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

**December 12, 2024, 5-7 pm ET**

**Please note: this meeting was held virtually.**

**Attendees**:

* **Statewide Rehabilitation Council (SRC) Members:** Heather Wood (Chair), Joe Bellil, Rebecca Davis, Naomi Goldberg (Client Assistance Program – CAP), Steve Higgins, Steve LaMaster
* **MassAbility Staff:** Kate Biebel, Jessica Cimini, Emily McCaffrey, Amy Karr
* **Other individuals present:** Kevin Goodwin, Doug Mason, Becky Phaneuf
* **ASL Interpreters:** Lucy Annett, Denise Martinez
* **CART Provider:** Lisa Nihan-Demeule
* **Absent SRC members:** Matthew Bander, Dawn Clark, Dr. Lusa Lo, Tay Silveira, Rosanna Woodmansee

# Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 5:04 pm by the Chair.

# Reading Of the Vision and Mission Statement: Ms. Davis read the SRC Vision Statement and Mr. Higgins read the Mission Statement.

# Approval of Meeting Minutes

No minutes were approved at this meeting.

# Unfinished Business

* 1. Membership update – Sahara Defensor

Ms. Defensor was not present at this meeting to provide an update. Chair Wood has met with a few people who have submitted SRC membership applications. She noted that one of those individuals, Becky Phaneuf, is present at this meeting.

* 1. Review of FY25 recommendations – Joe Bellil

Mr. Bellil shared the document with the FY25 recommendations. **(See SRC FY25 Recommendation MRC Response and SRC input- final 10-3-24.docx.)** These are the recommendations that were submitted to MRC after the SRC voted upon them at the June Quarterly meeting.

FY25-1

The recommendation is to consult with MassAbility and to prepare a proposal to restructure the SRC committees by merging redundant ones, establishing distinct objectives, harnessing technology, and offering training to boost productivity and impact.

Some of this is in process. The Executive Committee is talking about what the committees will look like.

FY25-2

This recommendation will have MassAbility provide an overview of DEIA (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility) work across the agency to SRC members, to help educate on current efforts and identify areas of meaningful partnership with the SRC. One area that MassAbility could partner with the SRC on DEIA is in the review of in-development VR training modules.

The SRC has been receiving regular updates about the work of MassAbility’s DEIA Council from Mr. Mason and will continue to do so.

FY25-3

This SRC will advise MassAbility on strategies to enhance business and employer awareness of the Disability Employment Tax Credit (DETC): a state-sponsored incentive to promote employment of people with disabilities.

This was just discussed at the meeting of the Business Employment Opportunity (BEO) Committee held earlier today. It was a good discussion, and Mr. LaMaster will have more to say about that.

FY25-4

MassAbility has been involved in receipt of a year-long examination of national best practices in self‑employment of people with disabilities, the final recommendations of which are expected in October 2024. The SRC will then work with MassAbility to involve stakeholders in presenting its findings and discuss a future MassAbility self-employment strategy to support Job Seekers with disabilities in pursuing self-employment vocational goals.

This was also discussed at today’s BEO Committee meeting.

Mr. Bellil will also discuss these recommendations at next week’s State Plan Committee meeting.

# New Business

* 1. Committee Reports

1. State Plan Committee - Joe Bellil

The last meeting was on August 21st. The October meeting was canceled.

The State Plan Committee will meet next week. As noted above, we will discuss the FY25 recommendations.

At that meeting we will discuss developing a more formal process of obtaining input from MassAbility earlier in the process of creating recommendations, perhaps working with a MassAbility liaison. This idea was suggested by Kate Biebel.

There also will be an update of the status of the Annual Report. This year, the SRC and MassAbility are looking to combine their annual reports, which was a suggestion by MassAbility. Mr. Bellil has submitted all of the SRC information to Colleen Casey and Communications and is waiting to hear about next steps.

The next State Plan Committee meeting is on December 18th at 11:00 am.

1. Business Employment Opportunity (BEO) Committee - Steve LaMaster

The committee last met earlier today, December 12th. We normally try to keep our meetings to an hour, but this meeting went over by 15 minutes.

