



STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES (DHS)

COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND & VISUALLY IMPAIRED (CBVI)

## STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL (SRC)

### MEETING MINUTES

OCTOBER 3, 2025 - HYBRID MEETING

130 LIVINGSTON AVE | NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ 08901

**Members Present:** Donald Campbell, Vito DeSantis, Breeanna Douglas, Alice Eaddy, James Good, Steven McCoy, Gwen Orlowski, Nicole Pratt, Sarah Spitzmiller, Wanda Williford, Joseph Zesski

**Absent:** Ronda Banks, Felicia Hopson, Sioban Leahy, Linda Melendez, John O'Connell, Gary Robinson, Lauren Weishaar, Keith White

**Ex Officio Present:** Dawn Corbett, Dr. Bernice Davis, Charles Pat McKenna

**CBVI Staff:** Esther Lavarin, Bryan McClain

**Members of Public Present:** Brigid Griffin (GWU), Kevin Harris, Dena Hazen – ASL, Rhea Hood, Mary-Anne Rangone (Bestworks), Craig Ridgeway – ASL, John Walsh (GWU)

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Vito DeSantis, SRC Chairperson, welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 9:38am. He then discussed the Blindness Awareness Month Event held yesterday by CBVI at the Cheesequake State Park and congratulated everyone that was involved with organizing the event because it was a very nice event. Dr. Davis added that the targeted audience for the outreach portion of the event is for people who are 55 years of age and older and asked the SRC if they have organizations or places that they recommend for CBVI to visit or invite, please send those recommendations to Pat McKenna.

Vito continued by acknowledging Pam Gaston who was not at the event. But for many, many, years, 50 years, was involved with the agency and really in a lot of ways was the backbone, and Pam will be missed. Pam did retire but unfortunately soon after her retirement, she passed away. That is a loss that the agency and the blindness community will feel for a long time.

Vito announced that the meeting was being held in compliance with the New Jersey Open Public Meeting Act, NJSA 10:4-6.

After attendance and introductions, Vito reminded all those participating on Zoom to keep themselves muted until speaking and for all those participating to announce themselves prior to speaking. Vito reminded members of the public that they are welcome to be at the meeting and if they have questions concerning the meeting, they can wait until after the meeting or send an email to Charles Pat McKenna at [Charles.McKenna@dhs.nj.gov](mailto:Charles.McKenna@dhs.nj.gov).

Vito also asked Gwen if she has received her appointment. She was not aware of it, and Dr. Davis acknowledged not receiving any appointment for Gwen. Pat made a note to follow up on that.

### Approval of Meeting Minutes:

The minutes of John 6, 2025 were acknowledged as received and reviewed. Vito asked if there were any comments about them, or corrections to be made. There were none. Alice motioned to accept the minutes as sent. Nicole seconded the motion. All were in favor. These minutes will be put into the permanent record of the SRC.

The next SRC meeting will be Friday December 5, 2025.

### New Business:

#### Selection of Business Relations Committee Chair

Vito transitioned to the Business Relations Committee, and its need for a Chairperson. Vito mentioned that Steve volunteered to serve as the Committee Chair and confirmed that he is still available to fulfill the role. Pat will arrange a meeting with Steve, Vito, Nicole, and Jay Mills, Supervisor of CBVI's Business Relations Unit.

#### George Washington University Presentation on CSNA

John Walsh and Brigid Griffin both work at the Center for Rehabilitation Counseling Research and Education with the George Washington University (GWU), and are happy to work with CBVI. They presented an overview of the statutory requirements of a Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment and reviewed their project plan with the SRC to get feedback. The project Plan will be appended to the end of these meeting minutes for further review.

The following is a summary of the Project Timeline:

1. Phase 1: CSNA Project Plan –plan will be finalized on November 21<sup>st</sup> and a final review of the project plan will be at the next SRC meeting on December 5<sup>th</sup>.

