

**Department of Human Services
Office of Rehabilitation Services
State Rehabilitation Council**

Minutes June 10, 2008

4:00 P.M. – 5:20 P.M.

**Department of Labor and Training, 1511 Pontiac Avenue Cranston, RI
02920**

Present from State Rehabilitation Council: Dr. Kate McCarthy-Barnett, Janice Belasco, Rocco Bruno, Domenic DiOrio, Susan Donovan, Dr. Judith Drew, Jeanne M. Giroux, Joseph Ferreira, Margaret Hoye, Gary J. Levine, Silvermoon Mars, Vincent Rossi, Juan Troncoso, Mary E. Wambach

Present from Agency: Kathleen Grygiel, Ronald Racine

1. Call to Order and Introductions - The Vice Chair. J. Ferreira, called the meeting to order at 4:00 P.M.

2. Additions or deletions to the Agenda – none.

3. Approval of Minutes –the minutes were approved for both the March and May meetings.

Motion

S. Donovan made a motion seconded by J. Belasco and unanimously approved to accept the minutes from the March 11, 2008 meeting.

Motion

M. Wambach made a motion seconded by D. DiOrio and approved with one abstention from J. Drew to accept the minutes from the May 13, 2008 meeting.

Note for membership – The members discussed and agreed upon the second week of October for the first meeting back for the Council. The Chair will have N. Baker send out the schedule later in the summer for the upcoming year.

Policy committee comments for the State Plan were presented to ORS.

S. Donovan did attend the Public Hearing for the State Plan. She spoke at the hearing and gave the Council a brief run-down of the event. There were not a lot of people attending, however she did give some background to those there about the Council and what it does. She also commended the Counselors at ORS who have been working above and beyond their workload. She expressed the Council's concerns regarding professional development training and the cutbacks at ORS. And she shared her personal experiences with ORS

of her own family, which were positive. C. Sansonetti spoke for The Disability Law Center and Austin Davis Jr., from the RI Statewide Independent Living Council shared his experiences. He talked about the service providers that ORS could use for helping their clients. This might be a topic that we could revisit this next year especially regarding quality assurance.

K. Grygiel added what was interesting about Mr. Davis' comments was that the vendors he listed were not ORS vendors. But it raised the issue of how we work with our vendors.

R. Racine also added that it shows how confusing the process with our vendors can seem to those unfamiliar with it.

J. Ferreira suggested that we do look at this next year and follow-up with some more information of how this system works.

M. Wambach said that consumers could really benefit from very specific information when they come to ORS regarding how the system works. Additionally, the Council members should have a facts sheet about the Council for consumers or any other interested parties.

D. DiOrio suggested that the Nomination and Leadership committee already does this but could put something on paper. N. Baker and D. DiOrio work on something.

R. Racine recommended that the Nomination and Leadership committee work to put a draft together of a fact sheet and follow up with the executive committee.

DiOrio gave a brief report of the NCSRC Regional Forum in Orlando last week. He prefaced by saying how grateful he was for the Orlando experience, which was productive and meaningful. The chance to meet in a small group setting, about eighty five (85) participants, provided opportunities to have good conversation and active participation in the many two-day sessions. It was sponsored by Georgia State University. The conference planners were representatives from various regions in the U.S., the RCEP and the NCSRC.

It was good to be with my friends from Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Connecticut, and of course Tom McCarthy of Assumption College, who is very respected nationally.

One key point was that there were few SRC Chairs or designees who had served some years on a state council. I was one of the few there with much experience. Many Chairs or their representative were rather new with only a year of experience. One was just appointed Chair after being seated three (3) weeks prior to coming to Orlando. Because the majority of participants were new, many concerns and frustrations were shared. I was proud that our Council is so far ahead

of many of the others regarding productivity and partnering practices with the State Agency. We seemed very advanced in the game compared to the other states. I'd say this is in no small part do to the strategic planning initiative set up in our Council by D. Sienko as well as the open partnership we have with ORS and the fine work of N. Baker over the past five (5) years. Ironically, we fall behind though with our staffing. Most of the states present have a coordinator and several people who do all the staff work for their councils. Yes, we are a small state but they all have full-time staff and we do not.

