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

**March 20 2025, 5-7 pm EST**

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

**Attendees**:

* **Statewide Rehabilitation Council (SRC) Members:** Heather Wood (Chair), Matthew Bander, Joe Bellil, Naomi Goldberg (Client Assistance Program – CAP), Steve Higgins, Steve LaMaster, Doug Mason, Tay Silveira, Commissioner Toni Wolf (Ex-Officio)
* **Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) Staff:** Kate Biebel, Emily McCaffrey, Graham Porell, Amy Karr
* **Other individuals present:** Jonathan Oz, Milo Pass, Sarah Wiles (CAP)
* **ASL Interpreters:** Patrick Cole, Denise Martinez
* **CART Provider:** Tracy Ukura
* **Absent SRC members:** Dawn Clark, Dr. Lusa Lo

# Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 5:01 pm by the Chair.

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

# Approval of Meeting Minutes

No minutes were approved at this meeting.

# Unfinished Business

* 1. **Membership update – Sahara Defensor, Heather Wood**

Ms. Defensor was unable to attend this meeting. The SRC has received reappointment letters for Chair Wood and Mr. LaMaster, and the appointment letter for Mr. Mason.

The Massachusetts state legislature sent a bill to the governor’s office that will continue remote meetings through June 2027.

Chair Wood and Ms. Goldberg met recently to discuss setting a meeting for the Ad Hoc Membership Committee. There are still a few months until the SRC needs to decide whether to make this a standing committee. However, currently it would be beneficial to reconvene to discuss recruitment efforts to fill the vacant seats on the SRC.

Ms. Silveira pointed out that the Zoom link to this meeting on the SRC website was not correct. It was not the link from the meeting calendar invite and did not provide access to this meeting, so it is not properly noticed. Commissioner Wolf recommended continuing with the meeting. Ms. Silveira recused herself from this portion of the meeting.

# New Business

* 1. **Client Assistance Program (CAP)/Ombuds - Naomi Goldberg and Emily McCaffrey**

Ms. McCaffrey shared her screen. **(See SRC Cap and Ombuds presentation 2025 pt 2.pptx.)** She will lead the Ombuds piece and Ms. Goldberg will lead the CAP portion. CAP is run by the Massachusetts Office of Disability.

Ombuds program – Emily McCaffrey

Ms. McCaffrey tracks and collects complaints data on the types of inquiries coming in. These can include complaints, questions, areas of barriers and conflicts. She analyzes the data either by month or program and looks for trends and patterns.

She started in the Ombuds role in April 2023. From May through December 2023, she tracked 412 inquiries that she received. In January through December 2024 there were 551 inquiries. In January through February of 2025 there have been a total of 74 inquiries. She provided the number of administrative reviews and fair hearings that occurred in each of the three time periods.

Appeal requests are often related to case closures, funding for books or supplies related to training, funding for college tuition and room and board. Fair hearings are often related to case closures and the ability to reopen cases, funding for training or higher education that MassAbility deemed not fundable, wanting amendments to their Individual Plan of Employment (IPE) that MassAbility had decided could not be added to their IPE.

When participants have complaints about MassAbility, such being dissatisfied with their assigned counselor or vendor, Ms. McCaffrey can often resolve these by collaborating with the participant and staff without administrative review or appeals. She may meet individually with the participant or with both the participant and counselor. Sometimes she creates a communication plan to show the participant’s preferred methods of communication and receiving information. She can also develop an engagement plan

Ms. McCaffrey asked anyone who has questions about her part of the presentation to either put them in the chat or to ask them in the period for questions after Ms. Goldberg’s part of the presentation.

Client Assistance Program (CAP) – Naomi Goldberg

Ms. Goldberg is the head of the Client Assistance Program, which is part of the Massachusetts Office on Disability. Also present at today’s meeting are her colleagues Sarah Wiles and Milo Pless. CAP focuses on vocational rehabilitation (Career Services) and independent living services. There is a CAP in each state. It sits outside the agencies that provide vocational rehabilitation and independent living services. It addresses the concerns of the individuals served by these agencies and makes sure that the services are provided in a way that is consistent with regulations and policies.

