

Virginia State Rehabilitation Council
Meeting Minutes
March 13, 2006

The quarterly meeting of the Virginia State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) was held on March 13, 2006, at the Virginia Department of Rehabilitative Services (DRS), Portsmouth, Virginia.

Members Present: Chet Avery, Karen Baugh, Daniel DeBoer, Race Drake, Robin Hoerber, Frances Lewis, Hiawatha Nicely, James Rothrock, Philip Sieck, Samuel Simon, Cherie Takemoto, Ed Turner, Roy Ward, Florence Watt

Members Absent: Marianne Moore, Dana Nelson, Michael Organ, Kenneth Holloway, William Hall

Others Present: John Phelps, Field Rehabilitation Services Director; Elizabeth Smith, Policy and Planning Director; Ernie Steidle, Chief Operations Officer; Barbara Tyson, Staff Support; Vanessa Rakestraw, Policy Analyst; Mary Lutkenhaus, Policy Analyst; Myra Owens, Lead Research and Evaluation Analyst; Janice Clark, Personal Assistant to Ed Turner; Cat Clough and Bernadette Mayhall, Interpreters

Call to Order: Council Chairperson Samuel Simon called the meeting to order at 11:45 a.m.

Approval of Minutes: A motion was made by Roy Ward, seconded by Frances Lewis, and passed by unanimous vote to approve the minutes of the January 23, 2006 meeting as amended.

Welcome and Introductions: Mr. Simon welcomed the vocational rehabilitation staff of the Portsmouth Field Office and had them introduce themselves to the SRC members and briefly describe their jobs.

Matters of Public Comment

Joseph Haranzo provided public comment via conference call. Mr. Haranzo thanked the Council members for providing him time on the agenda to inform the members about his dissatisfaction with his vocational rehabilitation services. He does not believe that DRS has worked with him to maximize his employment opportunities or the advancement of his educational goal of a law degree. He also has some medical conditions which need addressing and he is deeply concerned that DRS will not pay the medical expenses needed to address these conditions. Some of his previous concerns were heard through DRS' administrative hearing process, but he was extremely disappointed by that process and has appealed the decision to the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals. The Council members had no questions for Mr. Haranzo.

Chairperson's Report:

Mr. Simon stated that he supported the SRC members' suggestion to recognize members with a Certificate of Appreciation for their service on the SRC when their term ends. Mr. Simon presented Robin Hoerber with a certificate to recognize her for her outstanding work as the Client Assistance Program representative to the SRC.

The Council discussed possible locations for the May 8 meeting and expressed their desire to continue to hold some of their meetings in regional offices if possible. It was decided that the May 8 meeting will be held either in Roanoke or Fairfax depending on whether the SRC can meet with the Statewide Independent Living Council at the Independent Living Conference in Roanoke in August. SRC members will be notified of the next meeting location in the near future.

Working Lunch: Discussion with Portsmouth Field Staff

Lynn Kushner, Human Services Manager for the Portsmouth Field Office, and four Portsmouth staff provided additional information on their job responsibilities, the needs of their vocational rehabilitation consumers, effective community partnerships, and some of the challenges that their consumers face in reaching their employment goal and counselors face in providing effective services.

Commissioner's Report

The General Assembly will reconvene on March 27 to continue work on the budget. At this juncture, neither the vocational rehabilitation program nor programs at the Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center have received any additional funding. Former Governor Warner included \$763,500 in his proposed budget for Long Term Employment Support Services. In addition, there are proposed budget amendments in the House and the Senate for brain injury services for underserved areas and a budget amendment in the Senate for Centers for Independent Living to expand services for individuals with brain injury. DRS has been in a dispute with Augusta County over who is going to provide water and sewer systems to the locals around the Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center and there are some budget amendments that are trying to address this issue.

