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

**June 5, 2025**

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

**Attendees:**

* **Executive Committee Members:** Heather Wood (SRC Chair), Joe Bellil, Naomi Goldberg, Steve LaMaster, Doug Mason
* **Other State Rehabilitation Council Members:** Tay Silveira
* **Massachusetts** **Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) Staff:** Sahara Defensor, Emily McCaffrey, Amy Karr
* **Others present:** Dawn Clark

Please Note: This meeting was held remotely.

**The meeting was called to order at 4:03 pm by the chair.**

**Approval of Meeting Minutes:**

No minutes were approved at this meeting.

**UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

1. Membership update – Sahara Defensor, Heather Wood

All four Business, Industry and Labor seats are open. There were three nominees for those seats, but those individuals have not responded to attempts to reach out to them, so their applications were withdrawn. Rosanna Woodmansee, who had filled one of those seats, resigned. Chair Wood will work with Ms. Goldberg to schedule an Ad Hoc Membership Committee to brainstorm outreach to potential new members.

Ms. Defensor confirmed that members who are currently serving in holdover status, such as Mr. Bellil, can continue to serve until replacements for their seats are appointed. The loss of Mr. Bellil’s knowledge is concerning. The Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) released guidance about this topic, which suggests that other states have had these problems and concerns. The federal regulations do state that if a person served two full terms in one seat, they cannot serve in another seat until they have not served on the council for some time.

Chair Wood lamented the long duration of the approval process of new members. She praised new active members such as Ms. Silveira and Steve Higgins.

The Ad Hoc Membership Committee created in the spring of 2024 can last up to a year. Chair Wood would like to make it a permanent committee. The revised Executive Order reduced the number of seats. However, we still need to gain new members, and we want to do orientation and training. The SRC does not have a budget to hold trainings, but the Membership Committee could be helpful in providing support and resources to current members.

Chair Wood asked for a motion to make the Ad hoc Membership Committee a standing committee. Mr. Bellil made the motion, and Mr. Mason seconded the motion.

Chair Wood and Ms. Goldberg will discuss how to move forward with the Membership Committee.

**NEW BUSINESS**

1. Committee reports
* Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (DEIA) Council – Doug Mason

The primary focus over the last two meetings has been getting new members on board and ensuring that the chairs and co‑chairs in the individual employee resource groups were set. Understandably, given the current political climate, many people were concerned about the name of the council. At the last meeting the council voted to change its name. The goals of the council are not changing. People were asked to submit name suggestions. At the next council meeting, June 17th, the council will vote on its new name.

A few weeks ago, the Governor announced that there was a statewide freeze on new hiring. The council is wondering how that will affect recruitment and retention goals. At this point we do not know.

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

The committee last met on April 17th. There are no updates. No updates. Next meeting will vote on recommendations (?). He saw the most recent versions.

Chair Wood noted that the four Business, Industry and Labor seats on the SRC are open. Mr. LaMaster said that it is easier to get people in the business community to join a meeting on a one‑time basis to provide feedback than to commit to serving on a regularly meeting committee. However, he is certain there are some committed businesspeople who would consider joining the SRC as a member.

The committee will next meet on June 12th at 1:00 pm.

* **State Plan Committee – Joe Bellil**

The committee met on May 7th to review the recommendations submitted. The committee made a few revisions to some of the recommendations and decided not to accept two of them. Those who wrote the original recommendations were asked to submit any revisions by May 16th. Mr. Bellil then sent the recommendations to Kate Biebel for MassAbility’s review and comments.

The June meeting of the State Plan Committee has been canceled. The committee will next meet on August 20th at 11:00 am.

1. FY26 recommendations – Joe Bellil

At this meeting we are not voting on the recommendations. The committee is agreeing to move the recommendations to the SRC Quarterly Meeting on June 26th. At that meeting we will vote on the recommendations.

MassAbility’s comments on the recommendations will not be available until the following week. Once Mr. Bellil receives the comments about each recommendation, he will send the feedback about the recommendation to the person making that recommendation. The person making the recommendation can revise as they wish and then send the recommendation back to Mr. Bellil. If the MassAbility feedback is received next week, there will be a week’s turnaround time for people to review the feedback and possibly revise their recommendations. This is the first year we have provided recommendations to MassAbility prior to the vote. Mr. Bellil did not know how long it would take for MassAbility to provide its feedback.

Mr. Bellil will collect all these recommendations, and they will be sent to the full SRC to be voted upon at the June Quarterly meeting.

Mr. Bellil provided a summary of the recommendations. Ten recommendations were initially received. Two were very similar and were merged into one recommendation. It was decided not to continue with two recommendations. **(See draft SRC FY26 Recommendations - SRC Ex. Comm 6-5-25\_.docx.)**

1. Committee Membership

All members of SRC are asked to commit to at least one committee. Newer members have not been asked, and Chair Wood will reach out to ask them to select at least one committee on which to serve. In the future, that could be a part of the new member orientation process.

1. Planning for the SRC June Quarterly Meeting – Heather Wood

In addition to the routine items, there will be the vote on the FY26 recommendations and the NextGen presentation. Chair Wood will find out if there needs to be an item for voting on the budget this year, as there had been at previous June Quarterly meetings. There were requests for the Commissioner to talk about the budget, what is being cut back and what will continue to be funded. Ms. McCaffrey confirmed that MassAbility is continuing to move forward with Order of Selection/Managed Intake, and updates about that will be part of the Commissioner’s report. Chair Wood would like to hear about Connect and the assisted intake process, which is supposed to be easier than waiting for someone to call you and interview you. In addition, Chair Wood would like to have someone from Connect come to an Executive Committee or Quarterly meeting and talk about the process and how things are going on Connect’s end.

