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

**April 3, 2025**

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

**Attendees:**

* **Executive Committee Members:** Heather Wood (SRC Chair), Joe Bellil, Naomi Goldberg, Steve LaMaster
* **MassAbility (MBY) Staff:** Kate Biebel, Emily McCaffrey, Amy Karr
* **Absent Executive Committee Members:** Doug Mason

Please Note: This meeting was held remotely.

**The meeting was called to order at 4:06 pm by the chair.**

**Approval of Meeting Minutes:**

Chair Wood called for a motion to approve the November 2024 Executive Committee meeting minutes. Mr. Bellil motioned for approval of the minutes. Mr. LaMaster seconded. The November 2024 minutes were approved with no corrections.

**NEW BUSINESS**

1. Order of Selection meeting preparation – Kate Biebel

This meeting will be on May 1st. There will be no May Executive Committee meeting. MassAbility will be developing the agenda for the OOS meeting. The time on today’s agenda is for anyone to bring up questions or concerns they would like addressed in the May presentation. That way Ms. Biebel can share them with the people preparing the presentation.

A member remembered that the last time MassAbility was considering Order of Selection (OOS) there were many meetings. Ms. Biebel said there will probably not be as many meetings this time. Last time there needed to be more discussion and education. This time it should move more quickly.

What is the SRC’s role in this relative to this? Many members also serve in advocacy and/or service provider roles. Ms. Biebel just spoke about this with Commissioner Wolf. Currently we want SRC members to not share this outside of the SRC.

The SRC does expect some degree of transparency from MassAbility. The more information members receive, the better they will be at advising MassAbility and supporting its decision. The SRC will be presented with the information and the members’ roles are to think from the perspective of our participants and ask relevant questions, while also understanding the MassAbility’s situation.

The SRC will be asked to vote if it is “supportive” of MassAbility going into OOS. She thinks it is possible to go into OOS without SRC approval, but not desirable, as MassAbility sees the SRC as a very important partner and champion.

At the presentation in May there is likely to be data about the current financial landscape and forecasts for the next several years. Currently when people do come through MassAbility’s door they are assigned to one of three priorities, based on the degree of disability or impairment. Priority one is the most impaired, priority three is the least. Information about how priorities are determined, and the priority distribution of current participants will probably be included in the presentation.

Ms. Biebel asked that if anyone with requests for specific information to be included to let her know. For example, does priority distribution differ from region to region or office to office? MassAbility can provide that information.

Questions/comments:

A member thought Commissioner Wolf said that other states are always in OOS. Has MassAbility communicated with other states to see how this is working?

Ms. Biebel said that the last time MassAbility was discussing going into OOS we did reach out to other states to ask about their processes and experiences. Ms. Biebel is a fan of being in OOS even if the resources are available to keep all priority categories open. That way, the agency can act quicky if/when necessary.

1. Committee Reports

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

The committee last met on February 27th. There is no update since the March Executive Committee meeting.

Mr. LaMaster met with Mr. Bellil recently. Mr. LaMaster expects that the BEO Committee will submit recommendations regarding the Disability Employment Tax Credit (DETC) and self‑employment.

The next BEO Committee meeting in on April 10th at 1:00 pm.

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

Mr. Mason was unable attend this meeting.

Mr. Mason had emailed Chair Wood with an update. He will be meeting with Commissioner Wolf about becoming a co‑chair of the DEIA Council.

The next meeting of the DEIA Council is on April 15th.

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

The committee last met on March 17th. The is no update since the March Executive Committee meeting. At that meeting the committee reviewed the most recent results of the Participant Experience Survey. Afterwards the committee discussed possible recommendations that could stem from the survey findings. The CSNAC will likely submit two or three recommendations. One will be about addressing transportation access as that lack of transportation was a barrier mentioned by a number of participants.

The next CSNAC meeting is on May 19th at 5:00 PM.

* **State Plan Committee – Joe Bellil**

The committee last met on February 19th. There is no update since the March Executive Committee meeting.

In MassAbility’s upcoming spring newsletter there will be information about the SRC recommendations and a request for anyone wishing to provide input to email it to the SRC mailbox.

The next meeting of the State Plan Committee is on April 16th at 11:00 am.

1. FY26 Recommendations – Joe Bellil

As we have discussed in previous meetings, this year the SRC will be working earlier with MassAbility to refine the SRC recommendations before the SRC even votes on the recommendations at the June Quarterly meeting. Therefore, the earlier committees or individuals can send Mr. Bellil recommendations the better.

