

# STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

*JULY 22, 2025*

## **ATTENDEES:**

Brandi Fitch  
Cindy Kurtz-Hopkins  
Diane Hernandez  
Eva Castillo  
Hugh Kelly  
Kelsey Teeter  
Krys Purcell  
Linda Rouse (virtual)  
Lisa Schneider (virtual)  
Margee Woywood  
Pam Woelber  
Richard Phelan  
William Stumpf

## **IVRS SUPPORT STAFF:**

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

## **PUBLIC/GUEST:**

Brian Guillaume (virtual)  
Dr. Allison Levine (virtual)  
Greg Bal  
Mari Brown (virtual)

## **ABSENT:**

Cara Di Giovanni  
Susan Bunz  
Victoria Keith

## **CALL TO ORDER**

Castillo called the July 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 Teeter, Second Phelan – approved agenda for July 22, 2025, meeting at 10:40 a.m.

## **APPROVAL OF APRIL 2025 MEETING MINUTES**

Motion by Teeter, Second Schneider – approved April 22, 2025, meeting minutes at 10:40 a.m.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

None

## **INTRODUCTION OF NEW COUNCIL MEMBERS**

New SRC members: Kurtz-Hopkins, Kelly and Purcell

## **STANDING COMMITTEE REPORTS**

### **Outreach Committee** (Carrington)

- Discussed the SRC Annual Report due in December and possible additions
- Dr. Levine shared Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) data, discussed improving services and outcomes
- At the October SRC meeting, a group picture of SRC members will be taken

### **VR Service Delivery Committee** (Schneider)

- Dr. Levine shared CSNA Data Summary document and collected information from VR and committee members to include in the final report
- VR working on their portion of updates to the Unified State Plan; townhall to be scheduled for public comment once full draft is complete
- Briefly discussed three VR policies currently being updated

### **Business Services Committee** (Castillo)

- Discussed the National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) activities to be held in October
  - Hansen shared employers of various sizes will be recognized for their efforts in employment and inclusion of individuals with disabilities
  - Nominations will be collected by September
  - IWD Communications Team will post information on social media platforms prior to and following NDEAM
  - Possible outcome of more business interest and input in SRC

## **RSB BUREAU CHIEF REPORT – (Jackson)**

- Transition summer programs occurring across the state
  - Had 49 approved summer pre-employment transition services (pre-ETS) proposals, varying in length and the activities conducted, based on feedback provided by the students
  - Have over 850 students who are participating in the camps this summer
  - The Communications Team taking videos and pictures to post to social media platforms
- Local School Plan (LSP) redesign
  - Will be presenting the changes later in this meeting
  - LSP plan is a tool designed to help streamline service delivery to students with disabilities across the state between high schools, VR, and Area Education Agencies (AEAs)
  - A group came together and worked on redesigning the template and the process
- Transition to Microsoft platform
  - VR staff are still learning the new platform and applications
  - Email addresses transitioned to @iwd.iowa.gov
  - Ostendorf added since VR moved under IWD with the alignment, one major initiative was to get all IWD programs under the same IT infrastructure

- Moving VR to Microsoft was part of this initiative
- Currently working on getting the current VR case management system behind a two-factor authentication called Okta (should be done within the next month)
- VR is getting a new case management system
  - Current system has been in use for 15+ years
  - Recently finalized the contract with Libera for an off-the-shelf product called inFormed
  - Projected full go-live date of October 1, 2027
  - New system will include a vendor portal to improve communications with VR's vendors
  - DIF grant funding the system with RSA approval