The committee discussed the DETC and how to make more people aware of it. Business owners and employers are the ones who benefit from the tax credit. Job seekers and employees with disabilities are the people who have the responsibility to get certified. However, it will be important to provide information about the DETC to disability employment service providers, who can help job seekers get certified. MassAbility is working with Communications on developing physical and e-media DETC information material. At the meeting it was decided that Mr. LaMaster and Mr. Bellil will connect offline, create a list of places with which to share DETC information, and then send this to Mr. Reale and BEO Committee members to add to the list. He invited anyone at the Quarterly meeting who may know employment service providers or other constituent stakeholders that work with people with disabilities to consider helping with this project of creating an outreach list and to contact him in the meeting chat.

The committee also discussed self‑employment at today’s meeting. Mr. LaMaster is impressed with the work MassAbility has been doing with Deloitte, the consultant service that helped analyze their current systems, competencies and resources so they can enhance how they can help the people they serve who want self-employment. The committee discussed how a participant who is interested in seeking self-employment will need the information and decisional support to decide whether to commit to pursue self‑employment.

Mr. LaMaster would like to request that maybe twice over the course of 2025 that the BEO Committee receive the total number of new enrollees to MassAbility requesting self-employment, and where they are located. It will be interesting to see if there are differences in self‑employment requests between rural and urban areas, and if the demand for self‑employment stays stable or varies.

MassAbility has given itself a one-year timeline; they will complete their work by the end of the 2025 calendar year. They are consulting with staff from the vocational rehabilitation agency of Vermont, which has been a leader in this area of self‑employment.

The next BEO Committee meeting is on February 13, 2025 at 1:00 pm.

1. DEIA Council update - Doug Mason

There was to be a council meeting next week. However, that was canceled. The next DEIA Council meeting is scheduled for January 17th, 2025.

As noted at Executive Committee Meeting, the council decided that term limits for council members will be 18 months, and it is still finding out if the existing members want to commit to serving for another 18-month term. The council still has not decided on the total number of seats.

The next DEIA Council meeting will probably be on January 17th, 2025.

1. Membership Ad Hoc Committee – Naomi Goldberg

Chair Wood and Ms. Goldberg will talk about the next steps with this committee.

A member asked about the status of the Policy Committee. Ms. Goldberg explained that there are no recommendations assigned to the Policy Committee. If MassAbility does have something it wants the SRC to review, the Policy Committee would reconvene. The SRC is supposed to receive reports about hearing decisions, and the Policy Committee is supposed to keep track of that. Ms. Goldberg will contact Ms. Defensor about that, because she is the one who provided the information last time. Upon receipt of this information, Ms. Goldberg could present it at an SRC meeting; the Policy Committee would not necessarily have to meet.

1. Consumer Satisfaction & Needs Assessment Committee (CSNAC) – Heather Wood

The committee last met on November 18th.

At that meeting we reviewed the most recent results of the Consumer Experience Survey. The results were similar to recent previous results. There are some continuing areas of concern that MassAbility is aware of.

The committee typically meets on the third Monday of the month, but the third Monday of January 2025 is MLK Day. Therefore, the next CSNAC meeting is January 27th 5-6:30 pm.

* 1. MRC Commissioner’s Update & Report – Kate Biebel, Jessica Cimini, Amanda Baczko

Connect –We had a lower number of Career Services applicants in November, 868, a below average month. There were about 1350 applicants overall across all the MassAbility programs. The processing time is going down slightly, which is good. It takes about 42 days from application until transfer to an area office. That is still longer than we would like, but less than half the time it took before Connect existed. Eligibility is happening in a day, which is our target. Transferring to an office takes about 1.5 days instead of 1.5 days. We are going in the right direction, but we want to do better.

Branding: People have seen MassAbility ads on television, buses, and billboards. Ms. Biebel thinks the big marketing push is in November and December.

On Tuesday, December 10th there was “Let Go to Stigma” pop‑in event. Ms. Biebel and Commissioner Wolf were there. Media were present and asked about the goal of the event. One goal is to start conversation.

Upcoming federal landscape: We know nothing for certain. MassAbility has heard from the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) that the incoming administration has communicated that it does not need a Department of Education and will those functions to the states, but that will take a while.

Relocations: The closure of the 600 Washington Street office allows for the merger of the Boston and Roxbury offices. For now, both Boston and Roxbury participants are being served out of the Roxbury office. Not many participants are seen in the office. There will still be some drop in space at the new Boston office at 40 Broad Street in downtown Boston.

Commissioner Wolf would like to attend the January Executive Committee meeting. We will put some time on the meeting agenda for her.

# Open Mic

Chair Wood wished everyone a happy holiday season.

The next Quarterly Meeting is on March 20th, 2025 at 5:00 pm.

Chair Wood called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 6:02 pm.