

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

**Minutes October 7, 2008
4:00 P.M. – 5:20 P.M.**

**Office of Rehabilitation Services
40 Fountain Street
Providence, RI 02903**

Present from the Council: Dr. Kate McCarthy-Barnett, Rocco Bruno, Cynthia Cote, Susan Donovan, Linda Deschenes, Domenic DiOrio, Joe Ferreira, Gary Levine, Lucille Massemينو, Sandy Lupovitz, J. David Sienko, Juan Troncoso, Mary Wambach

Present from the agency: Steve Brunero, Laurie DiOrio, Ronald Racine

Public: Laura Jones

1. Call to Order – The Chair, J. David Sienko called the meeting to order at 4:00 P. M. He welcomed members to a new year. It was noted that N. Baker was absent, due to illness today. S. Donovan volunteered to take notes. An attendance sheet was passed out and attendees were asked to sign and initial.

During introductions it was noted that G. Levine expressed interest in joining the Employment committee this year.

2. Additions or deletions to the Agenda – none.

3. Approval of Minutes –the minutes were approved for the June 10, 2008 meeting.

Motion

J. Ferreira made a motion seconded by D. DiOrio and unanimously approved to accept the minutes form the June 10, 2008 meeting.

4. Chair's Report - J. David Sienko discussed and explained the work done over the summer months on behalf of the Council and Agency, particularly budget concerns. The Council co-authored a letter with the Rhode Island Statewide Independent Living Council and the Governor's Advisory Council for Blind in addition to completing the Op-ed piece started last year which was published in the Providence Business News, and mailed to all Rhode Island Legislators and various key Stakeholders. A public thank you to H. Weiss for his help in identifying various outlets of dissemination.

It is critical this year to stay connected with directors of all state agencies and stakeholder groups as the fiscal situation continues to worsen.

Currently, the Governor is committed to “RI Works” which could affect benefits for nine thousand (9,000) people with regards to long-term benefits. We believe this cadre will have difficulty coming off public assistance and the Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS) does not have the FTs to support the onslaught. The Council is committed to help facilitate positive effects during this transition; and presented our concerns involving the “RI Works” initiative and the future of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program in Rhode Island in a letter to Adelita Orefice, Deputy Secretary of the Office of Health and Human Services of Rhode Island. The letter written reinforced the need for additional support so ORS can serve the additional workload.

Comments from public hearings expressed dissatisfaction with services at netWORKri. The need for trained, qualified, and available staff should to be the focus of our advocacy, as we see increased referrals and reduced benefits.

M. Wambach noted what a beautiful state we have yet, a cultural ignorance when it comes to disabilities and communication.

D. Sienko noted our need to broaden our circle and what a great job the Nominating committee has done this past year in this area.

G. Levine asked if “RI Works” has provided a process or strategy for re-entry into the work force and if ORS was at the table for planning?

S. Brunero responded: No. ORS was not invited during the early stages of development of planning. ORS has written a “white paper” for the state and the Department of Labor and Training (DLT) to work specifically on this issue, which was signed into legislation on Oct. 1, 2008. ORS has already seen an increase of referrals since that date. The Department of Human Services (DHS) has since asked for a vocational rehabilitation counselor to join the planning group for their much-needed input.

D. Sienko explained the letter written reinforced the need for additional support so ORS can serve the additional workload.

L. Massemino asked if the Global Waiver would have an impact on ORS?

S. Brunero stated: not directly, but indirectly.

D. Sienko stated that any frozen position could be viewed by the state as a savings even though we may be sending back federal funds.

M. Wambach said she spoke with Representative Langevin and discussed how most funds go directly to employers, not the folks with disabilities.

D. Sienko noted that we need to get educated about “individual training accounts” and have a guest speaker present more on this to the Council.

J. Ferreira asked, how are folks with no education going to get into the work force? And he is afraid ORS will reach capacity. He noted ORS counselors are over burdened now and caseloads are too high.

D. Sienko agreed and emphasized our need to focus on how the Council is going to respond.

R. Bruno stated that the state is not taking into account the space they are paying for that once was covered by federal dollars.

M. Wambach mentioned the new federal law, “Heart X” which will allow Veteran benefits through the Americorps Program.

S. Lupovitz stated that we don’t pay enough attention to employers. He asked how can we network the Business Leadership Network (BLN) and the Employment committee with various employment focused groups and advisories? (Follow-through with this.)