1. MassAbility Priorities – Kate Biebel

Commissioner Wolf agreed that the SRC should be informed about MassAbility’s priorities and focus areas so there is some framework when the SRC develops its recommendations. From now on, at the beginning of each federal fiscal year Commissioner Wolf will discuss areas that MassAbility is prioritizing. This will be put on the agenda for the September Quarterly meeting for this year. It is hoped that this will help inform the SRC when creating recommendations.

For this current year, there are two spaces MassAbility is really prioritizing:

1. Taking NextGen best practices into the field: How to think differently about how we work with young adults from what we learned with the NextGen grant. Young adults are the bulk of people coming through the door of MassAbility.

2. How to continue to evolve our business relations: That is part of MassAbility’s work. We want to strengthen our relationships with employers, and make sure we have internships and opportunities that are directly linked to those employers. There definitely could be intersection with the young adult area, particularly around internships, work experiences, et cetera.

Ms. Biebel suggested that since this is an area of interest of the BEO Committee, that its chair Mr. LaMaster may want to reach out to Commissioner Wolf and Joan Phillips, as they have been strategizing about what needs to be done towards this goal, particularly if the committee is thinking of creating any recommendations in this area.

Within strengthening employer relationships, are there any plans for MassAbility to more closely coordinate with state agencies? It is frustrating when a state agency is looking to hire a person with disabilities, but the MassAbility job placement staff only send over some resumes without trying to learn more about the open position and what type of applicant would be a good fit. Ms. McCaffrey noted that some participants contacting the Ombuds are looking for that type of support from the MassAbility job placement staff. Ms. Biebel said that there are discussions about enabling staff to have more space in their role to do these kinds of things.

1. MassAbility update – Kate Biebel
   * Federal landscape: Commissioner Wolf will be going to the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) conference this weekend. She wants to get more information about what is happening federally.
   * Staffing: Ms. McCaffrey is moving to her Disability Partnership Coordinator role. For now, Ms. Biebel will be filling part of the Ombuds role. Ms. Biebel will be meeting with Ms. Goldberg to learn more about CAP and its intersection with MassAbility. A large volume of calls are about disability determination services (DDS). MassAbility cannot say anything more than that the application is being processed; we cannot give dates and projected timelines.

**UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

1. Discussion of continuation of American Sign Language (ASL) and Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) – Kate Biebel, Heather Wood

We have been providing these services for the Quarterly meetings. As far as Ms. Biebel can remember, we have not had anyone attend a meeting and use either of these services. Considering whether to continue to do this is less about money than ethics. These are limited resources.

An option is to put a notice on the website requesting anyone wanting CART or ASL to let us know two weeks in advance of the meeting. If something changes and we have members or regular attendees who need these services, we could bring them back for each meeting.

Ms. Biebel asked Ruth Dresser, the MassAbility Interpreter Supervisor, about what other agencies are doing. Ms. Dresser said there is no one best practice and had no recommendation.

The consensus among members was to discontinue offering the services regularly at every Quarterly meeting. Ms. Biebel will contact Ms. Dresser to cancel the services already scheduled for the remaining Quarterly meetings of 2025. We will also look at the SRC website to add language about requesting ASL or CART in advance of a Quarterly meeting and add some language to the Quarterly meeting agendas going forward. ASL and CART will be provided for any open hearings about Order of Selection.

It was also recommended that the SRC prioritize outreach to the deaf and hard of hearing population. Chair Wood noted that Jonathan Ozek of the Boston chapter of the Hearing Loss Association of America had attended a few Executive Committee meetings but had not been at a meeting in a few months.

1. Membership update – Sahara Wood, Heather Wood

Ms. Defensor was not present at this meeting.

Chair Wood and Mr. LaMaster received their reappointment letters. Mr. Mason received his appointment letter. They still need to be sworn in.

Chair Wood met with Ms. Defensor to discuss the list of current SRC members and vacancies. The SRC currently has eight appointed voting members and six open seats. All four of the business, industry and labor seats are open. Ms. Biebel needs to find a vocational rehabilitation counselor (VRC) to serve in the required Ex-officio seat. The workforce development board seat is also open, and someone is working on filling that seat. Then two additional seats recommended to be filled with former VR recipients with successful closures.

Chair Wood will talk to Ms. Goldberg to set up an Ad hoc Membership Committee meeting, where we can brainstorm ideas for member recruitment.

1. Open Mic

There was no discussion.

There will be no May Executive Committee meeting. Instead, there will be a special SRC meeting to discuss Order of Selection on Thursday, May 1st at 5:00 pm.

The next Executive Committee meeting will be on June 5th from 4:00 to 6:00 pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:00 pm.