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

**January 2, 2025**

**4:00 - 6:00 pm EST**

**Attendees:**

* **Executive Committee Members:** Heather Wood (SRC Chair), Joe Bellil, Naomi Goldberg
* **Other SRC Members:** Commissioner Toni Wolf (Ex-officion)
* **Massachusetts** **Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) Staff:** Kate Biebel, William Noone, Amy Karr
* **Others present:** Jonathan Ozek
* **Absent Executive Committee Members:** Steve LaMaster, Doug Mason

Please Note: This meeting was held remotely.

**The meeting was called to order at 4:04 pm by the chair.**

**Approval of Meeting Minutes:**

No minutes were approved at this meeting.

**UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

1. Membership update – Heather Wood

Chair Wood met with a couple of the SRC applicants. One is a person with a disability who has experienced homelessness. She could potentially represent an unserved/underserved population and might be a good addition to the SRC. The other is a nurse practitioner who aspires to open a day habilitation facility.

1. Vice-Chair position availability reminder– Heather Wood

Chair Wood reminded members that the Vice Chair position is open.

**NEW BUSINESS**

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

The committee last met on December 18th, 2024. It has not met since the December Quarterly meeting so there is no update.

The committee typically meets on the third Monday of the month, but the third Monday is Martin Luther King Day, so the meeting is a week later than usual.

The next CSNAC meeting is on Monday January 27th from 5:00 to 6:30 pm.

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

The committee last met on December 12, 2024. There is no update since the December 2024 Quarterly meeting. Mr. LaMaster was not present at this meeting.

The next committee meeting is on February 13th at 1:00 pm.

* **State Plan Committee – Joe Bellil**

The committee last met on December 18th, 2024.

The committee discussed the possibility of the SRC committee structure being altered and whether the work of the State Plan Committee would at some point be done within the Executive Committee.

The committee also talked about changing the timeline to gather the FY26 recommendations, getting the recommendations in April. Mr. Bellil asked Commissioner Wolf about having MassAbility liaisons working with the SRC to develop recommendations. Commissioner Wolf and Ms. Biebel loved the idea of the SRC and MassAbility working in such a collaborative way. This will allow the SRC to understand what MassAbility is currently doing and develop relevant recommendations.

The committee did briefly discuss the Annual Report. Today Mr. Bellil received an update that a draft of the Annual Report was ready.

The next State Plan Committee meeting is on February 18th at 11:00 am.

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

Mr. Mason was not present at this meeting, so there was no DEIA Council update.

1. Discussion of ideas for CAP/Ombuds presentation – Heather Wood

This presentation will be given by Ms. Goldberg and Emily McCaffrey at the March Quarterly meeting. Chair Wood wanted to start talking about this now, to see if there were any specific topics we wanted included. Members would like to get an understanding of what the top issues are and what is being done about them.

1. MassAbility update – Kate Biebel
* Connect: The December 2024 data are similar to the November 2024 data. Career Services applications down a bit, which is not unusual this time. There were 871 Career Services applications; total number of applications for all of MassAbility was 1,326. Processing time, the time from submitting the application to getting to program transfer, is down to 39 days from 42 days. We would like this time to be shorter, but there is progress. Before Connect this time was 93 days. Eligibility continues to happen in about one day and transferring to specific offices takes about 1.5 days.

MassAbility is about to launch a Turbo Tax -like artificial intelligence (AI) model for Connect. The launch was delayed because of cybersecurity issues. We think it may speed up processing. This will be an option. Those applying can still speak to real people. We hope that this frees up time for staff to do things that cannot be done by AI.

* Staffing moves: The biggest one is that Jessica Cimini, who has been our Director of Career Service Operations, is taking on a new role within the agency. She is now the Director of Excellence and Innovation. The things that are going to live in this new division include Connect, our data division, and our clinical services division. We are excited about this because we are very interested in getting more clinical capacity within Career Services. Amanda Baczko’s Office of Learning and Community Engagement will be in this division, as will assistive technology. These services and offices had all been separate and independent. The intention is to have a home for them to live together to facilitate more collaboration. This is an internal organizational structure shift. For most people at MassAbility their work will look no different. The biggest impact people will feel is Ms. Cimini not being in her old role. She was the first person in that role and did an amazing job of creating a lot of structure, capacity and systems to maintain the work. MassAbility has not yet posted Ms. Cimini’s old role. Her new work will still touch Career Services so she may still be involved with the SRC, just not in the same way as before.

Colleen Casey, MassAbility’s Director of Communications, has received a promotional opportunity at another Secretariat to become Chief of Staff. She did an amazing job over the past years leading us to become MassAbility.