Legislatively, there is a bill that would allow the Statewide Independent Living Council to receive gifts or bequests to be placed in a non-reverting Independent Living fund. There also is legislation that will have the Assistive Technology Loan Fund Authority report to the Secretary of Health and Human Resources. Regarding workforce development, there is a bill that makes the Governor the Chief Workforce Development Officer for the Commonwealth, but provides him with the ability to delegate that responsibility to one of his direct staff who will work with the affected agencies to develop a strategic plan for workforce development. The Commissioner thanked the Council members for their efforts to support additional funding for the department's services during the General Assembly.

Secretary Tavenner, Deputy Secretary Harms, and Deputy Secretary Jaspen visited the DRS Central Office on March 24th and toured the facility and spoke with staff. Secretary Tavenner will be attending the Transition Conference in Roanoke on March 21, 2006. The Transition Conference brings together school personnel, parents, students, vocational rehabilitation staff and others to share ideas and best practices regarding students in transition.

Governor Kaine has signed a proclamation declaring March as Brain Injury Awareness Month.

Council Roundtable Reports

Virginia Workforce Council

Hiawatha Nicely reported that he has met with two of the Virginia Workforce Council task forces recently. One task force is looking at revising the dimensions of the workforce coverage in Virginia. The second group is looking at the recommendation going to the Governor on the new Workforce Development position in the Governor's Office.

Statewide Independent Living Council

Philip Sieck reported that during this session of the General Assembly, the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) supported a bill which would allow the SILC to have a "legal pocket" for receiving donations and gifts, supported SB182 on Community Integration, and supported a budget amendment to allow the Centers for Independent Living to do more outreach to persons in nursing homes to help them transition to community living. At the January meeting of the SILC, a staff member of the Freedom of Information Advisory Council provided information on the Freedom of Information Act, including the requirements for teleconference meetings. Susan Prokop, Chair of the SILC, has written the Advisory Council asking for more flexibility in holding meetings by teleconference as a reasonable accommodation. Mr. Sieck also reported that the SILC welcomes the opportunity to comment on the DRS State Plan and, possibly, meet with the SRC in the future to share ideas and discuss common issues. During the latter part of August, there will be an Independent Living Conference in Roanoke, and this might be an opportunity for the SRC and SILC to meet together.

Virginia Assistive Technology Council

Chet Avery reported that the Virginia Assistive Technology System (VATS) Advisory Council will meet on March 29th in Charlottesville to review the status of the VATS State Plan and to identify the current status of recycling centers for assistive technology.

Other Members

Karen Baugh stated that Doug James, Regional Director for the Northern Region, met with counselors who have been with DRS less than five years to gather information about their concerns and areas of interest. The discussion focused on counselor mentoring programs, counselor case load sizes, and additional training needs. Some of this information will be used to redesign the training program for new counselors.

Cherie Takemoto reported that there will be a Next Steps Transition Training with the One-Stop in Richmond. She said that Parent Educational Advocacy Training Center (PEATC) is seeing more and more instances of students being “pushed out” of school due to behavioral issues, which interrupts the transition services for those that are students with disabilities. In addition, the Virginia Department of Education is contracting with PEATC to provide a guide for parents and students on middle school transition.

Robin Hoerber thanked the DRS staff for helping to make materials accessible for her so that she could fully participate in the activities of the Council.

Ed Turner announced that on April 4-5, 2006, Virginia Commonwealth University’s Rehabilitation Research and Training Center (RRTC) will host a two-day meeting for community rehabilitation providers for Region III. The purpose of the meeting is to get input from providers about their training needs for the RRTC to utilize in its future training plans.

Committee Reports

External Affairs

Chet Avery, Chairperson, stated that the Committee heard a report on the status of legislation and the budget amendments. Hiawatha Nicely explained the Committee’s recommendation to send a letter, under the SRC Chairperson’s signature, to all members of the General Assembly asking them to continue to support budget amendments regarding services to Virginians with disabilities as they continue their budget negotiations. A motion was passed to send this letter and provide a copy to the SRC members.

