

## Statewide Rehabilitation Council (SRC) Meeting Minutes

June 22, 2023, 5-7pm EST

Please note: This meeting was held virtually.

### Attendees:

- **Statewide Rehabilitation Council (SRC) Members:** Inez Canada (Chair), Joe Bellil, Naomi Goldberg, Cheryl Scott, Christine Tosti, Heather Wood, Rosanna Woodmansee
- **SRC Ex Officio Members:** Kate Biebel (MRC Deputy Commissioner), Paula Euber (VRC), Kevin Goodwin, Doug Mason, Sarah Wiles (CAP)
- **Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) Staff:** Commissioner Toni Wolf, Sahara Defensor, Gabriela Lawrence-Soto, Emily McCaffrey, Amy Karr
- **ASL Interpreters:** Janice Evans, Kerri MacSwain
- **CART Provider:** Stefanie Farrell
- **Public:** Craig Hall (DDC), Jennifer Graf, Boyang Bang, Lucy Mueller

### 1. Call to Order/Introductions

- a. The meeting was called to order at 5:00 pm by the Chair.
- b. Ms. Karr read off the meeting participant list.

### 2. Reading Of the Vision and Mission Statement: Ms. Euber read the SRC Mission and Vision Statement.

### 3. Approval of Meeting Minutes

- a. Chair Canada called for a motion to approve the March 2023 Quarterly meeting minutes. Ms. Woodmansee motioned for approval of the minutes. Ms. Goldberg seconded. The March 2023 minutes were approved with no corrections.

### 4. Old Business

#### a. Membership update (Inez Canada, Sahara Defensor)

Jennifer Graf, who is considering joining the SRC, introduced herself. She works with Mr. Fujii, and learned about the SRC from him.

Nominations for Mr. Mason, Sarah Carroll, AJ Pape and Boyang Bian have been submitted. The SRC will need to fill seats that are vacant or will become vacant.

Ms. Canada thanked the many members who completed the required Open Meeting Law and Conflict of Interest compliance trainings. Those who have completed the training for other state boards do not have to complete it again. The Conflict of Interest training must be completed every year. Members were asked to copy Ms. Karr on emails sending training certificates for SRC records.

#### i. RSA-TAC-23-02

Ms. Defensor gave an update on the Technical Assistance Circular (TAC) sent out by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA). (**See RSA-TAC-23-02.pdf.**) The TAC pointed out that several states have been operating in a way not consistent with what the Rehabilitation Act requires of the SRC. Many states have permitted members to continue to serve on expired terms until new members are appointed. This is not allowed. Ms. Defensor has reached out to SRC members to learn when they joined the SRC. A term is three years, and a member cannot serve more than two terms. MRC will work with the current administration to help the SRC try to expedite the nominations already in the queue. Ms. Defensor will reach out to members individually. Ms. Canada encouraged members to email Ms. Defensor with any questions. Ms. Defensor shared her email address - [Sahara.Defensor@mass.gov](mailto:Sahara.Defensor@mass.gov) in the chat.

If a member has an expired term, can they still participate?

Ms. Defensor said that the member can continue to participate until the member receives a letter from the Governor's office stating that their term is over. The TAC did say that SRCs should continue their work.

## 5. New Business

### a. Vote on Budget

Quorum was not met; the SRC was unable vote on this item.

The budget, which was created by revising the previous year's budget, was shared for review.

**(See FY24 SRC Budget Request\_ Revised 20230601.xls.)** The amounts for admin support and ASL and CART remained the same. The amount for the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) conference has been increased. An item for attendance at the National Disability Rights Network (NDRN) conference has been added; the amount is currently to be determined. Members have requested DEI training, and an estimated amount for such training is included in the budget.

The amount for member stipends is still zero. During the discussion about stipends, a member shared an email in the chat that contained the federal law on referencing stipend for unemployed SRC members. **(See Gmail - Compensation vs reimbursement legal question.pdf.)** The member noted that federal law preempts state law. It was explained that the federal law says states may provide stipends, but leaves it to the states to decide whether to do this or not. Currently Massachusetts law says it is only possible to reimburse members for expenses; would need to amend the Massachusetts General Law to provide stipends. A question was asked about why Massachusetts chose only to provide reimbursement. No other governing bodies pay members, so perhaps Massachusetts wanted consistency across the board. Ms. Defensor stated that she could put in a request for the legislative history of this. At this point in time there is no negotiation about this; must comply with existing Massachusetts law.