## **ADMINISTRATOR REPORT – TOWNSEND**

- Libera - inFormed
  - Signed Statement of Work (SOW) for the new case management system
  - Holding a kickoff meeting on Friday this week
  - System will allow VR to fully integrate with the Iowa Workforce system
- DB101 Website
  - Being provided through the Disability Innovation Fund (DIF) grant
  - Website provides tools and resources related to SSI/SSDI benefits, adding to the benefits planning services VR currently provides
- Unified State Plan
  - Core partners are working to update the Unified State Plan
  - Solano will email a copy of the current draft to SRC members following this meeting to provide any feedback
- Core 4 Program
  - Rolled out agencywide referral process on July 1st
  - VR provides the disability needs to job candidates based on their employment plans, while receiving access to the expertise of disability career planners, business engagement consultants and the full range of job placement services through the American Job Centers (AJCs)
  - Provides job candidates with services delivered by experts in helping people find jobs immediately when they become job ready
  - Attempting to eliminate the time between job ready and employed statuses
  - Builds capacity for VR counselors to continue work in assisting job candidates to become job ready
- Fiscal Community of Practice
  - Staff attended in June to learn more about the proposed 2026 budget for VR
  - Proposes to take the fiscal budget for 2026 back to 2024 levels
  - Adds a second reallocation process and an extended period to meet non-federal requirements, which will require regulatory change to implement
- US Department of Labor (DOL) and Department of Ed (DE)
  - Signed agreement to work more closely together

- Recommending RSA be moved to the US DOL to better align with the work and mission of the agencies, if not eliminating the RSA entirely at the federal level
- Goal is to get all workforce programs working together to eliminate the duplication of services and simplify the funding stream to allow agencies to focus on assisting individuals in finding work
- Statewide Strategic Plan submitted
  - Each agency needs to produce a strategic plan that accounts for what metrics will be tracked this year for each program
  - VR's focus is how can we shorten the time for job candidates between becoming job ready and becoming employed
- Statewide VR Conference
  - Decision made to cancel this year's conference
  - Logistics wouldn't work for the previous plan to reschedule to October
  - Will overhaul what is presented at the conference to justify the time and money spent
  - VR conference will be held next spring, likely a one-day conference
- Iowa State Fair
  - Iowa Workforce Development has a large presence at the state fair
  - Booth located in the Varied Industries Building by the northwest doors, as well as the Mobile Unit right underneath the Sky Glider
  - Have swag and staff working from IWD and VR teams
  - Encourage attendees to stop by both locations

#### **LOCAL SCHOOL PLAN (LSP) TEMPLATE UPDATE – (Teeter, Jackson)**

- Had original LSP process in place for the last 5-6 years
- Feedback received required a complete overhaul of the template and process
- The work group consisted of several partners (VR, Department of Education, various school districts, Department for the Blind, ASK Resources and AEA)
- Was a lengthy process with various revisions
- New LSP was presented at the Teaching for Impact conference and good feedback was received
- Purpose is to support collaboration efforts at the local level, clarify roles, responsibilities and expectations of each of the partners at the table
- Plan focuses on the use of data-based decision-making
- Facilitates the implementation of effective transition services, without duplication
- Training modules were created, as well as resources and FAQs
- Teeter, Jackson walked through the new LSP template and shared the website location and resources

#### **UNIFIED STATE PLAN (McOmber, Ostendorf)**

- For a state to be eligible to receive federal funds, the Governor must submit a Unified State Plan every four years, with a modification at the two-year interval
- All four titles under the Workforce Investment Opportunity Act (WIOA) need to draft their part of the plan
- Solano to email VR's portion of the Unified State Plan to SRC members to provide feedback

- Castillo reminds SRC members their job as a council member is to review, analyze and advise

#### **CSNA UPDATE (Dr. Levine)**

- Met with the Outreach and Service Delivery Committees today to review findings
- Have pulled data and come up with themes that will guide the Executive Summary
- Learned of initiatives, recommendations from VR and council members
- Will draft Executive Summary with McOmber and Ostendorf over the next few months that will be provided at the SRC October meeting
- Key findings have not changed a lot, Executive Summary will have more actionable steps
- Data summary will be distributed to SRC members to provide feedback to Dr. Levine