National Council for State Rehabilitation Councils - This year we joined efforts with other State Rehabilitation Councils to form the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC). It is our sincere belief that this organization will enhance the employment opportunities of persons with disabilities through a more unified national voice.

SRC Facts Sheet - was passed out and reviewed.

SRC Meeting Schedule – was passed out and reviewed.

5. Nominating and Leadership Development (Appointments) D. DiOrio and L. Massimino

The Nomination and Leadership committee interviewed the following candidates over the summer: Sandy Lupovitz, Kelley A Conti, Cynthia M. Cote, Roger A. Iannetta Sr. We ask the Council to move to recommend the appointments of these new members to the Governor.

The Nomination and Leadership committee recommends the appointment of Joan Vendetti who will be replacing Susan Donovan.

The Nomination and Leadership committee recommends the reappointment of Lucille Massemino, Dr. Judith Drew, Jeanne M. Giroux.

The Nomination and Leadership committee recommends the following Slate of Officers for the ballot at the November 19, 2008 meeting.

Chair – J. David Sienko

Vice-chair – Dr. Kate McCarthy-Barnett

Secretary - Catherine Sansonetti

Any other members wishing to nominate someone may do so at the meeting in November.

Motion

D. DiOrio made a motion seconded by S. Donavon and unanimously accepted, to approve the recommendation for the Slate of Officers to be placed on the ballot at the Annual SRC meeting in November and all appointments/reappointments for consideration by the Governor.

Rick Costa has had to step down from the Council. He represented the Rhode Island Statewide Independent Living Council. He has informed us that they will be picking a replacement soon.

And a very sad note for the Council and all that knew him, Edward Costa passed away. His passing is a huge loss not only to the SRC but also for all of Rhode Island. He will be missed.

6. ORS Director's Report / Updated on the Vocational Rehabilitation Program - S. Brunero:

National News - On 9/25/08 ADA Act was passed which broadened parameters for individuals with disabilities.

On 10/1/08 Pres. President Bush signed Vocational Rehabilitation Workforce Investment Act - level funded. Note funding for defense and veterans was not level funded.

Health and Mental Health Act approved through "Bailout". Representative Kennedy spearheaded this support for individuals with mental health needs.

October is National Disabilities Month. Job Fair held at Marriott, good coverage by channel 10. S. Brunero spoke to the media regarding this event

State Budge – The State is possibly looking at a one hundred (100) million dollar deficit.

Last June ORS had six (6) counselor vacancies, since then three (3) counselors were hired. But now we have eleven (11) counselor vacancies and eight (8) support staff positions have been reduced to one (1). ORS has lost revenue-creating positions. We have been advocating for personnel positions.

Over twenty three hundred (2,300) new applications came in this year. Seven hundred and fifty (750) placed in employment. But with the cutbacks there are concerns of losing Federal funds that have been created for working with partners.

A grant for 8 TA centers was received by UMASS. ORS may need to limit eligibility by using "Order of Selection".

Needs Assessment - K. Grygiel is supporting the 2008 Needs Assessment and handling various focus groups for stakeholders. She will work with the State Plan committee. An RFP has gone out for a new case management system and has had preliminary approval by the State so that state workers would have the ability to work remotely and be less reliant on support staff. We have been training current staff on computer use and other skills if they have the need.

Ed Barlow is presenting on Nov. 7th to the Business Advisory Council at Save the Bay.

D. Sienko suggested the Council get some information and do research on "Order of Selection".

7. Committee Work – The committees broke into groups to deliberate on their summer work and then reported back to the Council.

Employment - Reviewed history of committee with new folks. A suggestion to review the Agency's Employment Plan (*Monica Dzialo*, ORS Liaison) S. Bruner updated group on WIA work.

Leadership - Importance of diversifying. S. Mars and Dr. K. McCarthy-Barnett will be included as speakers. Follow up through Executive committee.

State Plan – Comprehensive Needs – C. Sansonetti agreed to chair when J. Ferreira steps down. K. Grygiel will continue as the ORS Liaison for this committee.

Transportation – No report.

D. Sienko asked the Chairs to update their plans and schedule their meetings.

5. Public Comment - None

6. Adjournment – The meeting was adjourned at 6:00 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,
Susan Donovan, Chair
Employment Committee