

August 9, 2023 minutes

State Rehabilitation Council (SRC)

State Plan and Interagency Relations Committee

Meeting Minutes

August 9, 2023, 11:00-12:30 pm EST

Attendees:

Statewide Rehabilitation Council (SRC) Members: Joe Bellil (Committee Chair), Naomi Goldberg, Kevin Goodwin (Ex-Officio), Steve LaMaster, Christine Tosti, Sarah Wiles (Ex-Officio)

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

Please note: This meeting was held remotely.

The meeting was called to order at 11:02 AM.

1. Welcome and Introductions

Mr. Bellil stated the names of all attendees.

Mr. Bellil reminded members that he will be leaving and there may a new committee chair for the October State Plan committee meeting. Also, SRC Chair Inez Canada will be leaving.

2. Approval of minutes

Mr. Bellil called for a motion to approve the May 2023 minutes. Mr. Bellil asked whether there were any corrections to the minutes. The May 2023 minutes were approved with no corrections.

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

A member shared a highlighted version of the DEI roadmap prepared by HMA in the chat.
(See HMA DEI roadmap highlighted.pdf.)

4. Review of MRC's responses to the SRC FY24 Recommendations

Mr. Bellil went over the procedure. After reviewing MRC's responses to the recommendations, the committee responsible for each recommendation will prepare a written response to MRC's response to the recommendations. The plan is for the committee chairs to send him their responses, and he will then send the responses to the Executive Committee, which will review them and then send them to MRC. When asked for the timeline to get the committee responses back to him, Mr. Bellil stated that the responses could be sent to him after the committee has had a chance to meet and discuss their response(s) to MRC's response(s). The next State Plan committee meeting is on October 18th.

Mr. Bellil had sent members the document with the SRC recommendations and MRC's responses.
(SRC FY24 Recommendations with MRC Response 8.1.23.docx.)

- **Recommendation FY24-1: Recommend MRC reach out to the sheriff's department at the Worcester County Jail and House of Correction to explore outreach to individuals with disabilities using a dog training program and to get inmates' input on the program.**

Responsible SRC Committee: Consumer Satisfaction/Needs Assessment Committee

Mr. Bellil read MRC's response to this recommendation. MRC rejected this recommendation. Ronaldo Fuji, the chair of the Consumer Satisfaction/Needs Assessment Committee, was not present. The member who made this recommendation was upset that the MRC is not supporting a recommendation regarding incarcerated people, and feels that the recommendation as written and presented to MRC did not capture her intent. Another member believes assistance for this population is important, but that perhaps this recommendation was too specific regarding the training to be provided. The member who made this recommendation shared three documents supporting her recommendation in the chat. **(See Special Legislative Commission on Structural Racism in MA Correctional Facilities FINAL Report, Dec 2022.pdf, Commission on Structural Racism in the Massachusetts Parole Process December 2021, and MRC and Dept of Corrections 1981.pdf.)**

- **Recommendation FY24-2: Recommend MRC analyze for accessibility the current ways people with disabilities give input and results from consumer needs survey.**

Responsible SRC Committee: Consumer Satisfaction/Needs Assessment Committee

Mr. Bellil read MRC's response to this recommendation. MRC proposed that this recommendation be combined with recommendation FY24-5, recommended by the Business Employment and Opportunity (BEO) Committee, and will accept it once it has been combined with recommendation FY24-5. It was suggested that the Chair of the BEO Committee, Mr. LaMaster, contact Mr. Fujii to figure out how the two committees can coordinate communication and activity to work in concert, not overlap. Recommendation FY24-5 was discussed immediately after this recommendation.

- **Recommendation FY24-5: 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.**

Responsible SRC Committee: Business and Employment Opportunity Committee

Mr. Bellil read MRC's response to this recommendation. As stated, MRC proposed this recommendation be combined with FY24-2. Mr. LaMaster stated that he will communicate with Mr. Fuji about how to collaborate and move forward.

- **FY 24-3: Recommend MRC Counselors identify if a consumer is financially struggling and educate the consumer about possible resources and barriers to access these resources.**

Responsible SRC Committee: Customer Satisfaction/Needs Assessment Committee

Mr. Bellil read MRC's response. MRC chose not to accept this recommendation. A member who applied for her disability without support said that MRC's description of what it does is not accurate and not occurring, and did not understand MRC's response and decision not to accept this recommendation. It is hoped that the Consumer Satisfaction/Needs Assessment Committee will discuss this at their next meeting.

