

State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) Executive Committee Meeting Minutes

August 3, 2023

1:00-3:00pm EST

Attendees:

- State Rehabilitation Council Members: Inez Canada (SRC Chair), Joe Bellil, Naomi Goldberg, Steve LaMaster, Doug Mason (Ex-Officio), Christine Tosti, Sarah Wiles (Ex-Officio)
- Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) Staff: Amanda Baczko, Kate Biebel, Colleen Casey, William Noone, Graham Powell, Amy Karr

Please Note: This meeting was held remotely.

Meeting was called to order at 1:01 pm by the chair. Ms. Karr read off the list of the attendees from the participant list.

Approval of Meeting Minutes: Chair Canada called for a motion to approve the June 2023 minutes. Mr. Bellil motioned to approve the minutes. Mr. Mason seconded. Chair Canada asked whether there were any corrections to the minutes. The June 2023 minutes were approved with no corrections.

Chair Canada asked for thoughts about skipping the July meeting after the June Quarterly. It was decided that for the future the July Executive Committee meeting will be tentative; they will be kept on the calendar so members will have it on their schedules. If something will need to be addressed right after the June Quarterly meeting, then the committee will meet in July. If there is nothing that needs to be addressed, members will receive notice that the July Executive Committee meeting will be cancelled.

OLD BUSINESS

a. Membership Update – Inez Canada

Chair Canada thanked Sahara Defensor for working to amend the current Executive Order to reflect the Technical Assistance Circular (TAC) recently received from the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), which emphasized that members cannot serve holdover terms after their terms have ended. Ms. Defensor is also trying to push reappointments through Boards and Commissions. The Governor is currently reviewing applications; the goal is to ensure diversity in race, ethnicity, geography, and gender identify. These factors were considered when nominating, but some seats are designated in the regulations, and the SRC must nominate the individuals the agencies put forward. The SRC is as diverse as possible in terms of race, ethnicity, and geography, and at least 51% of the members are people with disabilities, which the regulations stress.

A member expressed concern for the SRC as a whole, that it is limited on what it can accomplish when a quorum cannot be reached. Chair Canada noted that the TAC allows SRC to operate as if in compliance short term. The SRC is trying to rush through nominations and reappointments to get in compliance. Quorum continues to be issue even with people serving extended terms. There is no guarantee that quorum will not be an issue when all seats are filled. Mr. Bellil said this has been on his mind also. He cannot be reappointed. He will talk with the State Plan committee about transitioning to a new committee Chair. Chair Canada noted that she announced at the June Quarterly meeting that she will not be renewing as SRC Chair because of personal and work situations. She will still attend SRC meetings and encourages others who will no longer be members

to still attend. She wants committee Chairs whose terms will be ending to think about who may be a good fit to chair their committees. It is important to try to establish the new committee chairs, but it is difficult without knowing who the members will be. The SRC Chair usually appoints the committee Chairs, but the new SRC Chair would probably not replace existing leadership. When Chair Canada took her position committee Chairs were not replaced, some left because they wanted to. She let that if there is not a barrier to a committee Chair continuing to serve, let them serve. She believes the next SRC Chair will be open to that.

NEW BUSINESS

a. Committee Reports

- **Policy Committee – Naomi Goldberg**

The Policy Committee last met on August 1st before this meeting.

The committee is just about complete with the recommendation about creating fact sheets. The fact sheets were drafted and revised over a few months. Ms. Goldberg will forward the drafts to members for review. Then the fact sheets will be sent to MRC for use as they wish.

The Policy Committee, on behalf of the full SRC, receives a summary of instances when consumers appealed decisions, and either went through the appeal process or settled. At the meeting held earlier today the committee looked at the summary of the first half of the fiscal year. The committee will look at how this format works. There may be other questions going forward. It is possible that in the future the committee will have the MRC Ombudsman share the report once a year.

The next Policy Committee meeting is on October 5th at 11:00 am.

- **DEIA Council – Doug Mason**

The council met on July 20th. Two weeks prior to that meeting Mr. Mason emailed the DEI manager of the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) suggesting that given that it is halfway through the year, the July meeting would be a good time to receive a summary or report indicating what MRC as an agency has accomplished in regard to the year one plan. At the July meeting the manager said he did not have a full report but will have it for the upcoming meeting in August. Mr. Mason will have more substantive information to bring to SRC after the August meeting. Mr. Mason also noted that he had not forgotten the question from a member about whether applicants for MRC positions have requested accommodations for interviews.

