill.

We hope to have more information about funding by the September Executive Committee meeting.

1. Order of Selection/Managed Intake – Jessica Cimini

Ms. Cimini noted that MassAbility often uses the term Managed Intake to refer to Order of Selection, but the two terms mean the same thing. MassAbility is still in the preparation stage, but further along than when this topic was initially presented at the special May 1st meeting.

The purpose of this update is to keep the SRC Executive Committee informed and see if you have any questions or advice.

MassAbility has revised its policy, making sure it is aligned with the regulations. The biggest piece is the justification. We looked at fiscal resources. We looked at ways to streamline and cut costs that could help us not need to go into order of selection. We wanted to ensure that the justification is well documented and explains the why of needing to go into order of selection.

The next major step will be to hold a public hearing. This is open to everyone. Initially the hope was to hold the hearing this month. However, there is a new secretary of the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS). MassAbility is still fine tuning some things, so the public hearing will be a bit later than initially anticipated. The purpose of the public hearing is to both ensure that the disability community and public understand what is happening and why, and also for MassAbility to receive feedback. MassAbility will take the feedback into consideration and may use it to adjust our justification or policies.

Once we get the EOHHS secretary gives approval to hold public hearings, there will be a public notice. The hearing will probably be held in the late afternoon to early evening, something like 4:30‑6:30 PM. There will be one hearing, virtual and statewide. MassAbility will probably ask the SRC who should specifically be notified about this. SRC members are encouraged to push it out the communities they know. MassAbility would welcome SRC members to attend the public hearing to hear community feedback.

After the public hearing we will present our policy and justification to RSA informally and receive feedback. That turnaround takes about one month. Then we would formally submit it to RSA. That approval can take 3-6 months. Once we receive final RSA approval, then RSA would give us permission to open the portal to change the state plan, because this is really like an addendum to the state plan. We would also need the approval of the new secretary of EOHHS.

To date there has not been much formal or informal messaging to MassAbility staff about what information they can provide about MassAbility possibly going into order of selection. The staff does know MassAbility is considering order of selection. There has been no intentional message about this outside of MassAbility. A member has heard questions about clubhouses taking some MassAbility referrals, so some partial information is out there. The draft communication plan does include a huge list of MassAbility service providers. Ms. Cimini asked members if they think of a particular group that MassAbility may not have included to please email her or Ms. Biebel.

Questions/comments

* A member noted that when MassAbility went through this last time, there was a lot of focus on how people would not be served. However, part of the messaging should be that order of selection helps MassAbility better serve the people who need the most help and is good for participants who are already receiving help. There are probably people who can get services through career centers, or who may not need much support to obtain a job.

Ms. Cimini said MassAbility has more information than it had the last time it was considering order of selection. We have had successful consultations with RSA. So many states are going into order of selection currently. There is a guide to make sure that all the steps are followed. MassAbility’s talking points right now are very much about the why of order of selection. They are clear about what MassAbility has done to try to free up as much money as possible. We also explain that MassAbility will be analyzing the situation regularly and try to move people off the wait list. MassAbility will dedicate an external webpage to this, and it will be updated frequently. There is a group working on a huge list of resources for the page, including Career Centers and local resources. We anticipate more calls to Connect, and that people will appeal their assigned priority categories more frequently than currently; there will be resources for that.

* A member will be starting a new role as a transition specialist in a high school. She will be working with students who will be applying for MassAbility. Will that age range be treated the same?

Ms. Cimini said the answer is yes and no. There are no priority levels for Pre‑Employment Transition Services (pre-ETS), but funding received from RSA for pre‑ETS may change. If/when the students apply for individual VR services through MassAbility, they will be assigned a priority level like others who apply for services.

* When order of selection is turned on, and a priority level is closed, will this affect participants who are already receiving services?

Everyone currently being served, regardless of their priority, will continue to be served. The federal regulations require that services continue. This will affect only those coming through the door after a particular date. Ms. Defensor clarified that the way the policy is currently written, a participant needs to be in a plan before the date order of selection is turned on, not just have been determined eligible.

Ms. Cimini shared the link to a page that lists the states currently in order of selection. She is not sure this is updated to the most current information.

[Order of Selection Information | Rehabilitation Services Administration](https://rsa.ed.gov/about/programs/vocational-rehabilitation-state-grants/order-of-selection-information)

States with all priority categories closed are still processing applications, determining eligibility and priority category. Once there are sufficient resources then those people do not have to go through eligibility.

Ms. Cimini said that MassAbility is aiming to give at least a week’s notice for the public hearing; Open Meeting Law (OML) requires 48 hours. There will only be one public hearing. After the public hearing there will be a two-week period for people to submit written comments.

**Open Mic**

Chair Wood officially applied for the position of transition specialist at her high school. Her job will be to oversee all the students in special education at the high school. This will include some referrals to MassAbility. She is excited because the job will be more directly related to her work with the SRC. Ms. Biebel will connect her with MassAbility area directors. told Heather she can connect her with Area Director.

The next Executive Committee meeting will be on September 4th from 4:00 to 6:00 pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:13 pm.