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

**August 1, 2024**

**1:00 - 3:00 pm EST**

**Attendees:**

* **State Rehabilitation Council Members:** Heather Wood (SRC Chair), Joe Bellil, Commissioner Toni Wolf (Ex-officio)
* **Massachusetts** **Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) Staff:** Kate Biebel, Sahara Defensor, Amy Karr
* **Others present:** Doug Mason, Armené Margosian, Bonnie Thompson
* **National Association of Head Injury Administrators (NASHIA):** Jill Ferrington
* **Absent Executive Committee Members:** Dawn Clark, Naomi Goldberg, Steve LaMaster

Please Note: This meeting was held remotely.

**The meeting was called to order at 1:06 pm by the Chair.**

**Introductions:** Chair Wood asked members and attendees to introduce themselves.

**Approval of Meeting Minutes:** The June 2024 meeting minutes were not approved at this meeting.

**OLD BUSINESS**

1. Membership update and Executive Order update – Sahara Defensor

The Governor’s Office has approved the communications outreach plan for the revised Executive Order. This is a major step and usually occurs just before the Executive Order is signed. The communications outreach plan is MRC’s plan regarding how to communicate that the Executive Order is signed. The SRC will be notified of the signing of the Executive Order before it is reported to the media or anyone else. The new Executive Order will change the composition of the SRC.

1. NASHIA Update – Jill Ferrington

Ms. Ferrington discussed three areas of work covered in the contract with the SRC and MRC.

1. Diversity and recruitment

A lot of demographic information about the membership was collected from the survey sent out after the June Quarterly meeting. We made sure that the information collected by the survey was generally in alignment with how Boards and Commissions collects information and approves members. The survey divided the state into five regions – southwest, northwest, northeast, southeast, and Boston metro. Information from the survey revealed that currently, four of those five regions are represented on the SRC.

Additionally, the survey indicated that in general participants felt engaged and able to ask questions and contribute.

More information about the demographics of the SRC membership will be discussed at the Membership Ad Hoc Committee meeting and the September Executive Committee meeting. The intent is for the SRC membership to be diverse in demographics. Also looking at the seats that need to be filled in order to target recruitment.

1. Bylaws

Earlier in the meeting, Ms. Defensor spoke about the progress of the revised Executive Order. NASHIA has been concurrently working on revising the SRC Bylaws. Many of the changes in the Bylaws are to align them with the Federal regulations. NASHIA will continue to work on the Bylaws in August. The plan is to bring the Bylaws to the Executive Committee at the September meeting. Then the Bylaws will be sent to the full SRC and then be voted upon at the September Quarterly meeting.

1. Orientation

NASHIA has been working on some revisions of the orientation slides; they are in draft stage currently. The Membership Committee will give opinions on the draft of orientation materials.

There will also be an Executive Committee manual and tools for the SRC Chair and committee chairs.

1. Reviewing SRC budget – Heather Wood

Chair Wood shared the budget document. **(See FY25 SRC Budget Request Proposed Final.xlsx - YTD BUDGET SUMMARY 712 (003).pdf.)** She went through the items.

* Ms. Karr’s salary
* American Sign Language (ASL) and Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) services will be obtained when requested. The plan is for the SRC to also host one or two open hearings that will not require
* Conferences – Even though SRC members have not attended the past few years, it is essential that we have a presence. The budget amount includes estimates for airfare and hotel.
* The National Disability Rights Network (NDRN) conference will be virtual in June 2025. is virtual.
* Two diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEI-A) trainings – An in-person training in September or October and a virtual one in early 2025.

There were no questions or comments about the budget.

**NEW BUSINESS**

1. Committee Reports

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

Mr. LaMaster was not present at this meeting.

The BEO Committee last met on June 13th. The date of the next BEO Committee meeting is August 13th  at 1:00 pm.

* **State Plan Committee – Joe Bellil**

The committee last met on April 17th. The committee reviewed the recommendations. The recommendations were discussed at the June 6th Executive Committee meeting and were reviewed at the June Quarterly meeting. They were then submitted to MRC. MRC had a month to respond, and Mr. Bellil received MRC’s response on July 31st. At the next State Plan Committee meeting on August 21st, the committee will review MRC’s response. Ms. Biebel noted that MRC appreciated how the SRC recommendations were concise and targeted.

Additionally, at this time of the year, Mr. Bellil usually asks the committee Chairs to start work on their Annual Reports. The SRC’s 2023 Annual Report is not currently online. He would like this posted and also sent to the SRC. Ms. Biebel will find out about this. It might be in limbo due to the name change delay. The 2023 Annual Report can be used as guidance when creating the 2024 Annual Report.

The next State Plan Committee meeting is on August 21st at 11:00 am.

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

The Council was scheduled to meet on August 20th, but that meeting has been canceled. The next meeting will be in September. At that meeting, the Council will receive some updated data and Mr. Mason will convey that data to the SRC as he receives it. MRC is in compliance with its goals.

* **Membership Ad hoc Committee – Jill Ferrington**

The Membership Committee last met on July 24th. The committee reviewed

Orientation materials were discussed. Input focused on not putting too many citations or Bylaw language into the materials, but staying more high level and explaining the purposes of various requirements from the Federal regulations and the Bylaws.

NASHIA did share some of the community-based organizations that fall within different parts of the state that may be good resources for some of the outreach and targeted recruiting.