2. Phase 2: Survey Development – Survey questions will be sent for review on November 21<sup>st</sup> and seek feedback at the next SRC meeting on December 5<sup>th</sup>. Surveys would be finalized January 16<sup>th</sup> 2026, launched February 9<sup>th</sup>, and closed on March 9<sup>th</sup>.
3. Phase 3: Focus Groups – Initial draft of discussion format and questions submitted on November 21<sup>st</sup> and seek feedback at the next SRC meeting on December 5<sup>th</sup>. Discussion format and questions will be finalized January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2026, and all focus groups completed by April 24<sup>th</sup>. Analysis report to be submitted by May 29<sup>th</sup>.
4. Phase 4: Data Analysis – Data analysis plan to be finalized by January 12<sup>th</sup>, 2026 and the data analysis will be completed by May 29<sup>th</sup>. Draft report submitted for feedback on June 26<sup>th</sup>, and integrate the findings into a final report by July 10<sup>th</sup>.
5. Phase 5: Final Report – First draft submitted to DSU & SRC for feedback on July 17<sup>th</sup>. Second draft submitted to DSU & SRC on August 12<sup>th</sup>. Deliver final CSNA Report on August 28<sup>th</sup>.

#### Additional Comments:

- In view of the timeline the SRC will need to meet to discuss the points in between time.
  - John Walsh noted that they are flexible and can make adjustments to some of the timelines, to make sure the format works. Brigid commented in agreement and hopes that this can be as collaborative as possible.
- Nicole noted that it can be a challenge getting the number of people needed for each focus group, and asked if less people come, will we just go with the number that shows up or will CBVI do another focus group to reach the number of constituents? If another focus group is needed it could affect the timeline.
  - Pat commented that he is not worried about the timing of the focus groups, and will be scheduling them between January through February and will continue to schedule them during this time period until there is enough feedback for the data analysis. Pat also noted that his schedule is open during this time period allowing him to be able to schedule additional groups.

#### Questions submitted by a member of the public

Vito acknowledged the questions submitted by a member of the public, 21 questions about the Federal Government Shutdown that just happened, and its effect on CBVI and what plans there may be. He acknowledged that it isn't possible to address all questions at this point but he has asked Dr. Davis to address the shutdown in her Report. He then introduced Dr. Davis for the Executive Director's Report.

## **Dr. Bernice Davis – Executive Director’s Report**

Dr. Davis began by discussing the Federal Government Shutdown which is now in its third day and spoke to the effect on CBVI. All services will continue and there is no seeming effect to CBVI services. The grant funding from the Federal Government was already received and is still available for draw down. Dr. Davis anticipates no disruption of services. Regarding the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), she expects everything to continue as usual. Regarding DHS, they have been in contact with all division heads and relaying intimate details regarding the shutdown. In general, monies that were already made available, are available. DHS is very involved and making sure that all divisions are well supported.

Following this briefing, Vito mentioned to Rhea Hood, who was in attendance in person, that if she has any additional questions after hearing what was just reported, he will make himself available after the meeting. She was in agreement to that.

### **Agency Updates**

There is a new Education Supervisor of the Northern Regional Office, Erin Regan, will start October 6<sup>th</sup>. This Supervisor role has been vacant since Jessica Cubberley, the previous supervisor, was promoted to the Education Director role, following the retirement of the former Director.

Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVI) and Orientation and Mobility (O&M) shortages are still a priority. Dr. Davis then put the request before the SRC that if any know of persons who are TVIs or O&M Instructors to please send them to CBVI. Currently, the O&M needs are being supplemented with third party vendors. CBVI has 5 vacancies for TVIs, and 2 candidates are good potentials which is good. Retirements from TVIs have stopped, so there is no expectation of further vacancies.

### **Conferences**

Dr. Davis noted that the months of September and October are very busy months for her. She enjoyed attending the New Jersey Council of the Blind (NJCB) Annual Convention, held virtually. DHS Deputy Commissioner Kaylee McGuire also attended and presented updates on DHS and CBVI.

Randolph Sheppard has been taking up a lot of attention from Dr. Davis. In some states, they would say that Randolph Sheppard has come under assault, when it comes to the priority stipulated in the Randolph Sheppard Act. Some military sites have not been honoring the priority, or understanding the priority given to the Blind Vendors. There is a Business Leadership And Superior Training (BLAST) Conference, held in Atlantic City, NJ on October 7-9. Dr. Davis will

be attending one of the days and presenting. There is going to be a lot of focus on the Randolph Sheppard Act, as they are trying to create a multistate arbitration, with a minimum of 14-15 states to sign on. CBVI is in communication with the legal department to have this idea assessed and approved.

