

**Policy Committee**  
600 Washington Street, Boston, MA 02111  
December 2, 2021  
11:00 a.m. -12:30 p.m.  
**Minutes**

**Attended:** Naomi Goldberg, Sarah Wiles, Rosanna Woodmansee, Sheryl Cruz, Liz Fancher, Kevin Goodwin, and Rebecca Davis

**Procurement:**

The committee discussed the four procurement items on which we have chosen to focus. At the October meeting Naomi agreed reach out to particular MRC staff who could potentially answer questions and offer guidance on the items as the committee discusses next steps. Naomi provided an update of progress on these items since the last meeting.

- **Ensuring CIES vendors can adequately address linguistic and cultural needs of consumers**

The procurement process for CIES vendors is set by EOHHS, is known as “257,” and is quite complicated. Under the existing process the rates are set and reviewed biannually. Requiring vendors to contract with a third-party interpreter service would be complicated under this 257 process because the rates are already set, and it would involve approval by EOHHS. There may be other ways to address the issue of improving language and cultural capacity such as encouraging cultural competency in the RFR and scoring accordingly. This may already happen to some extent. It was suggested that perhaps Jessica Cimini can speak to alternative ways of addressing this issue and/or suggest other mechanisms for incentivizing vendors to speak other languages and be culturally competent.

Naomi will contact Jessica Cimini and ask if she can attend an upcoming meeting

- **Surveying VR counselors for feedback on procurement issues**

Joan Phillips confirmed that it would be possible to survey VR counselors about issues or barriers they experience around procurement. She suggested discussing the matter with Jessica Cimini.

A next step for the Policy Committee will be to consider what questions will be asked of counselors on a survey.

- **Seeking a mechanism for purchasing higher cost services/items via a third party**

Naomi raised this question with MRC and is awaiting a response.

- **Increasing number of tutors available**

There was not update on this item at the time of the meeting.

### **Fair Hearing Decisions/Fair Hearing Officers**

Although this has not been on the list of state plan recommendations, the Policy Committee previously considered working on an issue related to fair hearings. While members considered the issue to be important, it has previously been put aside to focus on the longstanding two recommendations that have been the committee's focus in the past two years. Naomi suggested that the group commit to begin working on it in the coming months.

According to federal regulations, which were included with the agenda, the SRC should be receiving information about fair hearing decisions and should be assisting MRC in their efforts to find/recruit fair hearing officers. A fair hearing is a formal process at which an MRC consumer can challenge/appeal a decision that MRC has made about their case. Fair hearings officers preside over the hearing and ultimately decide about whether the decision that MRC made was appropriate according to the applicable regulations. Fair hearing officers are neutral, and they are not MRC employees.

CAP had previously made preliminary inquiries about the SRC receiving copies of fair hearing decisions. MRC has agreed to provide general information to the SRC about fair hearing decisions but has some concerns about how to provide such information while maintaining confidentiality. MRC does not want to share redacted versions of decisions because the level of detail may identify individuals and has suggested that perhaps a summary of decisions would be sufficient. In future meetings the committee should discuss what level of detail it finds to be important. The committee should also discuss what next steps should be taken to address the requirement to assist in finding fair hearing officers. This topic will continue to be added to meeting agendas.

**The next meeting of the Policy Committee will be Thursday, February 3, 2021, from 11:00-12:30.**