#### **DISABILITY INNOVATION FUND (DIF) UPDATE (Hazen)**

- 14(c) Certificates
  - DOL initiated a push to eliminate 14(c) certificates approximately one and a half years ago
  - They have now pulled those efforts to eliminate 14(c) certificates because it was felt individuals with disabilities should have the option to be able to choose where they want to work
- Registered Apprenticeship (RA)
  - Moving forward with the Direct Support Professional RA
  - The first student starts next Friday
  - Partnered with Children and Families of Iowa in Des Moines to be the host site/sponsor
  - RA requires Mental Health First Aid Training; Hazen took the Trainer Course and can provide this in-house
  - Outreach is occurring, Communications Team created fliers and posting to social media sites
- DB101 website
  - Adult site set to launch in November 2025
  - Calculator is currently being tested
  - Images and pages associated with the website are being finalized
  - Student site to be launched in January 2026
- Iowa Blueprint for Change (IBC) Collective
  - Wrapped up six-month Walk the Walk Community of Practice series on Employment 1<sup>st</sup> present by the University of Massachusetts, Institute of Community Inclusion
  - Will resume regular Collective meetings every other month
  - Collective group to decide how to move forward, has been discussion on developing smaller committees
- Transition Pilot
  - Two pilots started last fall at Linn Mar and Waterloo community school districts

- In May and June, both providers pulled out of the project due to not profiting from the program
- Both schools are willing to continue moving forward and providing the services in-house
- Proposals currently being written by the two schools
- IPS Youth
  - Working on finalizing the funding structure
  - Two areas have volunteered to be involved in the project pilot

## **POLICY (McOmber, Ostendorf)**

### **IVRS Self-Employment Policy**

- Policy revisions are needed to put cost controls in place due to a poor fiscal forecast; VR continues to provide services that benefit job candidates
- Currently there are two ISE programs, Micro Enterprise and Full ISE
  - Micro Enterprise provides up to \$1,500 in Financial Assistance and up to \$1,500 in Technical Assistance
  - Full ISE provides up to \$10,000 in Financial Assistance and up to \$10,000 in Technical Assistance
- Policy changes include having only one ISE program with elimination of Financial Assistance and reducing Technical Assistance to a maximum of \$7,000 without an exception
- ISE counselors will provide technical assistance and guidance, as well as assist in finding funding streams to support the business start-up
- Regulations mandate providing Technical Assistance, Financial Assistance is not required
- See Miscellaneous Policy below for additional considerations for VR financial support

### **Confidentiality and Authority for Release of Information (ROI) Policy**

- Changes in state and federal laws required addition of language to the ROI form
- Updated policy to align with the information on the form, no major changes

### **Miscellaneous Policy**

- Covers several smaller policies, including service to family members
  - Any service VR can provide to a job candidate can be provided to a family member if it is needed for the job candidate to reach their employment goal
- Interpreter services portion updated due to the State obtaining a new vendor under a Master Agreement for these services (Lion Bridge)
- Other Services is a service category on the employment plan for all other services that do not fall within the main VR services
  - This includes assistance with purchasing initial stock, supplies, tools, and equipment
  - Related to the ISE program: this service category can be used to assist job candidates with purchasing needed items to start a business
  - The maximum dollar amount will increase from \$1,500 to \$2,000

- Council members encouraged to send feedback on policy changes to McOmber by August 16th

## **COMMITTEE REPORT/UPDATES**

### **Financial Overview (Haight)**

- Pre-ETS
  - FFY24 total is 144.22% of target
  - FFY25 total is 88.3% of target
- Closures
  - The FFY2025 Successful Closures as of June 30, 2025, is 1,154; this is 227 less than FFY2024 as of June 30, 2024
  - The FFY2025 Unsuccessful Closures as of June 30, 2025, is 1,396; this is 168 less than FFY2024 as of June 30, 2024
- Case Service Authorizations
  - The total dollar amount authorized for all case services in FFY2024 is \$13,078,460 and is 22% more than year FFY2023 or \$2,338,744 more than, June 30, 2024
  - The total dollar amount authorized for all case services in FFY2025 is \$9,502,993 and is 6% less than year FFY2024 or \$646,081 less than, June 30, 2024

### **Client Assistance Program (CAP) Update (Schneider)**

- CAP is a federally funded program that works with VR and offers job candidates an avenue for questions or concerns about rights and regulations and advocacy for navigating mediation with VR prior to appealing a VR decision
- CAP caseload is currently at 17, with three of those for Department for the Blind

## **OTHER BUSINESS**

- None

## **ADJOURNMENT**

Meeting was adjourned at 12:47 p.m.

The next SRC meeting is October 28, 2025.