

State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) Executive Committee Meeting Minutes

November 2, 2023

1:00-3:00pm EST

Attendees:

- State Rehabilitation Council Members: Heather Wood (SRC Chair), Joe Bellil, Steve LaMaster, Doug Mason (Ex-Officio), Christine Tosti
- Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) Staff: Kate Biebel, Sahara Defensor, Emily McCaffrey, William Noone, Amy Karr

Absent members:

- Matthew Bender, Dawn Clark, Rebecca Davis, Paula Euber, Ronaldo Fujii, Naomi Goldberg, Rosanna Woodmansee

Please Note: This meeting was held remotely.

Meeting was called to order at 1:07 pm by the chair.

Approval of Meeting Minutes: Chair Wood called for a motion to approve the minutes for the September 14th Open Meeting Law Complaint Special Meeting. Ms. Tosti motioned to approve the minutes. Mr. Bellil seconded. Chair Wood asked whether there were any corrections to the minutes. The September 14th Open Meeting Law Complaint Special Meeting minutes were approved with no corrections.

Chair Wood called for a motion to approve the September 2023 Executive Committee minutes. Mr. Bellil motioned to approve the minutes. Mr. LaMaster seconded. Chair Wood asked whether there were any corrections to the minutes. The September 2023 minutes were approved with no corrections.

OLD BUSINESS

a. Membership Update - Sahara Defensor

There was not much to update. All members except for Mr. Fujii and Ms. Davis are in holdover seats. The SRC is waiting to hear from the Governor about the reappointments of those members who are eligible to continue to serve. Anyone who has questions about their terms should refer to their appointment letter from the Governor's office. Ms. Defensor has confirmed Mr. Noone has received the current membership list needed for the updated State Plan.

b. Minutes drafting and posting process - Heather Wood

Chair Wood discussed the process of drafting and posting the minutes. Members had received the document containing this information. **(See SRC Posting Process.doc.)** Chair Wood pointed out the addition of guidance regarding the content of minutes. The intention of the addition is to clarify in writing the SRC's policy about what should and should not be included in the minutes. There was a discussion about members of the public or SRC members not in leadership positions being excluded from recognition in the minutes since members' names are to be specified in the minutes in only in a few instances. To address this, it was suggested that the SRC encourage people such as members not in leadership, MRC clients, people unemployed for a long time, and incarcerated or previously

incarcerated people to present. There is a need for increased community engagement and increased awareness of the SRC.

NEW BUSINESS

a. Reviewing 2024 meeting calendar

Chair Wood shared the draft 2024 meeting calendar that had been previously sent to members. **(See SRC 2024 Master Calendar v.10.11.2023.docx.)** Committee chairs were asked to send any edits to the meeting dates to Ms. Karr by November 16th. It was noted that the Executive Committee meeting scheduled for July 4th and the December Quarterly meeting scheduled for December 26th should be rescheduled

b. Committee Reports

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

The committee last met on October 20th. Joseph Reale presented about the Disability Employment Tax Credit (DETC). Many members of the employment community attended as guests. The state DETC can be combined with the federal Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC). Employers are incentivized financially to employ people with disabilities. There is hope that it will be further encouragement for employers to hire people with disabilities. The BEO committee would like to advise and assist MRC on the roll out of the DETC, sharing information with entities such as Independent Living Centers (ILCs), DMH vendors, and clubhouses. There are a variety of places providing employment support that can give information about the DETC to employers, above and beyond MRC marketing.

The date of the next BEO Committee meeting is December 14th at 1:00 pm.

- **State Plan Committee – Joe Bellil**

The committee last met on October 18th.

The committee discussed the MRC responses to the SRC's recommendations. Mr. Bellil called for a motion to accept MRC's responses to the SRC's recommendations as written. Mr. LaMaster made the motion. Mr. Mason seconded the motion. The SRC will accept MRC's responses to the SRC recommendations as written.

All the information required for the SRC Annual Report is with Colleen Casey, who is preparing the Annual Report.

Cheryl Scott had suggested having a presentation about the Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA) State Plan in December. Mr. Bellil wants to ask about what this presentation should include. Mr. Noone stated that the Department of Labor and the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) released guidance about what should be included in the WIOA State Plan and will provide that document.

There is no State Plan Committee meeting in December. The next State Plan Committee is on meeting is February 21st at 11:00 am.

- **DEIA Council – Doug Mason #3**

The council last met on October 17th.

It was a while after the Council was set up before a DEIA manager was hired. Robert Arnáu was outstanding as the manger but has been promoted within the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHSS). It is possible that he will initially serve in both his old role and new role. MRC has posted three DEIA manager positions.