National Federation of the Blind (NFB) of New Jersey, is having their 49<sup>th</sup> Annual State Conference coming up October 24-26, The theme is We Are The Champions. Dr. Davis will be speaking at the conference on Friday October 24.

The National Council of State Agencies of the Blind (NCSAB), of which Dr. Davis is an Executive Committee member, will be holding their annual conference on November 5-7, and a lot of focus will also be on the Randolph Sheppard program. Dr. Davis expressed thanks and appreciation to Pat, Deacon Truesdale, and the BENJ Field Reps for their creativity in finding locations to expand CBVI's Randolph Sheppard program in NJ.

One of the things that was done at the BAM event was to read a few of the letters that was sent by consumers expressing appreciation to the staff.

Dr. Davis then opened for Questions.

- Steve McCoy, didn't have a question, but wanted to mention that he too will be attending the Access New Jersey Conference. He won the award for Outstanding Corporate Partner, and will be recognized at the conference. If anyone else will be there, he invited them to stop and say hello, and take photos with him because it would be a great representation for the SRC.

### **Pat McKenna - Assistant Division Director's Report**

#### **Agency Updates:**

As reported on previously, well underway with working on the CSNA process and assembling the SRC annual report. On Monday October 6<sup>th</sup> will be the next VRC Quarterly Meeting. Bestwork Industries and Community Health Law Project (CHLP) will be presenters at this meeting. October 26 will be the next Senior Hands-On Retreat Experience (SHORE), which is for individuals who are 55 years of age and older and is focused on Independent Living Skills such as orientation and mobility, adaptive technology, and adjustments to vision loss are a few of the aspects of the experience which will be taking place at the Resorts Casino in Atlantic City.

Questions regarding the VRC Quarterly Meeting were posed:

- Vito asked Pat if he thought there would be a need for the VRC's to be updated on the role of the SRC? Pat said he will add it to the suggestions list and present it to them. Vito asked Dawn, who is the SRC's VR Counselor, if she thought it would be a good idea to hear about the SRC, its role, and purpose. Dawn answered that she thinks it would be a good idea since most do not know what the SRC is.
- Gwen also mentioned that since CHLP is speaking, that perhaps it would be a good idea for Disability Rights New Jersey (DRNJ) to speak at one of the VRC Quarterly Meetings and provide an overview of what DRNJ does, since it is more than the Client Assistance Program (CAP).
- Don also mentioned that if Pat thought there would be value for a presentation on Centers for Independent Living (CIL), that he would be happy to do so.
- Dawn again commented, indicating that she thought it would be a good idea because there are a lot of new staff that don't know about CILs and also agrees with DRNJ presenting as she thought they only do CAP.

#### Vocational Rehabilitation Programs:

The Fellowship Program is a collaborative program between ILOB and Transition students presently have 22 participants with half from each group. The program is administered by our partners VLANJ. The get togethers are either virtual or in person and the most recent one was done on September 26. Both groups work together on activities of daily living, mentoring on items such as O&M, best practices for work readiness, and more. It will conclude for the year in the next two months, and expectations are for it to continue into 2026.

The EDGE Program continues to be administered by ARC of Ocean presently with 104 referrals – 61 in EDGE1 and 43 in EDGE2. The year began on September 13<sup>th</sup> with an event at the Lucky Strike Bowling Alley.

CBVI will soon be taking referrals for a new transition program for college students. A weekend retreat experience focused on advocacy called the Promoting Academic and Student Success (PASS) Program.

LIFE101 took place last July and had a record setting 14 students. This is a two-week residential program that took place at the JKTC and work on orientation & mobility, independent living, activities of daily living, and enjoy fun events that will put those learned skills to use, such as going to a movie theater and going to the Point Pleasant Boardwalk.

The summer programs that have been running for the past few years have been administered by The College of New Jersey (TCNJ) but the contract has ended on September 30. Esther, VR Coordinator, is working on crafting the vision for what the summer programs will look like in the future and requires putting out a Request for Proposal (RFP) for the next agency that will administer those programs.

