

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

**Meeting Minutes February 10, 2009
4:00 P.M. – 5:30 P.M.**

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

Present from the Council: Dr. Kate McCarthy-Barnett, Rocco Bruno, Stephen Brunero, Kelley Conti, Cynthia Cote, Linda Deschenes, Roger Iannetta, Anne LeClerc, Anna Liebenow, Sandy Lupovitz, Silvermoon Mars, Lucille Massemimo, Vincent Rossi, J. David Sienko, Juan Troncoso, Joan Vendetti, Mary Wambach

Present from the VR Agency: Laurie DiOrio, Kathleen Grygiel, and Ronald Racine

Cart Reporter: Shelley Deming

- 1. Call to Order** – The Chair called the meeting to order at 4:00 P.M. Introductions of membership followed.
- 2. Additions/Deletions to Agenda** – there were none.
- 3. Approval of Minutes** – The minutes were approved for the November 18, 2008 meeting.

Motion

L. Deschenes made a motion seconded by K. McCarthy-Barnett and unanimously approved to accept the minutes from the November 18, 2008 meeting.

4. Chair's Report - D. Sienko

Advocacy - Not a lot happened during the holiday season but we did get some nice letters back from our legislators, and from The Department of Labor and Training ([DLT](#)). We had written letters with our concerns about budget cuts and vacancies. We really focused our attention in these letters advocating for the agency's ability to perform and meet its targeted goals. It is a mostly funded Federal program and we were very concerned about the State cutting back without making it clear just how much of the budget was Federal. We really tried to be diplomatic with our concerns in the letters.

The letters we got were very nice, and clearly acknowledged our push with our Op-ed piece to the Providence Business News, so it is nice to think we might have had an effect on the new hiring of positions at The Office of Rehabilitation Services ([ORS](#)). There is a lag time with advocacy results but at least we have some movement in a positive direction. I want to thank the Council for giving me the authority to get these letters out and in essence lobby to get these resources back into ORS. I think it did have a positive effect.

Committee Membership - We spoke at the Executive meeting about gravitating to Co-chairs on the committees. When two people are working together it might help to balance out the job, and split up the responsibility of the work so it is not on one person. We brought this proposal to the committees and got commitments from K. McCarthy-Barnett and C. Sansonetti to Co-chair the State Plan, Policy & Quality Assurance committee. On the Transportation committee, J. Drew is going to get in touch with A. LeClerc; she would like to continue to work as Co-chair on this committee with Anne. The only committee we have some uncertainty about is Employment. S. Brunero is on that committee so he agreed to talk to them today and see where we stand for leadership.

National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils ([NCSRC](#)) - Last year we were asked to join this national coalition, we agreed with some suggesting to their By-laws. For the first few months things were slow but the listserv is really moving along now, there is a lot of valuable information on the web site. Here is the link for the [listserv](#), if you wish to be on it and there are links in the minutes from November 2008. Or you can contact N. Baker and she can assist you with signing up. She and I will continue to disseminate any information coming from the list we think is pertinent, that way you don't get all of the mail coming into your boxes.

Query of Membership - If there are members who really can't continue to do this please let us know. This is the time of year we really get our membership committee working on recruiting new members so we want to have an accurate count of membership. So please let N. Baker and myself know if you cannot continue on the Council.

Director of the Office of Rehabilitation Services - Stephen Brunero has been promoted to the Director of the Office of Rehabilitation Services. He had been the Acting Director at ORS since Raymond Carroll's retirement. The Council wishes to congratulate him on the well-deserved promotion and we look forward to continuing our partnership with his agency.

5. ORS Director's Report - S. Brunero

Thank you all for coming and welcome to our new members. A lot has happened even since our last week's executive meeting.

[American Recovery and Reinvestment Plan](#) – The Plan passed the Senate today; all the Democrats voted for it and three (3) Republicans. Some Republicans and conservative Democrats tried to change some of the funding. The House and Senate will now work in committee to finish it up and get it over to the President for signing. Some of the highlights:

- \$3.95 billion for job training
- \$500 million for vocational training for the persons with disabilities
- \$4.2 billion to provide an additional Supplemental Security Income and Social Security Disability Insurance payment in 2009
- \$500 million to update the computer center at the [Social Security Administration](#)
- \$140 million for [independent living](#) communities
- \$12.2 billion for [IDEA special education](#)

State Budget and Personnel - Tonight the Governor will give his [State of the State Address](#). There have been freezes on hiring and we have lost thirty-three (33 %) percent of our staff from lay offs and retirements. However, because in part of the efforts from the SRC, the Governor decided to allow our agency whose levels of federal funding are seventy-five (75%) percent to start rehiring. We are the only state agency that has the approval to fill all of our vacancies. This is good news that we are able to hire. It is actually part of the Governor's Stimulus Package. We are also hiring more bilingual staff. This is going to better assist us in reaching more of the underserved populations. We have six (6) students from Salve and Assumption working with us in practicum and intern positions. At our spring breakfast meeting we'll probably have them come and give an assist in our presentation. It does a lot for morale when new people come on board; overall things are looking up with personnel.