One of CAP’s main duties is to provide information and advocacy to individuals who are either applying for or already receiving career services and/or independent livings services and who may be facing some barrier to receiving these services. Another responsibility is to provide information about disability rights and employment. One way CAP does this is by holding a series of three training workshops that cover different topics related to disability rights and employment. Another duty of CAP is to make systematic improvements, and CAP does this in part by identifying systemic problems related to career services and independent living services and attempting to resolve them.

If a participant gives permission to CAP and signs a release, CAP may reach out to help resolve a conflict between a participant and a counselor. Otherwise, all conversations with CAP are confidential. CAP can represent participants in informal negotiations and/or formal appeals if CAP determines that the agency’s action may out of compliance with the regulations.

CAP is funded through a federal grant and works in the federal fiscal year, which is October through September. The data to be presented is from federal fiscal year 2024 (FY24).

In FY24, CAP had 214 inquiries related to career services. For some of these, CAP provided information about the service such as what it involves and how it can help. For others, there were discussions of particular issues that people were having. CAP represented people in four administrative reviews; there were no fair hearings. Themes addressed in the administrative reviews included case closure, funding for college room and board, and funding to attend a private college. The goal is to negotiate solutions to avoid the appeal process. There were few administrative reviews, but CAP was often able to resolve complicated cases without the appeal process by collaborating with MassAbility staff.

Common reasons for calls to CAP are similar to those Ms. McCaffrey described about Ombuds inquiries. These include complaints about not being placed in a job, dissatisfaction with counselor, disappointment that a service will not be funded, delays in payment/reimbursement for something that is to be funded. A consistent theme is a lack of understanding about how career services work. Often CAP works to help set expectations and help participants understand their responsibilities.

A person can call either the Ombuds or CAP. But a person who wants to be represented in an appeal or hearing should call CAP because the Ombuds does not represent people in hearings and appeals.

Comments/questions

A member who works at an Independent Living Center said that he has had good experiences working with both CAP and the Ombuds. Sometimes having that second voice has been what allowed the Center to provide good service to their consumers.

* 1. **Overview of Participant Experience Survey – Graham Porell**

Mr. Porell noted that the results of the survey are consistent with what the Ombuds and CAP are seeing. Mr. Porell shared his screen. **(See MassAbility Participant Survey - 4.2.2025.pptx.)** Mr. Porell will give a brief overview of the Participant Experience Survey results from the most recent quarter. There will be a more in-depth review of the results at the Consumer Satisfaction Needs Assessment Committee (CSNAC) on next Monday, March 24th. There will also be a comprehensive presentation of these results to MassAbility staff on April 2nd.

He wanted to note that there a lot of consistency between the issues that the Ombuds and CAP see and what we have seen in the survey both historically and recently, such as participants needing more information about what MassAbility can and cannot do and participants not being able to contact staff.

This survey is sent quarterly to recipients of both career services (CS) and home and community life (HCL) services. Before modernizing this about 2.5 years ago, we were only surveying CS recipients. Currently MassAbility is working with a vendor to do that. The survey is conducted both via phone through the vendor’s call center and by email. There is intentional oversampling done in certain populations that historically have had low response rates, such as racial minorities, individuals with certain disabilities, and recipients of HCL services.

This data is for quarter 2 of FY2024. The goal is to get about 500 responses per quarter for a total of about 2,000 annually. This quarter a total of 457 surveys were completed; about 2/3 were from CS recipients.

The good news is that the scores this quarter reveal positive trends for both CS and HCL. Responses from recipients of both services indicate they are satisfied with how MassAbility is responsive to the participants’ cultural preferences and needs (Cultural Responsivity) and with how the participants and staff work together collaboratively (Working Alliance). Open‑ended responses suggest that participants feel the same way about the providers they work with.