#### Business Enterprises of New Jersey (BENJ):

2025 has turned a critical corner and now increased sales numbers and new locations have opened. There are also some breakthroughs in conversations with community colleges and the potential for BENJ vending locations in those settings.

#### Business Relations Unit (BRU):

The BRU will be having a virtual Career Fair later this month, and attendees would be able to switch between breakout rooms to engage in the potential employers that interest them the most.

#### Joseph Kohn Training Center (JKTC)

JKTC is currently averaging 12-14 residents at a time, and Pat is hopeful of increasing that average to 15-16 in the next few months. October 23 is the next JKTC Family Day, an opportunity for an attending resident to bring a family member or friend to the center so that they can see the work and impact that the JKTC makes in the lives of those that attend. Pat is continuing to work with Joy to identify the areas in the policies and curriculum to see where enhancements can be made to improve the overall experience at JKTC.

Pat then opened for questions.

- Vito asked regarding the Business Relations Unit, if there was a possibility for Steve McCoy, Nicole Pratt, and Vito could meet with Jay Mills before the Virtual Career Fair.
  - Pat will reach out to his assistant, to arrange for the meeting.

#### **Esther Lavarin – VR Coordinator’s Report**

##### Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Updates:

Esther began her report noting that she has been reviewing the State Plan since modifications are due in March 2026. One area of change taking place is around language. There is an upcoming benefits counseling training for the VRCs on October 24 and this will clarify which consumers will be able to receive paid benefits counseling. Family Resource Network (FRN) and Goodwill will be there to discuss benefits counseling opportunities they have for CBVI consumers.

The transition staff is working on referrals for EDGE and for the upcoming PASS program. College counselors are continuing to authorize costs for college tuition, and room & board. In October, EDGE's monthly Tech Talk will be focusing on Microsoft Word, teaching students shortcuts, formatting, and automatic tasks. There will also be a guest presenter at a workshop this month called Bold, Blind, Beauty - Steven McCoy, who will focus on confidence and self-advocacy. Students will learn grooming and practical makeup skills.

The last in-person meeting for the Fellowship program was on September 26 at which new classes were presented on Sound Healing and Essential Oil Healing, as well as online shopping, finances, and budgeting.

The BRU continues community outreach with employers. There are 170+ agency contacts and they are continuing to develop and maintain these relationships.

For the summer programs, there were 22 students for the final programs with TCNJ and the Request For Proposal (RFP) has been put out for bids.

Esther then opened for questions. There were none.

### **Old Business:**

#### **Client Assistance Program (CAP) Report by Disability Rights New Jersey (DRNJ):**

Gwen noted that in the absence of a continuing resolution by the Federal Government, the work is being funded through the 2025 monies received. In mid to late August DRNJ stopped taking on new CAP cases for the remainder of 2025 because of fiscal concerns, spending through the monies so fast and perhaps would not make it through to the end of 2025, also because of losing a few staff members that work on CAP cases. As of October 1, CAP is reopened again for more than phone consultation, but if the shutdown lasts for more than 2.5 months, the CAP would need to be stopped again as they would expect to run out of the carryover funds by that point.

Gwen then paused for questions.

- Vito asked if DRNJ receives State funding, and Gwen answered that they do not for the CAP program, but across the agency they do. Their Assistive Technology Advocacy Center (ATAC) is the designated implementing agency, but the State of NJ is the lead agency and so Federal monies pass through them to DRNJ minus a 10% administrative deduction.

The CAP Report was submitted for inclusion with the minutes by Gwen Orlowski, Executive Director of DRNJ and highlights were presented to the SRC. The third quarter report dealt with DVRS but no CBVI cases. The full report will be appended to the end of these meeting minutes.



## **Committee Reports:**

- Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) – Chaired by Vito DeSantis
  - Vito encouraged the SRC, if available, to sit in on the focus groups for the CSNA.
- Business Engagement Committee – Chaired by Steve McCoy
  - Steve is now the Chair and will meet with the committee in the upcoming weeks.
- Policy and Procedures – Chaired by Lauren Weishaar
  - Joe Zesski mentioned receiving documents from Lauren and providing feedback, which was also sent to Pat. But no further updates on the committee.
  - Nicole mentioned she does not have any updates as well.
- Quality Assurance Committee – Chaired by Gary Robinson
  - Gary was not in attendance and an update was not provided.
- SRC Annual Report Committee – Chaired by Breeanna Douglas
  - Breeanna reported that the committee had 2 meetings since the June SRC meeting. They met in August and early last week; received 24 success stories and divided them amongst the committee, to be reviewed and selections made by Thursday October 8. After that, stories will be edited and polished by the end of the month.
  - Vito acknowledged needing to submit the Chair of the SRC letter for the report, and asked what format the report be made available for the general consumer.