There was a question about what happens at the start of the next fiscal year if the SRC cannot vote on the budget until September. The MRC budget will be delayed for at least 30 days, so the SRC will actually be in a better place to vote on the budget in September, since will know what the budget is at that time. It is hoped that the SRC can vote on the budget in at the September Quarterly meeting.

### b. Vote on Recommendations

Quorum was not met; the SRC was unable vote on the recommendations. It is preferable that all members do approve the recommendations, but it is not required to vote before submitting the recommendations to MRC.

Mr. Bellil provided the Committee Report for the State Plan Committee. At the May State Plan committee meeting the language of the submitted recommendations was revised, and each recommendation was assigned to a committee. At the June 1 Executive Committee meeting the recommendations were approved to be sent to the full SRC.

Mr. Bellil shared the recommendations, which previously had been sent to members. **(See Draft-SRC FY24 Proposed Recommendations as of 5-31-23.docx.)** He read each recommendation, and then asked the person who made the recommendation to answer the following three questions about the recommendations that were suggested by a member.

1. What problem is this [recommendation] trying to solve or what issue is this trying to address?
  2. The intended value and purpose as it relates to vocational rehabilitation. In other words, how will this help achieve “competitive and sustainable employment for all people with disabilities”? (The quote is from the SRC mission.)
  3. What is the expected outcome or deliverable for this recommendation? What impact is it expected to have?
- **Recommend MRC reach out to the sheriff’s department at the Worcester County Jail & House of Correction to explore outreach to individuals with disabilities using a dog training program and to get inmates’ input on the program.**  
SRC Committee: Customer Satisfaction/Needs Assessment Committee  
Ms. Tosti made this recommendation. She had submitted her response to the questions and shared it in the chat. **(See Christine Tosti recommendations.docx.)**
  - **Recommend MRC analyze for accessibility the current ways people with disabilities give input and results from consumer needs survey.**  
SRC Committee: Customer Satisfaction/Needs Assessment Committee  
Olympia Stroud made this recommendation, but was unable to attend this meeting.  
A member asked what “analyze for accessibility” means. Another member noted that this was not what Ms. Stroud originally said. This recommendation is about looking at the way people access information, and to look at where there are gaps. For example, not all people are comfortable talking at consumer forums on camera, or doing surveys.
  - **Recommend MRC Counselors identify if a consumer is financially struggling and educate the consumer about possible resources and barriers to access these resources.**  
SRC Committee: Customer Satisfaction/Needs Assessment Committee  
Ms. Tosti made this recommendation. She had submitted her response to the questions and shared it in the chat. **(See Christine Tosti recommendations.docx.)**
  - **MRC will work with the SRC to develop practical strategies for sharing work incentives information with the business community/employers.**  
SRC Committee: Business and Employment Opportunity Committee  
Steve LaMaster made this recommendation, but was unable to attend this meeting.
  - **MRC will work with the Business and Employment Opportunity Committee of the SRC to analyze results of MRC Consumer, Employer, and Provider survey data to better align SRC Recommendations to relevant findings.**  
SRC Committee: Business and Employment Opportunity Committee  
Steve LaMaster made this recommendation, but was unable to attend this meeting.
  - **Develop a Request for Response (RFR) to get three additional business consultants to advise consumers pursuing self-employment to achieve their vocational goal.**  
SRC Committee: Business and Employment Opportunity Committee  
Chair Canada made this recommendation. Her answers to the three questions above:
    1. From her work with consumers seeking self-employment, she noted that MRC currently has only two self-employment consultants under contract, which is not enough. SCORE is not a good resource for consumers with disabilities to pursue self-employment because they usually deal with individuals who have a baseline knowledge of running a business.