The DEIA council will continue to move forward. MRC is focusing on retention, recruitment, and training. It is encouraging Employment Resource Groups (ERGs) to work together, push forward with outreach. Looking behind the numbers at MRC staffing, such as looking at the employees at each level, how many managers are minorities. There is a lack of men of color at the managerial level. Are we projecting unconscious biases when selecting people to fill certain positions? MRC staff is 80% women, most candidates are women. MRC is being intentional about trying to place men of color into managerial positions.

The next meeting of the DEIA council will be on November 17th from 12-1:30 pm.

- **Policy Committee – Naomi Goldberg**

Ms. Goldberg was absent from this meeting, so her report was not shared.

There was no Policy Committee in October. The Policy Committee last met on August 1st.

The next Policy Committee meeting is on December 7th at 11:00 am.

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

Mr. Fujii was absent from this meeting, so his report was not shared.

There was no meeting in October. The committee last met on August 21st.

The date of the next CSNAC meeting is on December 18th at 5:00 pm.

- **Questions/Comments for Chairs:**

A member shared a link for an organization serving black men.

<https://mochaspringfield.org/about>

c. MRC Updates and SRC RFR – Kate Biebel

- **MRC Connect**

The number of people contacting MRC has been higher than it has been for quite a while. In October 1,300 individuals applied for VR; this is about twice the normal number. There is a backlog in responding to people who call, it is still a challenge. Once an individual is called, the process moves quickly. MRC is piloting an on demand system, where screeners reach out to the people who called, instead of calling them to schedule screening. The Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) will be releasing guidance for expedited eligibility for VR services. California has been using expedited eligibility for a while.

There was a discussion about possible causes of more people seeking VR services. It is possible that more people are looking to go to work post COVID. Another factor may be that COVID accelerated retirement, but some people are coming out of retirement because they need to work. It is good that more people are seeking VR services, but MRC needs to be able to process

them. Many states are seeing increases in the demand for employment services. There has been a trend of a greater number of people seeking VR services for a few months.

- **Staffing**

VR is still hybrid. MRC is looking at the data on walk-ins. The Governor may want people back in the office more frequently. MRC is gathering data for when there is a discussion about this.

The final directorship, for the Cape and Islands, has been filled. MRC had been without full leadership for a while. Openings are being filled in the field offices. It has been challenging to keep the Boston office fully staffed. Cannot pinpoint why some offices are hard to staff.

- **Offices**

There have been no office changes or relocations.

- **SRC Request for Response (RFR)**

MRC has put out seven procurements. One RFR is specific to the SRC. This will be paid for with reallocation dollars. It was posted the previous week. There will be a bidder's conference on November 6th. Responses will be due November 20th. In theory this would start sometime in January 2024. MRC will spend up to \$50,000. It is for organizational and implementation support for the SRC.

Members had received the RFR previously. (See 94525 - SRC_RFR_COMMBUYS_Final_10_23_23.doc.)

The vendor will assist in the following:

1. Formalizing procedures.
2. Supporting onboarding of new chair.
3. Infusing DEIA work into the work of the SRC.

- **Rebranding**

The Governor filed legislation for changing the name of MRC to MassAbility. The name change still needs to go through the legislative process. It is hoped that Representative Livingstone will sponsor the legislation. The roll out, scheduled for January 2024, will utilize billboards and ads. Will need to be mindful of an even greater volume of people reaching out for services.

The following link was shared

<https://www.mass.gov/news/governor-healey-files-legislation-to-change-massachusetts-rehabilitation-commissions-name-to-massability>

d. Open Mic

There were congratulations for the MRC rebranding. During the Governor's announcement she was eloquent about the impact of words and language. There was a nice show of employer supporters, leaders of Independent Living Centers (ILCs), the commissioner of the Department of Developmental Services (DDS), and family ambassadors.

A member expressed concern about how consumers get enrolled for VR services. Some may not have records, or have disorganized papers. It might be easier for some people if their physicians can help facilitate providing necessary records during appointments. Additionally, not all consumers

understand what services they need and not all will appeal when denied. Ideally, relationships will be facilitated by listening to consumers and not saying no immediately. Chair Wood expressed an intention to learn more about VR services and the training VR counselors receive, to help the SRC help MRC ensure all consumers have the ability to access needed resources. It was suggested that there be a central file, or perhaps a flow chart, where MRC staff can learn what services MRC can provide, and also learn of places to refer consumers for needed services that MRC does not provide. MRC Connect does do this. It determines eligibility for VR services, but also provides information about and referrals to other agencies and services. This is the process currently, but those who started with MRC earlier may not have had this experience. Consumers do need to be their own advocates and make their needs known.

Chair Wood called for a motion to adjourn. The motion was made by Mr. Mason. The motion was seconded by Ms. Tosti. The meeting was adjourned at 2:21 pm.