The next meeting of the DEIA council will be on August 15th from 12-1:30 pm.

- **Executive Committee – Inez Canada**

There was no Executive Committee meeting in July. The last Executive Committee meeting was on June 1st.

The next Executive Committee meeting is on October 5th at 1:00 pm.

- **State Plan Committee – Joe Bellil**

The committee last met on May 31st.

At the next meeting the committee will review MRC responses to the SRC's FY24 recommendations. The committee will also review the committee's annual reports. Mr. Bellil is

currently waiting for two more. There will also be an update from Bill Noone on the State Plan. Chair Canada has not yet sent her annual report, will send today. Colleen Casey has requested a design for the Annual Report.

The next State Plan Committee meeting is on August 9th at 11:00 am.

- **Business and Employment Opportunity Committee – Steve LaMaster**

The committee last met on June 20th. At the June meeting researcher Jonathan Delman shared a flyer to recruit people of color with disabilities for a focus group about technical education. Mr. Delman shared his email at that meeting, and Mr. LaMaster shared it in the chat today: jondelman@comcast.net.

At the June meeting the committee also discussed its recommendation for the MRC to work with SRC towards sharing work incentives information with employers. At that meeting Bill Allen spoke about the six employer advisory boards throughout the state. Consumers, employers, and vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselors are invited. Approximately 800 consumers have received employment from these meetings.

The committee also discussed the need for personal care assistants (PCAs) and certified nursing assistants (CNAs) because of the aging population. There are already federal and state programs that offer can training, and it was noted that MRC should not duplicate those programs.

The date of the next BEO Committee meeting is August 10th at 1:00 pm.

- **Consumer Satisfaction and Needs Assessment Committee – Ronaldo Fujii**

Mr. Fuji was not present.

The committee last met on June 20th. The date of the next CSNAC meeting is on August 21st.

- **Questions for Chairs:**

A member discussed the focus group recruitment flyer discussed at the BEO committee meeting and reiterated her concern about the term “emotional disturbances,” that it is not helpful to label emotions as “disturbed.” Mr. LaMaster recalled that discussion at that meeting. There was a discussion of alternative wording, such as “distressed,” “trauma,” “lived experience of mental health conditions.” Jonathan Delman does have lived experience and has championed that words matter.

b. MRC Updates – Kate Biebel, Amanda Baczko, Colleen Casey

i. General Updates

- MRC Connect is fully operational throughout the Commonwealth. There is currently a six week backlog with point-of-contact interviews. The time from intake to eligibility used to be 93 days; it is now cut in half. MRC is working to decrease the time further but glad it is less than half what it had been. MRC is hiring more screeners to help decrease the time. Also, we are learning and building it as we go. There is a range of how folks do the intake interviews. There needs to be attention, responsiveness and empathy in intake interviews while keeping in mind that it is a production line. One day eligibility is huge. Overtime is available but staff must meet certain standards to be eligible for overtime. Some data was corrected in MRC Connect. Overall positive about MRC Connect.

- There are no office relocations. Two leases are expiring in the south, in New Bedford and Braintree.
- There are start dates for new Area Directors in Malden and Lowell. There is a candidate in process for Hyannis. The other Area Directors are thrilled.
- The end of the second year of NextGen is approaching. The target is to have 1000 individuals enrolled, currently ahead of target with 363 enrolled. Some were referred from the Massachusetts Commission of the Blind (MCB), some were referred from schools. In June, 42 individuals were recruited, the target was 28. Consistently over target, there were many community outreach meetings.
- MRC will not be receiving the additional \$3.9 million requested, and is surprised and disappointed. MRC was hoping to use the funds to hire additional vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselors to decrease their workload and to expand the Empower to Employ program. Caseload size is a barrier to VR counselors. MRC will have to get creative.

Two SRC members had recently participated in a webinar centered around customized employment as a path to increase Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) for people with disabilities. MRC is aware of customized employment. Ms. Biebel will find out more about if and how MRC is using customized employment to fill its own openings. Many states besides Massachusetts say customized employment is underused in VR. A member commented that customized employment is not talked about because it makes people uncomfortable.

- The Governor signed a new executive order creating the Digital Accessibility and Equity Governance Board led by the Chief Information Technology Accessibility Officer. The job will be to make government websites and technology accessible for both staff and citizens. Sponsors and partners include the Massachusetts Office on Disability (MOD), MCB, and the Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MCDHH). Technology accessibility for people with disabilities is a hidden problem and a dedicated and specific skill set is needed to tackle the problem.

