

April 17th, 2024 minutes

State Rehabilitation Council (SRC)

State Plan and Interagency Relations Committee

Meeting Minutes

April 17th, 2024 11:00-12:30 pm EDT

Attendees:

Statewide Rehabilitation Council (SRC) Members: Joe Bellil (Committee Chair), Naomi Goldberg (Client Assistance Program – CAP), Steve LaMaster

Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) Staff: William Allen, William Noone, Graham Porrell, Amy Karr

Other individuals present: Kevin Goodwin, Christine Tosti¹, Sarah Wiles (CAP)

Absent SRC Members: Dawn Clark

Please note: This meeting was held remotely.

The meeting was called to order at 11:03 AM.

1. Welcome and Introductions

Mr. Bellil called on the attendees, and they introduced themselves.

2. Opportunity to share any diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility thoughts and ideas

- Mr. Bellil read the following Statement on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEI&A) from the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR):

CSAVR is committed to working toward a world free of institutional bias and injustice. Racism is a civil and human rights issue, and as such, a disability rights issue. CSAVR condemns and rejects racism and inequities in all forms and the systemic manner in which it is used to oppress minorities, including those who are individuals with disabilities. Disability and poverty continue to exacerbate the challenges that many individuals face. CSAVR will work tirelessly to assist individuals with disabilities, with whom we work, to have full access to opportunities that increase independence and employment, and to provide them with the services and supports they need to achieve the American dream.

<https://www.vrdeia.com/>

- Ms. Wiles shared the following link:
<https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-publish-final-rule-strengthen-web-and-mobile-app-access-people>
- Ms. Tosti receives email alerts from the Department of Justice (DOJ). She learned that gender dysphoria was not adequately accommodated at a correctional facility. Because of this lawsuit, the DOJ published a "statement of interest" to explain the discriminatory conduct and how it violates the ADA and Rehab Act. The link to the Statement of Interest:
<https://www.justice.gov/crt/media/1333226/dl>

¹ Upon request, attendees' names are used when they contribute to the discussion.

3. Approval of minutes

Mr. Bellil called for a motion to approve the February 2024 minutes. Mr. Bellil asked whether there were any corrections to the minutes. The February 2024 minutes were approved with no corrections.

4. Any updates/issues regarding the SRC FY24 Recommendations

Ms. Karr shared the SRC FY24 Recommendations. **(See SRC FY24 Recommendations with MRC Response update 11.2.23_FINAL.pdf.)**

A request was made for an update about the FY24 recommendations. The Business, Employment, and Opportunity (BEO) Committee did not meet last week, because the scheduled presenters from MRC, Joseph Reale and Rachel Reyes, would not be available. Mr. Reale did inform Mr. LaMaster that MRC is waiting for approval of its name change before really promoting the Disability Employment Tax Credit (DETC). Mr. LaMaster would like to get the information about the DETC out without waiting for MRC's name change. The SRC could get the information out to community groups. He invited MRC staff present at this meeting to discuss whether the SRC would be stepping out of its role by doing this. The DETC is not a "game changer," but it may be an incentive for an employer to hire an individual with a disability. Mr. LaMaster would like to pursue this until or unless he is told that it is counterproductive for people outside of MRC to promote the DETC.

Ms. Tosti expressed frustration with the DETC and the process. The certification was easy; it took her a few seconds in October. But it has had no impact on her finding employment. She asked how employers found individuals with the certification. It was explained that the certification does not make job seekers more visible to employers. Job seekers still have to obtain interviews. However, during interviews, people with the certification can point out that hiring them has financial incentives.

Deloitte Consulting has been retained to consult with MRC regarding self-employment/entrepreneurship. Self-employment programs across various states are being examined. Colorado has emerged as a "standout" with their self-employment efforts. The hope is that MRC can adopt some of the best practices while maintaining MRC's linkages with current consultants. MRC wants to increase the knowledge vocational rehabilitation counselors (VRCs) have regarding self-employment, prepare self-employment specialists, or contract additional consultants for self-employment services.

CAP is continuing to hear complaints from consumers seeking self-employment. There is still a need to provide consumers with foundational knowledge about what is needed to become self-employed.