* Annual Report: We have a finalized draft of merged MassAbility and SRC Annual Report – MassAbility and SRC merged. Ms. Biebel will send the draft to Ms. Karr, who will send it to the Executive Committee members. Members were instructed to send suggested edits to Ms. Karr, who will then forward them to Ms. Biebel by noon on Monday, January 6th.
* Office relocations: MassAbility is officially out of 600 Washington Street. Kate talked about move (missed a lot, ask her) Joe question about consumers used to 600 Washington Street. Staff are now working out of their local offices.
1. Commissioner Wolf

Commissioner Wolf has been thinking a lot about how in Massachusetts each disability agency has its own advisory board. MassAbility has the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC), the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB) has its Rehabilitation Council (RC), and the Massachusetts Commission of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MCDHH) has its Statewide Advisory Council (SAC).

Considering the incoming administration, perhaps some advocacy work may need to happen. At this point, we do not know what the federal government will do. Commissioner Wolf has been thinking about how to strengthen the voice of people with disabilities and strengthen the work that we all do within the Commonwealth. Is there any merit in pulling the three councils together, perhaps along with the council of the Department of Mental Health (DMH). She has not discussed this with any other council or commissioner; she is bringing it first to the SRC and would like to know what the SRC thinks.

This would not be combining the different advisory councils officially, because there are regulations regarding the councils. Having the councils work together informally in some way would be to help support the message of the importance of vocational rehabilitation (VR). She is particularly thinking of VR since that is where our federal dollars are.

Commissioner Wolf is curious if advisory boards or agencies themselves have provided educational sessions to the legislature. In the past, the SRC had its own education day at the State House, with different providers and consumers sharing. At a budget hearing, one of the SRC chairs spoke about the budget. Different governors have different ideas about advocacy. Currently she is thinking more about advocacy at the federal level, but a more unified voice would not hurt at the state level. At one Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) conference, there was a Capitol Hill Day where attendees were able to speak to legislators about the importance of VR.

The SRC is curious about what the other advisory councils are doing. One suggestion was to have an initial meeting where a representative from each council gets ten minutes to discuss their council’s work and then discuss where and how the councils overlap. It was noted that the often SRC has low attendance for regular meetings. If there were to be a combined meeting there would need to be a defined message, to not have meetings just to have meetings.

VR funding is not very stable right now. Commissioner Wolf does want to make sure the people controlling the federal funds see the value of VR and of employment for people with disabilities.

MassAbility is looking at what steps it can take if things do change. In this year MassAbility will discuss Order of Selection with the SRC because not everyone is familiar with it, and it is a tool that can be used if necessary. At this point we still do not know what the new administration will do.

That is why it is important to find ways to make sure that the voice of people with disabilities is clear and loud. The SRC seems to agree with this. The goal would not be to change the regulations or change the mission of agencies, but to be a stronger voice. Commissioner Wolf will talk with commissioners of MCB and MCDHH about potential collaboration and will get back to the SRC.

Commissioner Wolf wants to think more about how to use the tools MassAbility has developed, such as social media.

Mr. Bellil shared the following in the chat:

Webinar: “**How is MA Preparing for the Incoming Presidential Administration? Hear from Governor Healey’s Administration.” Thursday, January 9 at noon.** [**Register here to get the Zoom information.**](https://nam10.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Farcmass.zoom.us%2Fmeeting%2Fregister%2FjDPqdrFFSF6aP7CzGT5VxQ%23%2Fregistration&data=05%7C02%7Cjbellil%40eastersealsma.org%7C8f8abcc9eac94626cbe108dd2b7541f4%7C3fb788ab541244f9aa17dfc8cd62a9ee%7C0%7C0%7C638714504824815832%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJFbXB0eU1hcGkiOnRydWUsIlYiOiIwLjAuMDAwMCIsIlAiOiJXaW4zMiIsIkFOIjoiTWFpbCIsIldUIjoyfQ%3D%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=AgNB7YUOTBFdg9jUViY1AOAZSob66XYycD0o0nIxVfw%3D&reserved=0)
The Arc was able to collaborate with the Governor’s Administration to join us for a Community Webinar to address the concerns for the disability community. Maura Sullivan will facilitate a panel Q&A of key players in the Healey-Driscoll administration.

1. Open Mic

A participant mentioned that he was given a surprise party for his birthday. He shared a picture of the birthday cake.

A member noted that during her recent train trip, the train was not fully accessible. Another participant mentioned she received a wedding invitation that discussed the accessibility of the facilities.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 4:58 pm.