A link to the announcement was shared in the chat:

<https://www.mass.gov/news/governor-healey-signs-executive-order-establishing-digital-accessibility-and-equity-governance-board>

ii. Explore Possibility Summit

The Summit will be on Thursday September 7th at the Sheraton Framingham Hotel & Conference Center. There will be a speed networking event where people can learn about MRC services and advisory boards, including MRC. Members will receive formal invites early the following week. The primary audience is those who are receiving MRC services, but it is also for friends and those not yet receiving services. There are still limitations on attendance size. For the first time, there will be a Day 2 for staff. The goals are to try to build up engagement from the community and for staff to support the community. Ms. Baczko will reach out to members through Chair Canda for those who want to participate and to formally represent SRC. There is now a disability-focused event planner. There was not enough time to organize a planning committee. Planning for next year's Summit will start in October of this year.

The scheduled September Executive Committee is on Day 1 of the Summit. Will discuss rescheduling the September Executive Committee later at this meeting. The SRC wants members to be able to attend the Summit.

iii. Branding

Rebranding has been a marathon, not a sprint. MRC was known as the “best kept secret” in the Commonwealth. The goal is to change that. Over the past three years the MRC has heard from the community, consumers, providers, staff, focus groups, and disability focused leaders. The MRC needs its partners to play a role in sharing the MRC’s mission and ensuring that Massachusetts is accessible and inclusive. The Governor has approved the name and now the legislature has to approve the name.

The new name will be MassAbility. The tag line: Expanding equity and access for people with disabilities. Ms. Casey asked that members keep quiet about the name until it is officially announced. The name was shared with MRC staff the previous week. Members were asked to sit with the name for a bit and think about it; it is a shift and change. Ms. Casey will do a presentation about the rebranding at the next full SRC Quarterly meeting in September. This name came from the community. Changing the name was one of the top items mentioned about improving MRC. A member stated that she does not care about the name change, or advertising and marketing. She cares if MRC is helping consumers obtain jobs, and if disabled people are earning money. Ms. Casey replied that the brand is not just the name. The desire is to challenge society to focus on the talents of people with disabilities. The brand is one way to connect with more employers to get more people with disabilities high paying jobs. MRC is really looking to change how society looks at people with disabilities.

The SRC looks forward to Ms. Casey’s presentation in September. Ms. Casey reminded Mr. Bellil to get the SRC annual reports to her.

iv. Rescheduling Sept Executive Committee meeting

The scheduled September SRC Executive Committee meeting falls on the same day as the Explore Possibilities Summit, September 7th. There was a discussion about whether to move the Executive Committee meeting to the week before or after the Summit. It was decided to move the September Executive Committee meeting to Thursday September 14th from 12-1 PM; the sole item will be to set the Agenda for the September Quarterly meeting.

c. Open Mic

- A member stated her service dog turned one year old today, and that she is very grateful for assistance from MRC regarding her dog.
- The same member also mentioned an organization providing internships for job seekers with disabilities and shared the link in the chat.
<https://www.mass-service.org/for-individuals/commonwealth-corps>
- The Client Assistance Program (CAP) has three free workshops on August 23rd and then again on November 15th. Registration is at the Massachusetts Office on Disability (MOD) website. The link was shared in the chat.
<https://www.mass.gov/orgs/massachusetts-office-on-disability>

- Representative Josh Cutler successfully advocated for the creation of the permanent Commission on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. There is an event celebrating National Disability Employment Awareness Month on October 5 event at the Massachusetts State House in the Great Hall of Flags at 11:00 am.

Shared in the chat from the website: “This event will convene people with disabilities, policymakers, employers, human services providers, and other stakeholders as part of our National Disability Employment Awareness Month activities in October. Together, we will honor policymakers for their work in disability employment, recognize MA businesses that lead the way employing persons with disabilities, and share best practices for employers to hire and retain persons with disabilities. Our goal is to promote disability employment as an answer to the workforce crisis we see across industries.”

The link was shared in the chat.

<https://www.mass.gov/news/national-disability-employment-awareness-month-celebration>

Chair Canada called for a motion to adjourn. The motion was made by Mr. Bellil. The motion was seconded by Ms. Goldberg. The meeting was adjourned at 2:16 pm.