

October 12, 2023 minutes

Statewide Rehabilitation Council

Business and Employment Opportunity (BEO) Committee

1:00 – 2:00 pm

Attendees:

- SRC Members: Steve LaMaster (Committee Chair), Joe Bellil, Naomi Goldberg, Christine Tosti, Sara Wiles (Ex-Officio), Heather Wood
- MRC staff: William Allen, Joseph Reale, Amy Karr
- Public: Richard Berry, Joe Divincenzo, Jill Eastman, Carrie Endicott, Diane Gladu, Tina Macy, Emmie McDonell, Joseph Reale, Rupali Potnis (CMEC), Charlie Powderly, Lauren Rossignol, Allyson Syslo, Erin M. Young

Meeting was held remotely.

Meeting called to order at 1:03pm.

1. Introductions and announcements (as needed)

Agenda time of 2 hours is a max time. For the October meeting we have 60 minutes slated.

2. Presentation about the Disability Employment Tax Credit (DETC)

Joseph Reale, the Director of Financial Wellness for MRC, introduced himself.

Guests at this presentation about the DETC were invited by Michael Stepansky of the Department of Mental Health (DMH). Want to market the DETC to employment partners. It is an important method of augmenting efforts towards the employment of people with disabilities.

The DETC is an MRC initiative. It was finalized during the administration of Governor Baker. The process for an employee to become certified under this was designed to be simple. The goal is to screen people into the tax credit, not out of it. Once a person is certified, they receive a certification letter to give to their employer. The employer submits the certification with its state income tax return and receives the tax credit. It is a state incentive allowed by the Massachusetts Department of Revenue (DOR). MRC is not paying the employers to hire people with disabilities.

The definition of disability is meant to be as broad as possible. Individuals receiving SSDI or SSI, and/or receiving services from MRC or vendors can be certified. If an individual does not receive qualifying assistance or services MRC will work with the person to collect back up documents so they can be certified. There is no standard definition of disability that must be met. A person can be certified if they can demonstrate or describe their disability. Requiring a person's disability to meet a specific definition could be limiting.

The eligibility criteria have been drafted. There is an online certification form. A tax credit coordinator has been hired. A brochure is being created, and will be working with a marketing consultant to publicize the DETC. Members of the SRC and service providers will also help to inform employees and employers about the DETC. Not all people with disabilities will know about this. It is the role of VR counselors and providers to inform them of this.

Within two days after an applicant completes the online DETC Certification form, they receive certification or a follow up request for additional information. MRC is verifying the applicant does have a disability, and MRC provides the certification.

The Department of Revenue (DOR) held a public hearing about the DETC on February 28th, 2023. The credit may be claimed for the 2023 tax year. MRC has been certifying people with disabilities for two years. The DOR and the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) intend to issue further guidance on the credit. MRC is trying to coordinate a meeting to learn their timeline.

Mr. LaMaster read questions attendees had posted in the chat.

- Are there minimum hours per week that must be worked for an employee to be eligible?
Mr. Reale replied that he does not think there are. The only thing in the regulations is the minimum length of employment.
- Can an employer receive both the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) and the DETC?
Yes, an employer can receive the DETC along with the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC).
- What is the incentive for an employee to get certified for the DETC?
An incentive for an employee to obtain certification and present it to their employer is to create an incentive for the hiring of more people with disabilities. Whether a job candidate discusses this in a job interview is a personal decision. Disclosing a disability is a personal decision, not all people with disabilities feel comfortable doing this. An employment specialist working with a person with a disability who chooses to disclose can point out that disclosing the disability and the potential availability of the DETC may be a way to increase chances of being hired.
- Is there a minimum age limit for an employee to be certified for the DETC? Are youth eligible?
Yes, youth are eligible.

Before the conversation concluded, SRC Member Christine Tosti stated that, as a disabled person, she's uncomfortable that she'd have to "bribe an employer" with a tax credit to be hired. She stated her discomfort with that payment structure is that it doesn't offer a financial incentive to the disabled person.

3. Approval of August 2023 minutes

Mr. LaMaster called for a motion to approve the August 2023 minutes. Mr. LaMaster requested several corrections to the minutes. Ms. Tosti motioned to approve the minutes. Mr. Bellil seconded.

Mr. LaMaster asked whether there were any additional corrections to the minutes. The August 2023 minutes were approved with the requested corrections.

A member requested that her name be used in meeting minutes when she contributes to the discussions during meetings. Currently, the policy is to generally not include names in the descriptions of discussions.

4. Open Mic

Mr. LaMaster thanked the guests for attending. He encouraged them to attend future meetings, and perhaps join the SRC. He also announced that Heather Wood is the newly elected Chair of the SRC.

The next BEO meeting is on December 14th at 1:00 PM.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:59 pm.