Additional ideas relating to recruitment that were discussed include:

* + Educating vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselors and providing materials that communicate the role and purpose of the SRC, to not overlook individuals who have gone through the VR program as sources of members.
  + Possibly creating some 60-second shorts or videos from SRC members to use with social media and elsewhere
  + Presenting SRC information at the upcoming Statewide Independent Living Center (SILC) conference in September. NASHIA has been looking at previously created SRC recruitment materials to see if they can be revised and used.

The next Membership Ad hoc Committee meeting is on Tuesday, August 27th at 9:00 AM.

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

The committee last met on June 3rd. At that meeting, the committee discussed the results of the Consumer Experience Survey that had been presented at the May 28th meeting but did not come up with a recommendation from those findings.

The next CSNAC meeting is on Monday, August 12th at 5 PM.

**Questions/Comments for Chairs:**

There were no questions or comments for the Chairs.

1. SRC training – Heather Wood, Jill Ferrington

From the survey sent after the June Quarterly meeting, the dates of Friday, September 13th and Thursday, October 10th had the highest interest.

The survey sent after the June Quarterly meeting presented a number of potential topics that could be covered in the training. The topic with the most votes was “Maximizing your SRC's effectiveness.” The topic with the second highest number of votes was “The nuts, bolts, and best practices of SRCs”. The topic with the third highest number of votes was “Oppression and unconscious bias.”

Ms. Ferrington is using the members’ reported zip codes to choose a central location for the training. One possible location is Fish and Wildlife in Westborough; based on the zip codes that is central. Another location suggested was the Moss Institute Library in Natick. When deciding upon a location we need to consider if it’s accessible by public transportation and the Ride. There is some money in the SRC budget for transportation costs.

Once the date is finalized, the information will be sent to members in a save-the-date.

1. MRC Updates –Kate Biebel

* A new database for VR is replacing the long-standing database that was used. This will allow VRCs and other staff to see all the services besides VR, such as community living, that consumers are receiving. This was launched on July 3rd. MRC and VR leadership are working to ensure staff has the support they need.
* MRC will soon know whether it will receive the reallotment dollars requested. MRC has spent the reallotment funds it has received in the past. The funding that MRC is asking for includes support for the SRC. The Disability Innovation Fund grants have been opened up to other applicants besides VR agencies for the first time; there are about 200 applicants.

1. Commissioner Wolf

Commissioner Wolf praised the SRC for its recommendations.

The Commissioner started her conversation with two examples of issues MRC is currently dealing with.

* MRC is aware of the cliff effect and wishes to change policies so that people receiving disability benefits do not get penalized by having their benefits reduced when they work. MRC cannot talk to legislators to advocate for such changes. Members of the SRC, however, can do that.
* MRC thought that the name change to MassAbility would be in effect by the start of the new fiscal year. The delay in this is frustrating and is holding things up.

These are just two examples. Throughout the year there will be things such as this where MRC may ask the SRC for assistance. The Commissioner asked how such requests should be handled. Should MRC approach the Executive Committee or a specific subcommittee? It

Doug agrees – Present to Exec Committee, present guidance to the advocacy committee (the committee doing the advocacy)

The Commissioner acknowledged that some SRC members may not feel comfortable doing this, and may want training and guidance, as well as talking points. MRC could prepare talking points, and detail what actions to ask of legislators.

The consensus from the Executive Committee was that other members would probably support this. It was noted that many years ago, in the early 2000s, the SRC used to present at the State House. Commissioner Wolf was not aware of this.

Commissioner Wolf asked about the next steps. Chair Wood suggested that she send an email to SRC members about participating in an SRC Advocacy Committee. The SRC has been talking about committee reorganization.

Commissioner Wolf asked about upcoming meeting agendas and possibly doing a presentation about the cliff effect. Chair Wood prefers a presentation at a Quarterly meeting, which is larger than the Executive Committee meetings. There would be a need for 30 minutes for the presentation and 10 minutes for questions. Commissioner Wolf has been presenting to other states. There is a desire nationwide for people with disabilities to obtain higher-paying careers without being penalized. When asked, Commissioner Wolf said it would be possible to get an MRC consumer to share their experience, which could be powerful.

Chair Wood will contact Commissioner Wolf about the in-person SRC training coming up in the fall. It may be possible to include the cliff effect in the upcoming SRC training.

1. Open Mic

Armené Margosian introduced herself as an MRC consumer working with MRC’s Greenfield office. She was frustrated over the time and effort it has taken her to receive approval for reimbursement for classes she is taking. She finally received the approval but will not receive reimbursement for her outlay for some time. She spoke to Emily McCaffrey, MRC Ombudsman and Appeals Coordinator, but was not satisfied with how Ms. McCaffrey handled her situation and would like to file a complaint. Ms. Margosian feels that things were not addressed and that she was pushed aside and marginalized.

Ms. McCaffrey acknowledged Ms. Margosian’s concerns. Ms. McCaffrey explained her role in hearing inquiries and trying to solve issues. She noted that another way to complain is through the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS), outside of MRC. Ms. McCaffrey promised to obtain information from the Finance Department about the expected timeline for Ms. Margosian’s reimbursement. Ms. Biebel expressed appreciation for Ms. Margosian’s respectful contributions and for attending the meeting.

Ms. Margosian appreciated the replies. She is trying to help the next MRC consumer with problems and concerns. She feels it is important for people to feel empowered and that there should be more openness. Ms. Biebel noted that sometimes in a large agency such as MRC, one person may only know what is happening in their own space and not what is happening in other spaces.

**Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 2:32 pm.

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