2. Consultants will help people with disabilities seeking self-employment to start off on the right track instead of trying to course correct. They will support the consumers in writing a business plan and understanding business ownership. It will allow interested consultants to become state vendors. VR counselors would not have to gain additional expertise to help the consumer but can send them to reliable support and just monitor the process.
  3. Consumers who desire self-employment will be able to be served and attain self-employment without the VR counselors being overloaded. Consumers who have a good business plan are more likely to have a profitable business.
- **MRC will collaborate with SRC to identify, recruit, and engage more MRC Consumers and stakeholders from specific backgrounds, groups, and organizations required by federal regulations, including Un-served/Under-served communities, individuals with disabilities, and businesses.**

SRC Committee: Business and Employment Opportunity Committee

Mr. Bellil made this recommendation. His answers to the three questions above:

1. The SRC does not have enough appointed members and active participants in committees.
2. The SRC needs members to make quorum, to do business.
3. This will bring more attention to the issue of SRC membership.

There was a question about why this recommendation was assigned to the BEO Committee. There is no longer a Nomination Committee. Mr. Bellil did speak to Mr. LaMaster about this, Mr. LaMaster does do outreach to businesses. This may be best assigned to the Executive Committee because that committee has been doing recruitment. Mr. Bellil changed the committee for this recommendation to the Executive Committee.

Mr. Bellil asked for any additional questions or comments. The members were thanked for responding to three questions. A member noted that it is helpful to hear the thinking behind the recommendations. A member asked if the absent members who made recommendations can be asked to submit answers to the questions.

Members were asked to be mindful of how much work the SRC can take on. The SRC is an advisory council; it cannot make MRC do anything. A member questioned whether some of these recommendations are within the scope of MRC. A member stated that the recommendation process should be an opportunity for anyone to make recommendations. This member does not want the wording of recommendations changed; she does not feel that the presented versions of her recommendations reflect her intent. It has previously been discussed that recommendations are not always submitted to MRC as originally written because they must be within the scope of MRC. Also, a recommendation might be a good idea but may not be actionable. It is unrealistic to think that wording will not be changed.

There was a question about the process and the timeline. After this meeting, the recommendations will be sent to MRC. MRC has a month to respond, usually responds by July 31st. At the State Plan Committee meeting on August 9th the MRC response will be reviewed. Sometimes MRC suggests changes to the recommendations. The recommendations will also be submitted for the Annual Report using a template.

The assignment of committees to recommendations is not always firm. The goal is to make sure that each recommendation is assigned to the committee with the most relevant mission. Committee chairs will have to prioritize. For example, the BEO committee has several recommendations. The Chair and committee must prioritize because it is unrealistic to think they can do all of the recommendations. It was noted that the Policy Committee is not attached to a recommendation. Committee work on recommendations is mostly monitoring. The SRC is not a

working committee, it is advisory. The committee assigned to a recommendation monitors how MRC is working on that recommendation. That is how it should work, but it has not always worked that way. The committees' work will depend upon MRC's response. There are things that happen outside of recommendations: getting fair hearing decisions, analyzing results of the consumer survey.

A member suggested that in an attempt to help the SRC become more of an advisory board perhaps there can be a discussion about critical areas to focus on, such as a problem in MRC or a movement happening. Maybe recommendations can then stem from major areas of focus. The recommendations address important issues, but they have not arisen from council discussions. Chair Canada stated that this has not already been done and it is a good suggestion. The SRC was hoping to tie recommendations to survey results but did not receive enough information in time to be able to turn results into recommendations.

Massachusetts is currently developing the "uber" Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) State Plan for 2024. Joan Phillips and Bill Noone from MRC are involved, as is Ms. Scott as Director of the MassHire State Workforce Board. Ms. Scott feels discussing the goals towards workforce development in the state plan may add input to the process of developing recommendations. In developing this state plan, they are trying to be intentional that people with disabilities are in the center of the plan. Ms. Scott is volunteering her successor since she likely will not be in her role at that time. A member agreed that this suggestion is very helpful. Chair Canada will be in touch with Ms. Scott.

Chair Canada asked if the members agreed to move these to the MRC for response. Members agreed by verbal consensus. Members were encouraged to attend the August 9<sup>th</sup> State Plan Committee meeting.

**c. Committee Reports**

**i. State Plan Committee (Joe Bellil)**

The last meeting was on May 31<sup>st</sup>. Mr. Bellil provided the State Plan Committee report above at the beginning of the discussion of the recommendations.

The next State Plan meeting is on August 9<sup>th</sup> at 11:00 AM.

**ii. Consumer Satisfaction & Needs Assessment Committee (Ronaldo Fujii)**

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

The next CSNAC meeting is August 3<sup>rd</sup> at 5 pm.

