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

**September 5, 2024**

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

**Attendees:**

* **State Rehabilitation Council Members:** Heather Wood (SRC Chair), Joe Bellil, Naomi Goldberg, Steve LaMaster, Tay Silveira
* **Massachusetts** **Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) Staff:** Kate Biebel, Sahara Defensor, William Noone, Graham Porrell, Amy Karr
* **Others present:** Doug Mason
* **National Association of Head Injury Administrators (NASHIA):** Jill Ferrington

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:** No minutes were approved at this meeting.

Chair Wood mentioned that she has started a new position. Her job title is Transition Instructor. It is for a research study funded by the federal government. She is recruiting special education juniors this fall. In January, she will be instructing the recruited students. The focus will be on job skills, self-determination, and other life skills, which are often given less priority than academics. There are three different groups in the study. The control group receives the standard education, the second group receives self-determination instruction, and the third group receives that plus one-on-one mentoring. Fourteen school districts are participating throughout the entire country.

She had not anticipated working full-time again. Her school day is from 9 to 3:45 and her flexibility is unpredictable. She is asking if future Executive Committee meetings can be moved to a different time outside of her school hours. She proposes to send a doodle poll with potential new meeting days and times.

**OLD BUSINESS**

1. Membership update and Executive Order update – Sahara Defensor

Ms. Defensor had emailed the SRC in August about the Governor signing the revised Executive Order. The previous Executive Order was about 24 years old. In the updated Executive Order SRC membership is reduced to “at least 15.” The larger membership in the previous Executive Order did contribute to the SRC’s difficulty in meeting quorum and ability to get some of its work done.

A member in a seat that was removed in the updated Executive Order is still a member of the SRC. The seat will be removed by attrition. When that member’s term expires, a new member will not be appointed to fill that seat.

Ms. Defensor is hopeful that appointment and reappointment letters will be sent out by the end of October. The SRC will then be in compliance with federal regulations. Some members are in holdover status. Some are in holdover status but are eligible for reappointment, such as Mr. LaMaster and Chair Wood.

There is concern that when long-time members’ terms end there is a loss of institutional knowledge. There should be the option for them to participate even if they are no longer appointed members. It might also be fruitful to encourage more participation from members of the public. When recruiting, it is important to remember to note that the public can participate, particularly in committee work, without becoming appointed members.

1. NASHIA Update – Jill Ferrington

# Bylaws

Ms. Ferrington shared the SRC Bylaws crosswalk document. **(See MA SRC ExecComm Bylaws Review 20240905.docx.)** The document was shared at the June Executive Committee meeting but has been updated since the Executive Order was approved. The left column is the new language, the middle column is the old language, and the right column is the rationale for the change. The crosswalk document only includes substantive changes.

Ms. Ferrington highlighted the following changes:

* Section 4: This deals with how members are appointed. The new language reflects the SRC’s commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Like most of the changes in the bylaws, the language reflects changes made in the Executive Order.
* Section 5.01: The number of members has been reduced to “at least 15” from 21, to reflect the new Executive Order and be consistent with the federal regulations.
* Section 5.03 about Ex-officio membership was removed. Previous versions of the bylaws used that terminology inconsistent with the federal regulations. The usage is now consistent with the federal regulations.
* Section 6.01(a) – Language about the Governor having the sole authority to appoint and remove members was added to align with the boards and commissions process.
* Section 6.01(c): Language about permitting members with expired terms to continue to serve has been removed (although this may still occur in practice).
* Section 6.01(d): Federal regulations do allow a member who has served two terms to return as an appointed member of the SRC after a “meaningful break in service” but the regulations do not define this. Language has been added to indicate that for our SRC this is three years.
* Section 6.02: Language stating that the Governor could delegate authority to fill membership vacancies was removed, as only the Governor can appoint members. Language indicating the start and end of term dates are associated with the fiscal year was removed.
* Section 6.02(a): Language was added to clarify that when a new member is appointed to fill a vacant seat occurring before the expiration of that seat holder’s term, the new member is appointed for the remainder of the predecessor’s term, and then can serve two consecutive full terms following completion of the partial term.
* Section 6.03: Clarified that absences from two consecutive Quarterly meetings without good cause may be considered grounds to forward a termination request to the Governor.
* Section 7.01: This section was changed from specifying five officers to only specifying a Chair and Vice-Chair. However, language was added to provide the Chair with the flexibility to create additional roles as needed.
* Section 7.02: The procedure for nominating officers was simplified.
* Section 9.01(b): It was clarified that when determining a quorum, vacancies are not included.
* Section 9.01(c): Language about requesting a mail or telephone vote when unable to convene a quorum was removed since it is not permitted by Open Meeting Law (OML).
* Section 9.01(d-i): Language from OML about public notices, executive sessions, recording and approval of minutes, and recording of votes was added.
* Section 9.01(j): Language about public comment bellowed at the end of the meeting and elsewhere during meetings at the SRC or committee Chair’s discretion was added.
* Sections 11.01 and 11.02: Language was added to create a distinction between ad hoc committees and standing committees.
* Section 12.01: Clarified that votes are determined by a simple majority of voting members present.
* Section 15.01: Language was changed to indicate the bylaws may be altered, amended, or repealed and replaced by a simple majority vote of members present, as opposed to the 2/3 majority required in the previous bylaws, which was tied to Robert’s Rules of Order.

The members discussed the procedure for replacing the SRC Chair if the Chair leaves the SRC before the end of their term as Chair. On other councils the Vice Chair usually assumes the role. It was decided that clarification about this does not need to be added to the bylaws.