Chair Wood asked members to email her if they came up with additional information they would like to hear in the Commissioner’s report at the June Quarterly meeting.

1. MassAbility Update – Emily McCaffrey

Federally funded positions are exempt from the state hiring freeze; vocational rehabilitation (VR) is federally funded. From the most recent version of the federal budget, there are going to be major cuts to RSA or at least to the state grant. It looks like the budget will be restricted to the 2024 numbers. It is also possible that CAP will have to get its funding from state grants, not federal funding. Right now, we do not know whether the budget bill will pass or not, and then there is still the appropriations process after the budget has passed.

**OPEN MIC**

* Discussion about recruiting SRC members for the vacant Business, Industry and Labor seats

What types of vendors can the SRC reach out to when trying to fill seats? Could MassAbility provide the SRC with a list of the vendors they work with? Each region of MassAbility has a list of vendors. The Department of Disability Services (DDS) has vendors. There are about five regional employment collaboratives in Massachusetts; each has job staff with strong relationships with employers in the area. The SRC could make a simple flyer explaining how input from employers is important for the SRC.

Someone from Easter Seals would be great to have as an SRC member because the organization works at multiple levels. They are in the schools doing multiple things, such as providing pre‑ETS and evaluating for assistive technology.

A member suggested NEBA; MassAbility sends some participants there for testing. It is in Springfield and recruitment through NEBA could get a member representing the western part of Massachusetts.

Mr. LaMaster suggested reaching out to the following:

* Tom Coppinger, the Executive Director of the Massachusetts Clubhouse Coalition
* Kathy Petkouskos of Work Without Limits, which has a round table of employers networking about hiring people with disabilities
* Stephanie Marks of the Regional Employment Collaboratives

Ms. Goldberg shared the following in the chat, a link to a document with information about the Massachusetts Regional Employment Collaboratives (RECs):

<https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2023/06/09/Overview%20Final%20Reg%20Employment%20Collaboratives%20Slides%206-14-23%20Mtg%20Version%202.pdf>

Mr. LaMaster that reaching out to these individuals and groups would help connect with some employers. Someone from an organization such as a clubhouse could hold a seat and represent a larger group of employers.

Ms. McCaffrey suggested bringing in MassAbility’s Job Placement Services (JPS) team along with the business improvement partners to talk about the relationships and connections they are currently looking at. Then the SRC could figure out how to add to what they are doing or how to partner with them. Chair Wood said they could attend a Membership Committee meeting, but could also provide an update at an Executive Committee meeting.

* Discussion/comments about Order of Selection/Managed Intake:

Is there an effort underway to compile a list of alternative resources for people if MassAbility does go into order of selection? It is important for people who may not be able to receive MassAbility services to remain stabilized. For example, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) has the Path to Work program. Chair Wood said she will add this question about a list of alternative resources to the things the Commissioner can address at the Quarterly meeting.

A member said that she read about some opportunities on MassAbility’s Facebook page that her vocational rehabilitation counselor (VRC) was not aware of. Regardless of order of selection, staff should be aware of as many opportunities as possible so more participants would have the chance to benefit from them. This member participated in a program through her community geared towards small business development.

Following up on this, Mr. LaMaster mentioned Laysha Ostrow, a PhD holder with lived experience. She has been a guest at several BEO Committee meetings. She developed a portal and support system for people with disabilities who want self-employment. He thinks she is recruiting participants for her funded randomized controlled trial. He invited anyone interested in self-employment to email him and he could make an email introduction to Ms. Ostrow. For anyone interested in self-employment. Mr. LaMaster shared Ms. Ostrow’s email in the chat:

laysha@livelearninc.net

Ms. McCaffrey said there are currently about 10 or 11 paid internship opportunities in JPS. The SRC might want to invite someone involved with these to present. In theory, all VRCs know about the paid internship opportunities, but in practice they all do not know. The most recent one is the Ahoi cohort. Michael Sanders of MassAbility has been trying to get a banner on Connect announcing that MassAbility does have paid internships available. Ms. McCaffrey is correctly running a project reconnecting with previous MassAbility who disconnected during COVID. When these individuals are contacted, they are told to let MassAbility know if they are interested in potential paid internship opportunities. Michael Sanders can directly connect with the participant and their VRC to talk about available opportunities. Each internship may have specific criteria, such as age. If a participant’s Individual Plan for Employment (IPE) goal is not related in any way to the internship, they may not be told about the internship.

Is there any way to gather participants collectively for informative sessions to hear about many of the opportunities all at once, rather than each participant only learning about what their VRC knows about? The participant and VRC would still work closely together, but this might reduce what the VRC must remember and figure out for every participant. This might give more time for the VRC to do other work with the participant, and the information might be better explained by someone else.

Ms. Clark noted that almost every municipality has a commission on community and disability. Once you join such a commission you get to know what is going on in your local community. You get to know the members, and they get to know you, and this may lead to employment opportunities.

The next Executive Committee meeting will be on August 3rd from 4:00 to 6:00 pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:38 pm.