**iii. Business Employment Opportunity Committee (Steve LaMaster)**

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

The next BEO meeting is August 10<sup>th</sup> at 1:00 pm.

**iv. Policy Committee (Naomi Goldberg)**

The last committee meeting was on June 1<sup>st</sup>. Since the last quarter the committee has been focused on FY23 suggestion #2, which was a suggestion about creating information for consumers. The committee has drafted fact sheets about due process, financial participation, and Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) and they are currently being revised. When completed they will be given to MRC, and MRC will decide how to use them. The next meeting will be focused on appeals. The committee will have a summary to review, and Ms. Goldberg thanked MRC for providing that information. Going forward the committee will look at this information twice per year.

The next Policy Committee meeting is on August 3<sup>rd</sup>.

v. **DEIA Council update (Doug Mason)**

The council last met on June 20<sup>th</sup>. The focus was primarily workplace equity for people with disabilities. MRC employment demographics revealed that MRC is deficient as an agency in hiring people with disabilities. The council discussed a number of things related to how MRC can increase disability representation on MRC staff. The council explored “What is the outreach MRC does as an agency to identify people with disabilities and have them apply for positions?” This must be expanded. It is not sufficient to have boilerplate nondiscrimination language. Need to have something that will attract people to pursue employment with MRC. Then internally from a human resources standpoint there is probably a need for sensitivity training for those doing the hiring in terms of identifying how to accommodate people with disabilities when they do come in. Many staff need training on how to conduct the interview process. This should apply to all agencies in the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS). The DEI manager said he would do research and bring it to the next meeting next month. The council is in the process of formulating a plan to bring to MRC about increasing the representation of people with disabilities within MRC. It is a start, but there is still a lot of work to do.

The next DEIA Council meeting is on July 18<sup>th</sup>.

vi. **Questions & Comments for Committee Chairs:**

A member asked Mr. Mason if the DEIA Council is aware of whether people have asked for accommodations for interviews. Mr. Mason stated that many people do not like to disclose they have a disability. The interviewer may only know about a disability when the person comes in. Mr. Mason does not remember a discussion of someone applying and asking for specific accommodations. Mr. Mason will email the member who asked this question, and will bring this to the DEIA Council. He will bring information he receives back to the Executive Committee.

d. **MRC Commissioner’s Update & Report (Commissioner Wolf)**

The Commissioner commended the SRC for doing a great job at looking at the infrastructure. She understands the pain of being on an advisory committee.

- **MRC Budget**

The Commissioner asked members to not share budget details; the budget will be made public at a Town Hall on June 29<sup>th</sup>. MRC anticipates that the legislature will not pass the budget for one month. Since the budget for the new fiscal year will not be approved before the start of the fiscal year, MRC will work on a 1/12 budget, which means MRC will receive 1/12 of the previous fiscal year’s budget per month, probably for two months. MRC asked for a few VR related items, and also asked for community living. Asked for 3.8 million additional dollars. This includes \$500,000 for the Empower to Employ partnership with the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA). Want MRC staff at DTA locations. There is also \$500,000 for the WORK Inc pilot project.

The workforce is looking for talent, MRC can help employers find talent. VR counselors must have more manageable caseloads. MRC needs more money to hire more counselors to lessen their counselors’ workloads and increase the number of consumers who find employment. The MRC employment placement rate has not changed from 2004 to today, still placing approximately 3,000 consumers in the workforce annually.

The process for the budget is MRC first sends the requested budget to the EOHHS. The Secretary reviews the budget and then sends it to the Governor's office. This has happened and the governor sent the budget to the House Ways & Means Committee. The Committee did approve the budget and then sent it to the Senate House Ways & Means Committee, where it was not approved. MRC amended the budget, but it is still at the Senate waiting for a decision.

- **Staffing**

MRC has been hit with vacancies. There are 39 vacancies for VR; it had been 59 in March. There are about 16 VR counselor positions to fill in various locations. It is not easy to fill positions in the Berkshires. The HR process is not simple, it's long and arduous. The Commissioner acknowledged Mr. Mason and the DEIA Council and the work towards making people with disabilities feel welcome. The Hyannis Area Director position is open. MRC needs to come up with a new recruiting strategy for this position.