There are areas for improvement. About 30% of respondents experienced an issue or problem working with MassAbility. That has been pretty consistent with CS. It has recently dropped in HCL, which might have to do with a more appropriate sampling size for that group. Many of the issues reported are similar to those seen by the Ombuds and CAP, such needing more frequent contact and support and feeling they lack the full information about available services. There are still concerns about process being slow, but these are fewer than previously. When asked what MassAbility could do to improve, the most common response was to improve communication and follow through.

The vendor groups the questions into the following ten categories called domains.

* **Respect:** How service recipients perceive they are treated by MassAbility
* **Cultural Responsivity:** How service recipients perceive services regarding cultural responsiveness and DEI
* **Timeliness:** How service recipients perceive MassAbility’s pace
* **Dependability:** How service recipients perceive MassAbility’s responsiveness
* **Working Alliance:** How service recipients perceive the relationship with their primary service provider
* **Value:** How service recipients perceive the quality of services they receive
* **Accessibility:** How accessible is your experience with MassAbility?
* **Job and Career:** Are service recipients satisfied with their employment and career path?
* **Recommend**: Would you recommend MassAbility services to a friend or family member living with a disability? **(% Yes)**
* **Problems and Quality Improvement:** Have you experienced any problems with MassAbility or the services they provide to you? **(% No)**

Each domain is scored on a 0 to 100 scale. The higher the score, the positive the experience of the participants.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Total** | **CS** | **HCL** |
| **Respect** | **78** | **79** | **75** |
| **Cultural Responsivity** | **90** | **90** | **91** |
| **Timeliness** | **72** | **73** | **70** |
| **Dependability** | **76** | **76** | **75** |
| **Working Alliance** | **84** | **84** | **81** |
| **Value** | **70** | **70** | **71** |
| **Accessibility** | **85** | **86** | **80** |
| **Job and Career** | **68** | **68** | **-** |
| **Recommend (% Yes)** | **93%** | **94%** | **91%** |
| **Problems and Quality Improvement** | **70%** | **70%** | **74%** |

Positives: Cultural Responsivity has the highest score. 93% of participants would recommend MassAbility to other people with disabilities. Dependability has a fairly high score.

Concerns: The score for Value is a bit low; this indicates 30% of people MassAbility serves do not feel there is a lot of value in the services. The score for Job and Career is low at 68%.

Highlights of the trends in CS domain scores over the last four quarters:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Respect** | Around 80% |
| **Cultural Responsivity** | Between 90 and 95% |
| **Timeliness** | Between 73% and 75%. These scores are higher than from the older survey. |
| **Accessibility** | This is recently added question, only has data for the last two quarters. |
| **Recommend (% Yes)** | Consistently over 90% |
| **Problems and Quality Improvement****(% No Problems)** | There has been a dip in this recently; we will be keeping an eye on this. |

Across all the domains, the trends have been pretty consistent since we have started tracking these, not varying by more than 3-5%.

**Slide I missed**

**Resolve1 – CS and HCL Trending**

Less people feel problems resolved,

**Customer Feedback slide**

Staff not return calls
Need more guidance, support
Process slow

Vast amount of open ended comments are good.

Q16: What warked well? (slide)

Communication was highest

QI1: What to improve (slide)

Better communic
Increase and improve staff
General satisfaction

QI2: What additional serive would help job with good wage (slide)

Educations, training,
More guidance, support
More job options
Transportation

Majoritiy people responded they don’t need additional services

Same deck for Monday’s CSNAC and the staff presentation

Kate give real word example of how MassAbility uses the data. About 2 years introduced timeliness of response into staff performance measures. Now all staff, including management, have timely responsiveness as part of annual performance review. Grant agrees with Kate probably helps with people having fewer complaints

Matthew Bander left.

1. State plan – Joe

Went through scheduole

Shared that annual report is posted.

Next steps – getting FY26 recommendations. Request will be in MBY newsletter, asks chairs to submit before April

He and Steve will have a self-employment reco, maybe graham and bill involved

Next meeting April 26?

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

In December discussed DETC and also discussed self-employment.