Department of Health and Human Services - The executive office of the Department of Health and Human Services has undergone a change. Gary Alexander will be the Secretary of Health and Human Services now that Adelita Orefice is gone from that office.

The New Year's Eve Flood - The leak was on the sixth floor and because it happened over the holiday, it was not discovered for thirty (30) hours. Many were out due to the Holiday but after learning about it early on Friday we went in to see what had happened and what we needed to do. It was far worse than we first realized. We

have been working to try and get the lost items recovered. Fortunately ORS had a Business Continuity Plan in place from Y2K that set up guidelines for redeploying our staff and enabled us to work through this crisis. DOA was great, helping us out with use of laptops so we could hit the ground running. We were able to do things remotely from the [netWORKri](#) One-stops. Our administrative team including K. Grygiel, R. Racine, J. Microulis and L. DiOrio along with our entire staff did a fantastic job keeping things going.

Order of Selection - We had been talking about instituting the Order of Selection, which is put into place when a state has a lack of resources and selects individuals with the most significant disabilities first for the provision of vocational rehabilitation services. Most states are on or going on Order of Selection however, at this time, we will not be.

Assistive Technology Access Partnership (ATAP) State Plan - K. Grygiel has completed and sent the Plan out to DHS Director, Gary Alexander for his approval.

2010 State Plan - We are close to finishing our first draft of this.

2008 ORS/SRC Annual Report - The final draft is done and once we have it put together, in order to try and save money and conserve paper, it will be emailed to the membership.

New Software System for Case Management - We are in the process of getting a new case management system for our staff that is web based, to connect our system with counselors in the field. This will modernize how we do business and can be expected to provide a more comprehensive and efficient service delivery process.

Accessing Wage Data - We amended our Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with DLT which allows us to access wage data to follow and track cases. It will also allow us to get better reimbursement with programs like Social Security.

We opened up a new [Coffee Plus at the Veteran's Home in Bristol](#) - "On January 15, 2008, the Rhode Island Division of Veterans Affairs and the Office of Rehabilitation Services, Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired hosted a ceremonial ribbon cutting to showcase the newest Coffee Plus enterprise at the Rhode Island Veterans Home in Bristol..."

Comprehensive Needs Assessment (CNA) - This year the assessment may not be as broad as it was in 2005 and there may not be data sources as readily available. I do not think our goals are far off from the needs. We are working hard on this with the State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance committee it continued to develop the CNA.

6. Committee Reports

Nominations and Leadership Development - L. Massemينو

Co-chairs - L. Massemينو and J. Troncoso are the Co-chairs. (*Congratulations!*)

Speaker Program - We are working on getting speakers for the March and June meetings. We would like them to give five (5) to ten (10) minute presentations towards the end of the Council meeting.

Nominations - We are focusing on recruiting more people with disabilities and minorities. We would appreciate any recommendations from the membership for speakers or nominations for the council.

Transportation - A. LeClerc

Co-chairs - J. Drew and A. LeClerc are the Co-chairs. (*Congratulations!*)

We are at a point of redefining our committee goals.

Comprehensive Needs Assessment - We would like to suggest some questions for the assessment directed specifically at transporting.

Advocacy - We will most likely start to look to do more active advocacy efforts as we review the survey results.

Additional Information Gathering - We would like the committee to look at other information gathering efforts. RIPTA got some money from the new Freedom Initiative to study where money is being spent on transportation, and what are the gaps. There is a lot of money being spent on transportation but it isn't really qualified as transportation. North Carolina did this study and found sixty (60) million in saving. RIPTA put in for the money to do this but we need help getting it off the ground.

State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance - K. McCarthy-Barnett

Co-chairs - C. Sansonetti and K. McCarthy-Barnett are the Co-chairs. (*Congratulations!*)

State Plan - Today was the first internal state plan meeting at ORS and a timeline was development, which will be brought to our next committee meeting February 26th. Due to the timeline this year we are looking at a four (4) week period for our committee to give feedback; this should be sufficient.

Comprehensive Needs Assessment – We will be meeting on February 26th. This meeting is to work on the implementation of (1) the Customer Satisfaction Survey part of our Comprehensive Needs Assessment and (2) the Minority Vendor development aspect of our Comprehensive Needs Assessment.

Employment - S. Brunero

Co-chairs - D. DiOrio and S. Lupovitz are the Co-chairs. (*Congratulations!*)

Silvermoon Mars is another welcome addition to this committee.

S. Lupovitz is an employer and serves on a number of other committee that work with people with disabilities. We talked about how busy the business community is these days and how crucial it is to have productive meetings when they do come about to get things done. It isn't always the quantity of meetings but quality. Our attendance is important at events like business summits. It is key that we be cognizant of the needs of the employment community.

ORS Stats - Last year ORS had seven hundred and fifty (750) closures that contributed approximately eleven (11) million dollars into the Rhode Island economy.

Since 2003 we have had:

- A thirty-three (33%) percent increase in applications.
- A twenty-four (24%) percent increase in successful outcomes.
- A forty seven (47%) percent increase in IPEs.

8. Public Comment - None

9. Adjournment – The meeting was adjourned at 5:30 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,



Nancy L. Baker, Staff
State Rehabilitation Council