

STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

APRIL 22, 2025

ATTENDEES:

Brandi Fitch
Cara Di Giovanni (virtual)
Diane Hernandez
Eva Castillo
Kelsey Teeter
Linda Rouse
Lisa Schneider
Margee Woywood (virtual)
Pam Woelber
Richard Phelan
William Stumpf

IVRS SUPPORT STAFF:

April Stotz (virtual)
Ashley Banes (virtual)
Brandy McOmber
Jeff Haight
Lori Kolbeck (virtual)
Sandy Ostendorf
Victoria Carrington
Vienna Hoang
Wendy Solano
Director Beth Townsend
Jesse Dougherty

PUBLIC/GUEST:

Brooke Lovelace (virtual)
Dr. Allison Levine (virtual)
Dane Sulentic (virtual)
Greg Bal
Krys Purscell (virtual)
Linda Brundies (virtual)
Mari Brown (virtual)

ABSENT:

Victoria Keith

CALL TO ORDER

Castillo called the April 22, 2025, State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) meeting to order at 10:38 a.m.

QUORUM

A quorum was established at 10:38 a.m.

ADOPTION OF AGENDA

Motion by Schneider, Second Phelan – approved agenda for April 22, 2025, meeting at 10:39 a.m.

APPROVAL OF OCTOBER 2024 MEETING MINUTES

Motion by Stumpf, Second Teeter – approved January 28, 2025, meeting minutes at 10:39 a.m.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None

INTRODUCTION OF DIRECTOR TOWNSEND

Iowa Workforce Development (IWD) Director Townsend was appointed as Interim Administrator of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) by Governor Reynolds in lieu of James Williams' tendered resignation last week.

The VR Administrator position will be posted in the near future. The hiring process for the administrator position typically takes approximately three months.

Director's phone number will be provided; council members are encouraged to reach out with any questions.

STANDING COMMITTEE REPORTS

Outreach Committee (Hernandez)

- Legislative breakfast for January 2026 (beginning stages of planning)
- Need for more business representation on this council
 - Created first draft of a statement and information to promote business involvement in SRC
 - Once final, the statement will be emailed to council members as a call to action
 - Council members to provide business contact information for local and statewide employers for outreach
 - Include those with access to local chambers of commerce or business leaders who drive community engagement
 - Spreadsheet will be created to track outreach and outcomes
- McOmber shares the governor's office was contacted requesting a special appointment of Susan Bunz, in response to SRC member Dave Zrostlic's resignation and recommendation, still awaiting response
 - Bunz will be contacted to ensure she has applied through the Talent Bank for consideration of appointment by the governor for the upcoming term

VR Service Delivery Committee (Schneider)

- Policy reviews occur every three years on a rotating basis, updates are made as necessary
- Haight prepared data at the request of Schneider, Client Assistance Program (CAP)
 - Slight increase in CAP cases regarding driver's education
 - Discussed specialized driver's education programs for those on the autism spectrum
- Schneider encourages council members to review the policies recently emailed and provide feedback within the 2-week time period following this meeting
 - Email, call or request a meeting with McOmber
 - Schneider requests McOmber compile information on this feedback from SRC members and share at a future meeting

Business Services Committee (Castillo)

- This committee, as discussed by the Outreach Committee, is in need of more support from business leaders
- Discussion on call to order and outreach to businesses
 - Looking for different perspectives at the table
 - Local businesses have easier access to decision-makers; statewide businesses have a larger platform
 - Stumpf suggests focus on recruiting businesses in the greater Des Moines area, as the travel for the SRC meetings would be less of a burden
 - Director Townsend would also like to recruit a business who has not typically hired individuals with disabilities

RSB BUREAU CHIEF REPORT – KOLBECK

- Update on VR Des Moines office splitting into two locations
 - Bureau chiefs are working with the office supervisors to ensure a strong VR presence remains at the Army Post Road location
 - The new location is by the Social Security office, on the DART route
 - Discussion regarding VR finding the best location for the client for meetings, including virtual
- Update on YesLMS, VR's new learning platform
 - The first seven modules developed by Stotz were related to core counseling topics for the associates recently promoted to counselors
 - Stotz is developing virtual live sessions, allowing for role playing situations and the use counseling techniques
 - Many other VR staff continue to access trainings through the platform as well
- Offices and contracted programs are creating proposals for summer programs
 - Proposals (due May 1st) outline activities and costs of summer programs for high school students who are potentially eligible (PE) or clients of VR
 - Most of the programs will be running between June and July
- In May, VR staff will be trained on the new policies being rolled out

ADMINISTRATOR REPORT – TOWNSEND

- Interim Administrator has been meeting with the senior VR team, planning next steps to ensure everything is moving forward as smoothly as possible
- Director told the VR team during initial alignment conversations that her goal is to serve lowans with disabilities as efficiently and effectively as possible; that has not, and will not change
- Focal points for Townsend as the Interim Administrator
 - Removing barriers for staff and making sure they have the resources they need to provide services to as many people as possible
 - Using technology and other means to provide services to lowans
 - IWD served 66,000 lowans through the use of technology last year
 - Hiring the next VR Administrator, the right person for the job