There are members of the Council whose terms will end in September. They are: Race Drake, Kenneth Holloway, Frances Lewis, Philip Sieck, and Samuel Simon. These members need to inform Chet Avery whether they wish to be considered for reappointment.

At the last meeting, Mr. Simon appointed Michael Organ, as a member of the External Affairs Committee, to work with agency representatives to look at effective means to better educate the public about the department’s services and get appropriate public input, especially looking at the public hearing process and other possible forums for input. Since Mr. Organ could not attend this meeting, a report will be given at the May meeting.

Liz Smith informed the members that DRS is entering into an agreement with Virginia Commonwealth University to conduct the triennial needs assessment. There will be a presentation at the next meeting on the status of this assessment.

Internal Affairs

Karen Baugh, Acting Chairperson, reported that John Phelps reviewed the Field Rehabilitation Services performance results for Federal Fiscal Year 2006; a copy of the report was distributed to the full Council. Mr. Phelps stated that the performance report will be revised to meet the needs of the committee members. .

Ernie Steidle provided an update on the DRS budget as of February, 2006.

Myra Owens provided a report on the vocational rehabilitation Standards and Indicators, the Federal Fiscal Years 2000-2005 trends. Preliminary results show that in 2005, DRS surpassed the targets for three of six indicators for Standards 1 and surpassed the target for the indicator in Standard 2. This performance, however, was not sufficient for DRS to pass the Standards and Indicators for 2005; nor did DRS pass the Standards and Indicators in 2003 and 2004. For the 2003 Standards and Indicators, DRS has entered into a performance improvement plan with the Rehabilitation Services Administration. Chet Avery requested that the SRC review this plan at their next meeting. Sam Simon stated that the rehabilitation rate is one indicator that needs particular attention.

The Committee was not able to finish their work on the State Plan development due to time. Each committee member will provide Mary Lutkenhaus with comments on the State Plan Attachments by April 1. Ms. Lutkenhaus will distribute these comments to the committee members before the May meeting.

Old Business

Ms. Smith provided a report on outreach and services to vocational rehabilitation consumers with Limited English Proficiency (LEP). The report was prepared by Divette Brisco, Vanessa Rakestraw, and Mable Fleming in Policy and Planning. Ms. Smith reported on DRS' current situation in serving this population, available technology resources for interpreting and translation services, community resources, what other states are doing in the area of outreach and services, legal obligations in serving this population, and staff training needs. She also discussed the recommended action steps that the agency will be taking to improve outreach and services to individuals with Limited English Proficiency, which include: (1) maintaining a directory of staff with foreign language skills; (2) provide information for staff on vendors for interpreting and translation services; (3) place posters in reception areas and lobbies providing information on accessing services for LEP population; (4) work with the Skills for Leadership team members to develop a cultural diversity program for the agency; (5) continue with implementation of televideo system for use in foreign language interpreting; and (6) language identification flashcards to be made available in support of outreach and language identification.

New Business

Dr. Paul Aravich, Chairperson, and Anne McDonnell, Secretary, of the Virginia Brain Injury Council (VBIC), met with the SRC to discuss the VBIC. Established in 1986, the VBIC is a statewide, interagency advisory council comprised of consumers (i.e. survivors of brain injury and their family members), healthcare professionals, and state agency representatives. The mission of the Virginia Brain Injury Council (VBIC) is to ensure that individuals with brain injury in the Commonwealth have the opportunity to achieve the quality of life of their choosing. Currently there are 18 voting Council members.

The VBIC also serves as the advisory council to the federal Traumatic Brain Injury Grant that DRS has received. Under this grant, two awards have been received. One for the Educators Guide, which the Department of Education is now using as their guideline for serving transition students with brain injuries, and has been adopted by several other states for the same purpose. The second award is entitled “Collaboration and Coalition Building” and acknowledges the successful collaborative efforts within the Commonwealth to develop and enhance services for people with brain injury.

Dr. Aravich invited the SRC to have a member attend the VBIC meetings for further networking purposes.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:00 p.m.