- **Consumer Summit**

Gabrielle Lawrence-Soto, Assistant Director of Learning Community Engagement, discussed this in place of Amanda Baczko. The Request for Response (RFR) is closing, MRC will know the vendor next week. The site was narrowed to the Sheraton Framingham Hotel & Conference Center. The summit will be on September 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>. The first day is focused on consumers, the second day is focused on professional development. A steering committee will be formed after the vendor is in place, will know more the next week. MRC will reach out to the SRC for input. Looking for feedback about what worked and did not work last year.

Mr. Goodwin stated he would like to be on the steering committee for the consumer conference. Chair Canada will reach out to Ms. Lawrence-Soto with the names of SRC members who wish to serve on the steering committee.

- **Rebranding**

Commissioner Wolf stated that MRC sent a memo to the Governor about the brand, what MRC recommends, the research behind it. MRC is hopeful that the Governor will approve it. There will be a process to legally change the name. There will be a new design of the logo and new colors. There will be new language to reflect the agency better; it is felt that the current name and language is now archaic. Want to reflect that the agency wants to help people who want to work and live in their community. The Commissioner cannot share the name yet. She does ask that people sit with the new name for a while after it is revealed. MRC listened to stakeholders and the people served. The Commissioner hopes to hear from the Governor's office within the next month and will then update the SRC.

- **New Ombudsman and Appeals Coordinator**

Emily McCaffrey is the new Ombudsman and Appeals Coordinator in the Office of Learning and Community Engagement of MRC. This role is being revitalized. She has a master's degree in Community Engagement. She was previously the Director of Community Services in the town of Townsend, and has worked with transitional youth at UMass Chan Medical School. She will talk more about her role at the September Quarterly meeting. Chair Canada welcomed Ms. McCaffrey.

Commissioner Wolf acknowledged how hard the SRC works and thanked the members. Chair Canada will send Ms. McCaffrey the annual report and also shared the link in the chat.

<https://www.mass.gov/service-details/src-state-plan-and-annual-reports>

There were no questions for the MRC team.

e. **Running for SRC Offices**

Chair Canada's term as chair has ended. She will still be involved with the SRC though not as a member. She will help the next SRC Chair. Members can nominate themselves for offices or be nominated by another member. Members were sent a link to the SRC Guidebook with a list of the elected positions. (See <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/src-guidebook> pages 13-16.) The elected members are the SRC Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary and Member at Large. Not so concerned with the positions of secretary but would like to fill the two member-at-large positions. The member-at-large is a floating leadership position; this officer would step in to chair a committee if the committee chair is unavailable. Members were encouraged to review the descriptions of the positions in the SRC Guidebook. The vote for SRC leadership positions will be at the September Quarterly meeting, provided we have a quorum.

Some committee chairs will also need to be replaced because their terms are not eligible for renewal. Committee chairs are not elected; they are appointed by the SRC Chair. Traditionally anyone can volunteer to be a committee chair, and the SRC chair agrees to appoint them. There are four committees – Consumer Satisfaction Needs Assessment Committee, the BEO Committee, the Policy Committee, and the State Plan Committee, and hence four chairs.

A member stated that she has asked the current committee chairs if she can serve as co-chair and received no response. She shared the email she sent to the chairs. (See Gmail - mission co-chair.pdf.) Chair Canada cannot answer on behalf of the chairs; the chairs can respond at this meeting or email the member. Mr. Bellil stated that he did not know that committee chairs selected co-chairs, and he probably will not be serving much longer because he is not eligible for renewal. So, he felt it was not appropriate for him to select a co-chair. Ms. Goldberg said that she was not asked. If a committee chair wishes to name a co-chair, Chair Canada said she will agree.

Chair Canada stated that through chairing the SRC, she has met and worked with a lot of great people. As SRC Chair she has had the full support of the MRC team, and the new SRC Chair will also have that support. Members commended Chair Canada for doing a great job.

Commissioner Wolf asked if the MRC can support the SRC in the appointments of new members and the reappointments of current members. Chair Canada has discussed this with Ms. Biebel and Ms. Defensor. Perhaps there could be assistance with getting the appointments of nominees already in the queue through Boards and Commissions. The person there who handles this should be back from leave by the end of June.

6. **Open Mic**

Chair Canada thanked Ms. Graf for attending.

Chair Canada called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Mason motioned to adjourn. Ms. Scott seconded the motion. Meeting was adjourned at 6:57 pm.