Some of the concerns expressed at the sessions were common to all SRCs, such as limited customer employment opportunities, transportation barriers to work, having SRCs agendas with activities to maintain retention of membership (many of the mandated members do not or cannot attend), meeting times, (trying to find a good time). Many have difficulty in having representation from the Business Community. Partnering with other agencies is also a challenge. Another challenge is recruitment and the recruitment process (most differ on how they accomplish this), and SRC staffing and the partnership concept as per Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1992 and 1998. A few states like Virginia, Florida, Pennsylvania and I think New York all have several full time staff. Florida and Pennsylvania have more than one full-time staff person, four (4) in one case.

Notes from the Forum will be sent to all SRC Chairs after all the Regions have participated. This information will come via the

websites for each state. This is the reason for asking for websites.

**Note: RI has been registered on the NCSRC web page. The URL is:
<http://www.ncsrc.net/index.php?q=node/21>**

The Focus was the training on-line/tutorial model. I have a sample "how to use" copy that is three (3) pages long. I am sure once mastered it can be easy to use. It will be posted shortly. However, I agree with Tom McCarthy of Assumption College, using this training model for new Council Members could be a problem for it will take six (6) hours to review. It is in legal thinking mode. For many new members, the model would be a challenge to understand and comprehend. In my thinking, it would be a good Graduate Course for students matriculating in Vocational Rehabilitation on a Master level. It could also be a great tool for the orientation of new staff members at ORS or for upgrading for management at ORS.

We are not the only state facing financial crisis and sever state budget cuts. New Jersey is three (3) million in debt. In California, the Governor is attempting to borrow money from the state lottery to pay off state debts. Florida is having financial problems (in-state travel is severely limited to Florida's state employees). West Virginia and New York are also facing similar financial concerns,

4. ORS Director's Report R. Racine

Personnel - Currently we have six (6) vacancies with VOC. Rehabilitation Counselors as well as two (2) out on leave. There are two (2) new postings for Counselors. We are losing several people from retirement this month and so many have to pick up the slack and do double and triple duty. There are rumors and cutback threats as well as contract negotiations going on, leaving many people concerned for the immediate future. And even though the threat of cutbacks may not be true, it is still causing problems.

Cuts - There are more contractor positions that will be eliminated from Services for the Blind.

Spending - Restricted spending mandate does not affect our monies spent directly on clients but it does affect our training programs for staff.

Budget – Will be coming out in a couple of days from the Governor.

Question - What is the full capacity of your office?

Total capacity is forty three (43) service counselors. Not counting support staff and other supervisors.

Question – If federal money is allocated by the numbers (population served) to your department, and those numbers fall because of limited personnel, then will the funding also be less?

The statistics for ORS are good so far but we cannot be sure how long that will last and what affect it will have on our funding.

J. Drew - I would be very surprised if this high level of workload per person can continue I would think at some point there will be a bottleneck.

M. Wambach - I do not want to minimize the concern for ORS but we also have a large exodus from MHRH. The cutbacks are across the board. There is a feeling among people in this State that are disabled that these cutbacks will reduce advocacy. If the consolidation goes through how long will it take to get things through?

R. Racine - It is simply taking longer to get things done. We have to rely on other agencies to get things done and it is taking longer.

M. Wambach - It is refreshing to speak honestly on a Council, so many states don't speak openly.

K. Grygiel - How will this impact Order of Selection?

M. Wambach - I went to a conference in New York and thirty-four (34) states are on Order of Selection.

R. Racine - Right now we are serving people who are in Order of

Selection and life categories of three (3) or more but we might have to change this. S. Brunero did mention this at the Public Hearing for the State Plan. Eventually this could affect the Standards and Indicators.

5. Committee Reports

Transportation – J. Drew

The committee has not been able to get together. We want to go forward with four (4) steps. We feel it is important to find the forty-nine (49) agencies that did not fill out our survey. We will contact them and then move forward with analysis of the survey results. We will hold a forum bringing those agencies together to see what kind of transportation model we can do. Then we will share those ideas and see what kind of funding is out there.

Employment – S. Donovan

We met last month and were very impressed with Sandy Lupovitz. We finished the article and it was published in RI Hospitality and Trade. Now we are working with Monica Dzialo to identify different people at the various Chambers of Commerce and get more info out in more papers.

Nomination and Leadership – D. DiOrio

We are meeting next month and have three (3) or four (4) candidates. I will also work with N. Baker to formulate a draft Council Facts Sheet for the next executive meeting.

Policy Committee – J. Ferreira

We presented our comments on the State Plan to ORS. (see attachment) At this time we have no other business.

7. Public Comment - None

8. Adjournment – The meeting was adjourned at 5:20 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

Nancy L. Baker, Staff

State Rehabilitation Council