- **FY24-4: MRC will work with the SRC to develop practical strategies for sharing work incentives information with the business community/employers.**

Responsible SRC Committee: Business and Employment Opportunity Committee

Mr. Bellil read MRC's response. MRC proposed to revise some language and accept this recommendation. MRC's response includes having MRC's Director of Financial Wellness, Joseph Reale, provide the committee with regular updates about the Disability Employment Tax Credit (DETC) and engagement by employers. Mr. LaMaster liked MRC's response; he is happy to see that MRC is thinking about a targeted media campaign aimed at employers. A member stated she did not feel the response was concrete. Those making the recommendations had been asked to answer questions proposed by another member to explain the recommendations, and this member did not see answers to the questions reflected in this SRC recommendation. The member who proposed those questions was not present at this meeting.

- **FY24-6: Develop a Request for Response (RFR) to get three additional business consultants to advise consumers pursuing self-employment to achieve their vocational goal.**

Responsible SRC Committee: Business and Employment Opportunity Committee

Mr. Bellil read MRC's response. The MRC proposed to accept this recommendation with revised wording, which removes language regarding developing an RFR. Some felt it was a positive response and hope this recommendation will help consumers who seek self-employment.

- **FY24-7: 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.**

Responsible SRC Committee: Executive Committee

Mr. Bellil read MRC's response. MRC proposed to accept this recommendation with revised wording. A member referred to MRC's rejection of recommendation FY24-1, and stated that that recommendation would be a specific way to fulfill FY24-7, since the incarcerated community is mostly black or brown. This member felt it did not make sense that FY24-7 was accepted, and FY24-1 was rejected.

This member shared two links in the chat.

<https://www.wgbh.org/news/local-news/2023/06/20/life-after-prison-mass-leaves-thousands-of-prisoners-awaiting-education-that-would-help-their-re-entry>

<https://www.wgbh.org/news/local-news/2023/01/04/legislative-commission-calls-for-dismantling-structural-racism-in-mass-prisons-jails>

5. Review the Annual Reports - 2024

Mr. Bellil has received the individual committee annual reports from Ms. Canada and Ms. Goldberg, and has completed his annual report. Mr. Bellil is waiting for annual reports from Mr. LaMaster and Mr. Fujii. Mr. LaMaster stated he will get his report to Mr. Bellil. Mr. Bellil will reach out to Colleen Casey with the committee annual reports. Mr. Bellil appreciates the template Ms. Casey provided.

6. Status of MRC's State Plan activities

Mr. Noone said that MRC is working on submitting the updated State Plan. The goal is to submit it in September or October 2024. The plan will be sent to the Governor's office for approval in August 2024. The legal department is working on the list of SRC members and their terms and whether the SRC is in compliance with the federal regulations, and is also updating the SRC Bylaws. The SRC is currently out of compliance with the federal regulations, as are other states. The state regulations establish the SRC; legal counsel is updating the regulations about what the SRC can and cannot do and what their responsibilities are. Also in the process of updating and modernizing the Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) with other state agencies such as the Department of Mental Health (DMH) and the Department of Developmental Services (DDS). The process of working on the State Plan was started significantly earlier than in previous years. The Department of Labor (DOL) does the overall submission of the entire state plan. MRC has to submit its part through the VR portal. Will need the information by August 2024 to submit to the Governor's office. MRC will get SRC's part through the Executive Committee.

7. Other input from committee members

A member stated she would like the SRC to engage in meaningful conversations and wants to hear thoughts from people not currently represented on the SRC. Another member stated that she empathizes but that the SRC does need to stay focused on advising MRC about what it does and can do. That might be an explanation for why MRC did not accept the recommendations about working with incarcerated people.

There was a discussion about whether MRC can serve people while they are incarcerated. It may be that people in reentry programs can learn about VR, but cannot apply for services until they are released. There are VR counselors assigned to various institutions to serve people in reentry programs. A member would like to see MRC services being provided to incarcerated people, and would like to have substantive discussions about this. However, currently this is not supported by statute. The way to make this possible is to encourage legislators to change the law. We can advocate that things change. Currently to receive VR services the recipient must be able to work. Other members agreed that ideally incarcerated people should be eligible for services, but for now must work within the regulations and what is in place. Currently incarcerated people may be given information about services that might be available through MRC. It may not be the best, but it is what is possible at this time. A member shared an article about research MRC did with the Department of Corrections (DOC). **(See MRC and Dept of Corrections 1981.pdf.)** This member stated that she tries hard to bring relevant concepts to discuss and feels that the SRC is not doing the work.

Mr. Noone will be in touch with committee chairs about written responses to MRC's responses.

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

The next State Plan meeting is October 18th, 2023 at 11:00 am.

8. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 12:01 pm.