- Leveraging IWD resources, to the extent possible, to assist VR and eliminate duplication of work, fully integrating the teams
- Discussed budget and federal oversight of the VR program
 - VR received an additional five million dollars in funding for the basic grant
 - Continue finding ways to spend every dollar as effectively as possible
- VR Conference
 - Made the difficult decision to postpone the VR conference
 - The VR conference is a very effective way for the Administrator to meet with staff; want the next administrator to have that opportunity
 - The conference will be rescheduled once the new administrator is hired
- Hernandez questions what steps are being taken for frontline staff to address morale, fear and uncertainty
 - Director has communicated directly with VR staff and has sent out several messages to the entire VR and IWD team
 - Encouraging open lines of communication to help prevent staff feeling anxious or concerned unnecessarily
 - Director will be speaking at an upcoming VR teamwide meeting
 - McOmber adds Stotz recently sent out a training on stress management
 - Consistent message is VR is here to serve Iowans with disabilities; VR staff should continue to focus on that important work

MENU OF SERVICE CHANGES – HOANG

- Menu of Services are services VR has to support clients with achieving competitive integrated employment
- Service descriptions are located on the website (16 services)
- In October, VR started requiring contracts with community rehabilitation providers (CRPs) who provide these services to clients on behalf of VR
- CRPs now have 30 days, rather than 45 days, to provide invoices and documentation to VR for services rendered

APPRENTICESHIPS AND STATE APPRENTICESHIP AGENCY (SAA) FOR IOWA – DANE SULENTIC

- Shared process of how registered apprenticeships (RAs) work
 - Available to anyone 16 years of age and older
 - An RA is a job, involves a rigorous path, very rewarding
- Provided history of RAs in Iowa
 - Managed federally prior to June of last year
 - Iowa is now a State Apprenticeship Agency (SAA)
 - Allows for strategic growth to meet Iowa's workforce needs
 - Provides for personalized customer service and ongoing technical support

- Build better relationships with employers and sponsors
- Shared responsibilities of the Iowa Office of Apprenticeships (IOA)
- Discussed the functions of the State Apprenticeship Council
- Work closely with Department of Education, connecting high schools with employers
- Shared website located within the IWD website

CSNA UPDATE – DR. ALLISON LEVINE

- Presented information on the analysis process of the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) data
- Data collection is complete
- Shared statistical data received from consumer, VR employee and community partner surveys
- Schneider shares this data aligns with cases involved with CAP

POLICY

- McOmber encourages council members to review policies in their entirety and offer feedback
- Maintenance Policy
 - Added clarification, maintenance is an ancillary service that is in support of a primary service, only add these on the individualized plan for employment (IPE) at the time the service is needed
 - Services added to the plan will have a decisive time frame, provider, payor
 - Explained need to determine what are normal living expenses versus what are maintenance services necessitated by the plan
 - The IPE is a fluid document and changes are made when necessary
- Transportation Policy
 - Very similar to maintenance, an ancillary service
 - Added clarification on funding bus passes, insurance, and maintenance and repair of vehicles
 - Added requirement of an exception to policy if relocation expenses exceed \$1,500
- Case Services Guidance Policy
 - Provides general guidance on what VR case work entails
 - Added guidance on email communications and the appropriate way to add in the case record
 - Added time frames for frequency of contact section
 - Notes should include next steps: who is doing what by when
 - Frequency of contact should be guided by the individual needs of the client and what is needed to keep the case moving forward
 - Removed counseling methodology as it was only specific to motivational interviewing, which is only one type of counseling
 - Removed language related to hard copies, VR is paperless

- Working with Iowa Department for the Blind (IDB)
 - Removed section, added link to the memorandum of agreement (MoA) between VR and IDB
- Updated the CAP contact information
- Moved Standards for Consultants and Service providers to the medical diagnostic policy (below)
- Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) Policy
 - Removed step by step process of completing a paper IPE form
 - Changed previous philosophy of writing a comprehensive plan to now writing incremental plans with milestones to reach
 - Hoang adds the outcome from one service drives the need for the next service
 - Removed old guidance for post-employment due to changes in regulations
 - Job placement
 - Should not be listed on the plan (i.e. if assisting a high school student find a part-time job) unless it relates to the career goal
- Medical Diagnostic Treatment Authorizations and Fees Policy
 - Main change was adding assessment and authorization for services
 - Clarified the difference between standards for eligibility versus planning/service delivery
- McOmber again encourages council members to submit feedback via email, phone call, or meeting request

COMMITTEE REPORT/UPDATES

Financial Overview – Jeff Haight

- Reviewed various statistical data
 - Rehabilitation rate for most significantly disabled (MSD) and significantly disabled (SD) have a slight decrease from last year at this time
 - Personnel costs
 - 2022: 21M; 2023: 21M; 2024: just under 21M
 - 2025 estimated cost is 24.5M; Haight predicts final number will be between 22M-23M
 - Currently, 241 filled FTEs of 248 allowed
 - Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS): target is 15% of budget; currently halfway through the year and at 56.2% of target
 - 779 successful closures as of March 31st

CAP Update – Lisa Schneider

- Needs assessments results identified same themes Schneider is seeing in CAP cases
- Highest number of CAP cases (17) to date, but see positive changes being discussed that should help
- Case notes in case files
 - Clients have a right to see these notes
 - Regulations allow clients to dispute what was written in the notes
 - The dispute becomes and remains part of the case record

- Hoang shares case notes can also be a powerful motivational tool when they are read by clients

OTHER BUSINESS

- Follow-up from legislative reception
 - Stumpf reports how his son, who is non-verbal, was able to share his story with Iowa legislators using his communication device
 - Castillo suggests Stumpf's son come to the next SRC meeting to share his story with council members

ADJOURNMENT

Meeting was adjourned at 2:22 p.m.

The next SRC meeting is July 22, 2025.

Meeting minutes approved by the Council on this date: _____

Signed by SRC Chair – Eva Castillo _____