DETC Joe Reale provided update. In June 2024 there were 40 certified for the credit. In December there were 2 more, a total of 42 certified. In June couldn’t fully market the DETC because it was before rebranding was approved and marketed.

Responsibility is on person with disability to go through the process of getting certified. So the committee felt it should be marketed to service providers, disability advocates, people with disabilities. Want to insure consumers know it’s their responsibility to get certified. Want a sheets for vendors to show benefits of DETC/WOTC hir ple with disabilities

February – Asked Bill Noone and Graham to provide update aboutc people who got self-employmentc goals. He thinks 19 people had IPE s-e, 18 successfully closed. What were the job types what were the characteristics of the people who sought self-employment when they came to MBY.

At that meeting decided would like to involve Rachel and Paula and Graham and Bill to put together for how this data may be better understood.

There is a meeting with them next Monday, he will provide link.

Graham confirmed Steve is correct. Graham said those who had self-employment goals had about 85% employment rate, much higher than average. But in a needs assessment more people indicated they’d have a self-employment goal. (about 20% said they might be interested in self-employment)

Comm. Wolf recommends inviting Maine, they are doing interesting experiments regarding self-employment. MBY hasn’t been promoting self-employment much, more people would consider it if it was promoted more. MBY didn’t highlight it because people didn’t seem interested in it. Wolf says was somewhat disappointed (with Deloitte), no great ideas, shows difficulty with self-employment.

Steve acknowledges the small sample.

Graham will join on Monday. Sarah Wiles also.

Naomi meant to be in touch with Rachel and Puala to offer inputc CAP has. S-e is complex, issues such as procurement, etc. Would like a person to fully evaluate something before it gets started before people go down a road they can’t finish.

Tay re: DETC – possible to advertise to MBY consumers or just people with disabilities. Tay just got it at something not directed to her, and her boss was pleased about it.

Steve – Jason Alves East Cambridge was at December meeting, talked about getting info to employers. It’s not on the employer to get the certification. Marketing needs to be multi-pronged. Person with disabilities. Employment worker when talking with employers about benefits of hiring pwdisabilities. Unfortunately, still only 42 people are certified, so significant need to get the word out. Work with MBY to how to get the word out to consumers. Email blast.

Milo Plass – asked about a credit for self-employment?

Kevin asked about the two credits, DETC and WOTC. If employee leaves, does employer lose the credits? Steve is not sure, but said he thought employer fcould get renumeration from date of certification to the time the employee leaves.

The next BEO Committee meeting is April ? at 1:00 pm.

1. DEIA Council update - Doug Mason

The Council last met on March 18th.

Primarily focused council in agreement on 3 areas of focus outlined on scorecard: continue to monitor and increase employment minorieis in management MBY, improve accessibility for employees to do job, working on develop plan for service providers to their DEI efforts. Related to current political environment. Our actions must be measured because don’t want to jeopardize federal funding for MBY. Still in process of filling ??? co-chair position.

The next DEIA Council meeting is \_\_ at 12-1:30 pm.

Ad hoc membership committee

Will be sending out an invite

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

Just put last meeting and next meeting.

Commissioner thanked State Plan and BEO committees, loves hearing them.

* 1. **MRC Commissioner’s Update & Report - Commissioner Wolf**

Would like to meet again 30 to 60 days.

She inherited 22. ? deficit. The federal government calls the waiting list the order of selection. Makes sure VR prioritezs the people who needs us most get us prioritized. Priority 1 – needs us the most. Priority 2 – needs us but maybe could do okay without MBY. Priority 3 – usually employed but needs some support.

Have a federal deficit now. Wanted to hire self-e specialist. However, need to prioritize who to hire. She wants to have another meeting with CFO.

We received reallotment money for VR. Available to agencies who spent their money. It’s money leftover from other states who didn’t spend all their money. Used it for Deloitte, to look at Cliff effect. Now Fed gov’t is reassessing, Dept of Education on chopping block. We don’t think there will be any reallotment dollars for any state.