5. Review the Schedule and Tasks for State Plan and Annual Reports and guidelines for State Plan recommendations - FY25

Mr. Bellil shared the schedule document. **(See SRC State Plan Committee- Schedule for State Plan and Annual Reports Updated 1-4-24.docx.)**

Detailed SRC 2025 Recommendation Timeline:

- February 2024-April 2024: Committees start the process of developing their FY25 recommendations
- May 2, 2024: All recommendations are due at the Executive Committee meeting
- June 6, 2024: The Executive Committee reviews and approves the recommendations to be presented at the June SRC meeting
- June 27, 2024: SRC members vote on recommendations.
- June 28, 2024: SRC forwards the approved recommendations to MRC for MRC's response

- July 31, 2024: MRC's response to the recommendations is due.
- August 21, 2024, at 11 am: The State Plan Committee reviews MRC's responses and prepares a work plan with MRC.

Mr. Bellil asked about the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) State Plan. Mr. Porell and Mr. Noone said that MRC submitted some corrections to their portion of the State Plan, and they are now waiting for the final State Plan to be released.

6. Next steps for getting FY25 Recommendations

Mr. Bellil asked Mr. Porell if he had any information about reports, documents, or areas of concern from survey results. Mr. Porell said MRC will receive the first quarter data from the vendor next week. Certain issues stand out. These include communications, areas of services, and larger system issues such as the cost of living in Massachusetts, transportation, and the wait time to get to see counselors. This is similar to the past. Mr. Bellil asked if it would be possible to turn any of those issues into recommendations. There could be recommendations for improving communication. People have been dropped from MRC services because MRC could not locate them. Strategize ways to reduce the unsuccessful bucket. Mr. Bellil mentioned that a common theme of consumer emails in the SRC mailbox is poor communication between consumers and MRC staff. It was also suggested that a recommendation involve trying to increase placement in jobs in higher paying career paths given the increasing cost of living. Mr. Porell would be glad to do a presentation to the SRC about the findings. The vendor handling the survey has been asked to do further breakouts in demographics as the SRC had requested. MRC should be receiving the next report approximately April 25th, so it probably will not be ready to present at the May 2nd Executive Committee meeting.

Mr. Bellil told Mr. Goodwin that Amanda Baczko should be contacting him about the planning committee for the Explore Possibility Summit. Mr. Bellil asked Mr. Goodwin to suggest that the SRC have a table at the Summit.

7. Other input from committee members:

Mr. Bellil asked committee members for their thoughts about the future of the State Plan Committee. Should it merge with the Policy Committee? Should the State Plan Committee's functions be performed by the Executive Committee? A benefit to performing State Plan work at Executive Committee meetings is that all Executive Committee members would be present. Not all Executive Committee members attend State Plan Committee meetings. Another potential benefit would be that Executive Committees would not just consist of presentations that are then repeated at Quarterly meetings.

Mr. Bellil does feel that the Executive Committee could handle the recommendations, but it would take more time and meetings may need to be longer. Will there be enough time for dialogue? Could the functions of every committee be performed by the Executive Committee? Mr. Bellil is waiting for the letter announcing the end of his SRC term. He does plan to attend meetings. It was proposed that Chair Wood could appoint someone to facilitate the State Plan/recommendations part of Executive Committee meetings. There does need to be someone to remind the committee members where they left off and where the discussion needs to start at the next meeting.

Ms. Tosti wishes to support VRCs. She would like to see a new committee, an Education Committee, which would provide information about free learning opportunities. Mr. Allen praised Ms. Tosti and her suggestion. He needs to get continuing education credits and keep up to date as part of his job. He also stated he gets ignited at SRC meetings and wants to assist the SRC to help increase competitive integrated employment (CIE) for consumers.

Chair Wood thanked everyone for their thoughts and feedback. She was happy to attend today's meeting. She normally cannot attend State Plan Committee meetings because of her teaching schedule. Because the State Plan is all-encompassing of what the SRC does, it seems like it would make sense to bring that role to the SRC and the Executive Committee. The SRC has not had a Vice-Chair. Perhaps that role could be focused on the State Plan and recommendations. She is still trying to figure this out. There may be some trial and error initially.

Mr. Bellil suggested that perhaps an FY25 recommendation could be to get MRC input about the SRC committees. Mr. LaMaster volunteered to help Mr. Bellil. Mr. Bellil said he would draft something and share it at the May Executive Committee meeting.

Mr. Bellil thanked the attendees for their input and time.

The next State Plan meeting is scheduled for June 19th, 2024 at 11:00 am. If the recommendations are approved at the June Executive Committee meeting the June State Plan committee meeting will not be needed and will be canceled.

8. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 11:55 am.