Ms. Ferrington will provide the crosswalk to Ms. Karr, who will send it to all SRC members. There will be three weeks for members to review before voting on the revised bylaws before voting at the September Quarterly meeting.

# Council demographics

There was a 100% response rate to the survey sent to members after the June Quarterly meeting. Information obtained from the survey:

* Geographic location: Most members reside in or are otherwise affiliated with the Boston Metro area. One lives in Southern Massachusetts, and one lives in Western Massachusetts.
* Race/ethnicity: Most current members are white. Therefore, for recruitment, we will look at communities of color.
* Disability: We do currently meet the requirement of 51% of members having disabilities.
* Types of disabilities: Most of the disabilities represented on the SRC are physical; the second highest is mental health.

The current online SRC application does not capture this information, but we will discuss changing that so some of this information is captured up front.

Chair Wood thanked Ms. Ferrington for her presentation.

**NEW BUSINESS**

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

The BEO Committee last met on August 8th. At that meeting, the committee discussed the recommendations Deloitte made regarding MRC’s self-employment program. **(See Deloitte recommendations to MRC Self Employment.pdf.)**

1. Choose a foundational training program for all vocational rehabilitation counselors (VRCs).
2. Update, develop, and make available internal and external self-employment resources.
3. Some staff could become subject matter experts on self-employment. Perhaps there could be one in each regional office because the geography and labor market of each region is different and would require specific knowledge of that area.
4. Strengthen partnerships with various business incubators, entrepreneurial programs in universities, and community entities.

Ms. Biebel noted that these are the ideas that Deloitte has presented, but MRC has not committed to any at this time. It will be necessary to think about which ones make the most sense to weave together and how can MRC maximize the resources it has.

There was a discussion of the SRC, with the assistance of Ms. Goldberg and CAP, providing feedback that they have seen regarding self-employment in the future.

The next BEO Committee meeting is scheduled for October 10th at 1:00 pm.

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

The last scheduled meeting was postponed. There is no report to give.

If required, Mr. Mason will send a report from the DEIA Council to Mr. Bellil for the SRC Annual Report. Mr. Mason did not submit anything for the SRC Annual Report last year.

The next meeting is September 16th.

* **Membership ad hoc Committee – Naomi Goldberg**

The committee last met on August 27th. At that meeting, three main topics were discussed:

* SRC demographics: The committee looked at the roster of the current SRC membership and the demographic information obtained from the survey sent after the June Quarterly meeting. Now we know the race/ethnicity composition of the SRC and the parts of the state that are not represented. The committee recommended that the current online SRC application be revised to ask for this demographic information and also to remove mentions of Ex-officio membership since the bylaws are being revised to only use the term consistent with the federal regulations. Members of the public can participate in the SRC’s work without being appointed members. There was a suggestion to add this information to the SRC orientation materials.
* Community-based organization information: 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.
* SRC Brochure: The existing SRC brochure was discussed. There is a need to change the language to be less abstract and more inclusive.

The next Membership ad hoc Committee meeting will be on either September 23rd or September 24th.

* **State Plan Committee – Joe Bellil**

The committee last met on August 21st. The deadline for getting the Annual Report materials to Mr. Bellil is October 1st. He will then send them to Colleen Casey and the Communications team. Once completed, the Annual Report will go to the Governor and then to the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA).

At that meeting, Mr. Bellil also discussed an article about implementing ethical artificial intelligence (AI) in the workplace. He said he would share the link at this meeting:

<https://www.peatworks.org/ai-disability-inclusion-toolkit/>

The next State Plan Committee Meeting is on October 16th at 11:00 am.

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

The committee last met on August 12th with the intent of discussing the results of four MRC surveys - the MRC Connect Pulse Survey, the Staff Service Experience Survey, the Employer/Business Survey, and the Provider/Vendor Survey. However, only two appointed SRC members were in attendance. That meeting was adjourned and rescheduled for September 23rd. The survey results will be discussed. There will also be discussion about changing the frequency of meetings from quarterly to bimonthly.

The next CSNAC meeting is on September 23rd at 5 pm.

**Questions/Comments for Chairs:**

There were no questions or comments for the Chairs.

1. SRC training – Heather Wood

Suggested topics for the SRC training:

1) Strengthen understanding of SRC purpose/functions, bylaws, processes, and strategies for effectiveness

2) Continued focus on DEIA with the topic of oppression

3) Enhance team dynamics through networking and interactive small-group activities

In the survey sent after the June Quarterly meeting, most members had indicated that the date of October 10th works. Members have received the save the date. The library in Natick will be the location – it is central and accessible. Anyone needing accommodations and/or transportation are to reach out to Ms. Karr.

1. MRC Updates –Kate Biebel
* MRC Connect: Statistics are consistent with those of the past fiscal year. Processing time is 45 days from application to transfer to an area office. That time was 93 days before MRC Connect. Getting ready to try an artificial intelligence (AI) solution to help people walk through the application. However, applicants can still apply by phone or meet with a staff person. The AI interface may speed up the time it takes to apply, but it may increase the number of applications. Determining eligibility now takes one day, and getting transferred to an office now takes 1.5 days. The new database system that is now being used will allow MRC to track how the time it takes from someone being transferred to an office to getting an appointment with a VRC.

The Zoom connection was lost at approximately 2:32 PM and could not be re-established. The meeting was adjourned.

The next Executive Committee meeting is October 3rd at 1:00 pm.