Inflationary costs:

This year from last year: From 34.1 24 to 37.1 in 2025. Across the board is also high. Vendor rates increased, Computer costs, licensing for technologies. Probably an 18% reduction in how we want to spend our federal dollars Previous years could use reallotment dollars to cover that. Fiscal agility. When you have less money, need to reevaluate. Been talking about Secretary of EOHHS about applying order of selection. Just because apply doesb’t meanb we have tco cut services. This is a time we could use the order of seletion tool if wee need it. Requires a few things:

Sec’y needs to approve it
Talk to state legislature
Public hearings
Talk to RSA for approval
Amend State Plan

She would happy to send out info to help understand Order of Selection.

She would like to have a meeting with SRC and CFO.

Now we are looking at what positions we can fill, where we can cut costs.

Kate : Order of Selection lets you turn the faucet on and off quickly. It’s really the only way to control the front door. Got close to using it when Wolf started. It’s the only mechanism we have. Toni the issue of time limits is critical to her. When you already have a case load of 130, not giving the quality of service you’d give if case load 75. Seeing 1600 new referrals every month. Good news, wanted people to know about us, wanted front door. About 16% is youth (18-24 about). We want to serve, but can’t fcontinue this volume unless increase funding. If we closed priority 3, it’s currently 64 people now priority 3.

Wolf wants 30 to 45 days. There’s a timing issue. Wants SRC to be involved in the process.

Naomi comment – CAP hears from people who are looking for jobs. People who don’t need as much support. They have barriers to employment, come in as priority one, but really come in with wrong expectations and could go to career services. People with more disabilities can use the support more.

Steve Higgins: He hopes that if have to implement order of selections, also look at places where consumers can receive some of the services, such as the 10 independent living centers. One of the key pieces is directing and referring to other options. Wolf said SteveH made a great point. Want to have callers for info receive the same message.

Tay: She has had disaster training. They didn’t always treat the most urgent needs first. Wolf said that’s a great point. Maybe could help more people with fewer resources. Wolf – don’t wantc to not serve someone who is sworking but at risk of losing their job. Wolf says we have a bit of room in how we define categories. Kate says job retention. She says hearing aids is an example, if need hearing aid to keep a job.

Wolf said could do a couple of things:

Thinks it maybe helpful for CFO to explain where we are. Landscape is changing rapidly.
Someone from other state who has been using or of sel off and on for a long time. Been on for a long time.

Wood asked if wanted to select a date now.

May Executive Com meeting is on May 1st. Wolf is open to repurposing that meeting.

Wood: What additional info for that meeting? Steve Higgins thinks great idea to have CFO. Will have better idea of what is happening. An EO today getting rid of Dept of Education. Wolf says Ord of Selec doesn’t help Connect. But have lots of data. How many people can we serve with the money we have?

Kate praises Connect. 6 years ago everyone was priority one.

Wolf said she hasn’t yet shared it with MBY staff, they know it’s possible, but don’t know they’re considering it.

Wolf MBY will have to do a lot of homework by May 1st.

Heather said another option is April 1. Or a totally different date.

Wolf says wouldn’t go any later than May 1st with SRC. Kate thinks it’s fine on the agency end.

Wolf – no one wants to see this happen. Not secretary, not legislature.

MBY is careful about filling positions. Reevaluating, not only for today but for what may happen in the future.

Wolf frustrated because did have a strategy regarding self-employment and now frustrated.

Wolf doesn’t expect this right now. Got some state dollars last year so didn’t have to go to order of selecton

Plan on May 1st for that meeting. Will send out an updated invitation.

# Open Mic

Steve Higgins: On Statehouse at April 2 ?? Independence Day, can register at MASILC.org, a link to register. MBY is participating.

Heather: lost her job but does have a job. Education research has been shut down. Wolf is proud to be in MA.

The next Quarterly Meeting is on June 26th at 5 PM\_\_th at 6:43 pm.

Kate thanked interpreters and CART provider for staying.

Chair Wood called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. \_\_ motioned to adjourn\_\_ seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 7:23 pm.