



State of Rhode Island  
Department of Human Services, Office of Rehabilitation Services  
STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

*To work with the ORS assuring that all Rhode Islanders with disabilities are able to obtain and keep meaningful and satisfying employment.*



**SRC Meeting November 4, 2024**

**ZOOM**

**3:00 PM – 5:00 PM**

**Present Members:**

Chairpersons: Melissa Brusso, Educational Advocate for the [Paul V. Sherlock Center on Disabilities](#)

Nina Fiasconaro

Regina Connor, Chair, Governor's Advisory Council for The Blind, former Assistant Administrator, ORS

Dr. Judith Drew, PhD, CRC VocWorks

Liv Lozier, Legal Advocate, [Disability Rights Rhode Island](#)

Natalia Montoya, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor II (ORS)

Tracey Martins, CEO/President [AccessPoint RI](#)

Jay Mollo, Sr. Manager, Global Talent Acquisition Operations, Programs and Technology [International Game Technology PLC](#) (IGT)

Morna Murray, Executive Director, [Disability Rights Rhode Island](#)

Rena Rico, Clinician, [Eleanor Slater Hospital](#)

Nicole Rico Serrano, Project Director, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor for the [Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation](#)

[Vocational Rehabilitation Services](#)

Christine Yankee, Vice President of Program Services at [Goodwill Industries of Southern New England](#)

Office of Rehabilitation Services: Joseph Murphy, Associate Director, Karen Davis, Administrator - Vocational Rehabilitation, John Valentine, Strategic Planning Supervisor, Laurie DiOrio, Administrator RI Services for the Blind & Visually Impaired (DHS/ORS) Sharon DiPinto, Sr. Human Services Policy & Systems Specialist

Guests: Lynn Domenici, Transition Support Coordinator, [Rhode Island Parent Information Network](#) (RIPIN)

Sayaf Mireille, Executive Director [Ocean State Center for Independent Living](#) (OSCIL)

**1. Call to Order:**

- The meeting was called to order by Melissa Brusso
- A quorum was not required for this meeting.

**2. ORS Director's Update: Joe Murphy**

• **Personnel:**

- **Change in Requirements for ORS Counselors:** New requirements were implemented, allowing for the filling of all eight counselor positions. Two new hires were promoted from Rehabilitation Techs.
- **Training:** The department is developing curriculum and training for new hires. Dr. Drew will be assisting in training the new team members.
- **SVBI (Services for the Blind):** No new positions hired yet. The department is considering adding one more position to the SVBI team.
- **DDS Progress:** Disability Determination Services (DDS) has seen improvements in eligibility review accuracy and response times, ranking second in the country.

• **Libra System:**

- The system is still in progress, with about 75% effectiveness at this stage.

- Other states are transitioning into this system, which should lead to improvements as more states are involved.
- Other states using vocational case management systems have reported similar challenges.
- **CSAVR Conference:**
  - **AI Integration:** AI is being explored to improve system efficiencies, although Rhode Island is cautious about its use due to concerns about potential misuse.
  - **Funding Services for Growing Fields:** While VR can fund services for individuals entering high-growth industries, human oversight is still required for the process.
- **Corrective Action Plan:**
  - Eligibility processing times are being addressed through a new training program focused on rapid engagement for new clients. Once training is complete, the department will report to RSA.
- **Rebranding Efforts:**
  - The department is working to eliminate the term "rehabilitation" from its name.
  - New name proposals include "Employ Ability" and "RI Employability."
  - These changes will not affect DDS or Services for the Blind but are being made in coordination with the Department of Human Services.
  - A firm will be selected via the Master Price Agreement for this rebranding initiative.
- **Crown Plaza Employment Disability Event:** The department aims to host this event annually to highlight individuals with various disabilities and their employment achievements.
- **Public Awareness of ORS:**
  - There have been numerous inquiries about ORS, including what ORS is and who is eligible.
  - A more detailed FAQ page will be created to help answer these questions for educators, families, and the public.
  - The FAQ page will be more user-friendly, with easier navigation for both the website and schools.

### 3. CSNA Report (John Valentine):

- **Data Gathering Process:** The data gathering phase for targeted transition supported employment is nearing completion.
  - Focus groups include educators, parents, students, guardians, employers, vendors, and ORS staff.
  - Surveys will be closed soon, and the data will be shared for analysis.
  - **State Plan Update:** Once the data is reviewed, the state plan will require a full re-write, with publication scheduled for February 25.

### 4. Transition App and Outreach (Liv Lozier):

- **App Development:** The transition app is fully developed, and efforts are underway to translate it into Spanish.
- **Outreach & Training:** The next steps include training on how to use the app and deciding on which audiences will have access to it.
- The app will be a tool to help students advocate for themselves at transition IEP meetings.
- The app will include a QR code and instructional pages for downloading and completing tasks.
- **Web-Based Module:** A web-based version will also be available for those who prefer not to use the mobile app.
- **Timeline:** Meetings with developers at Disability Rights Kansas are scheduled, followed by translation work. The final rollout will depend on these steps.

5. **Chair's Report:**

• **Council Meetings:**

- The **January meeting** will be held in person, with a venue yet to be confirmed.
- Tracey and Jay have offered a location, and Nancy will follow up.
- The meeting time has been changed to 3:00 PM to accommodate post-survey analysis.

• **Annual Report:** The report is being worked on, with the estimated finish to be mid-December.

• **Membership & Recruitment:**

- Membership has declined, particularly after COVID-19, and efforts to rebuild it are ongoing.
- Nancy will resend recruitment information for new council members.
- The council still needs a **Co-Chair** for leadership.

• **Training & Development:**

- **Training Needs:** The council emphasized the importance of becoming well-versed in ORS and its programs so that members can educate others effectively. Melissa plans to speak with Judi regarding training needs, as she has experience in this area.
- **Small Committees for Training Events:** Small committees will be formed to leverage different areas of expertise to plan and execute training events.

6. **Correspondents** – There were none.

7. **Public Comments** – There were none.

8. **Adjournment** - The meeting adjourned at 5 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,  
*Nancy Baker*  
Nancy Baker, Staff, RISRC