## **Member Updates:**

Members were called upon to provide updates, if any, to the SRC.

- Linda Melendez – NFB, sent updates via email:
  - **National Federation of the Blind of New Jersey 49th Annual State Convention**  
The National Federation of the Blind of New Jersey State Convention is the largest gathering of blind people in the state. It is the premier event for training, support, and information for the blind community. It also serves as a governing body, democratically electing our leadership and establishing each year's organizational priorities.
  - Dates: Thursday, October 23 through Sunday, October 26, 2025  
Theme: Live the Life You Want; Building Champions  
Location: APA Hotel Woodbridge, formerly known as the Hilton  
120 Wood Avenue South Iselin, NJ 08830
    - The hotel is accessible by NJ Transit Access Link.
    - We will be live-streaming portions of the convention that will be recorded for archival purposes on the website. Pre-registration closes on Friday October 10

- **Note:** The agenda will be finalized, distributed, and posted on the state website in the next few days. Yes, the agenda will be available on NFB-NEWSLINE® too!
  - Please visit [www.nfbnj.org](http://www.nfbnj.org) for additional information
- **NFB Virtual Career Fair**
  - October 28, 2025, 1:00 – 4:00 pm Eastern via Zoom
  - You may register as a jobseeker or an employer. This event is free of charge for jobseekers.
  - [Career Fair – Jobseeker Registration](#) | [Career Fair – Employer Registration](#)
- Don Campbell – SILC, The Federal Shutdown is on the mind as it is affecting some of the federal funding and slowing down some of the operating contracts through DVRS and some Pre-ETS contracts. The centers that are strictly funded Federally were appropriated a few weeks ago so they are not affected as much. They were able to successfully restore some of the state funding that was removed at the beginning of the budget year through advocacy. The State Independent Living Center (SILC) has fully approved members and are fully functioning. Don also encouraged all to use their Center for Independent Living (CIL), a good resource for all who have a disability and it doesn't conflict with any other services.
- Wanda Williford – NJCB, gave an update regarding the recent conference. She thanked Dr. Davis, Pat, and DC McGuire for attending the NJCB State Conference held virtually. There were 11 speakers presenting on a variety of topics and resources, which was enjoyed by all. Another convention is planned for next year, hopefully in a hybrid format.
- Nicole Pratt – SPAN, gave updates regarding the Parent Center for NJ. Regarding grants, notice was received in August that it has 5 years of funding. Notification from RSA was received last week that they were refunded for the Real and Raised grants concerning the work they do with DVRS. Nicole is working with the DIF Grant helping to educate parents on services through VR, a collaboration with DOE, DVRS, and SPAN. The Parent Center for NJ is the National Technical Assistance Center (NTAC) for Parent Centers and finally received the letter of agreement for funding though noting monies could be withdrawn at any time. The annual fundraiser was on September 26 with 80 in attendees, the Attorney General was honored, and the SPAN conference on September 27 with over 200 attendees.
- Sarah Schiffelbein - DOE, gave a few updates on the New Jersey's Pathways to Post Secondary Success project, (the DIF Grant through RSA that Nicole was speaking of). Year 3 of the 5-year grant was just started as of October 1. The Summer Transition Academy took place on June 26 and 27 with 40 attendees. Attendees included representatives from DOE, CBVI, DDD, DVRS, SPAN, DAWN, CIL, The Boggs Center, and the 3 LEAs being worked with. This was 2 days of learning and collaboration on Transition 101 basics, done through workshops. The Transition Hub website is continuing to be worked on by the website workgroup that meets monthly on Mondays. This is to be a great resource for families, students, and professionals. The website is a collaboration between all of the partners to be sure that no matter where someone is in the transition process, they will be able to go on this

website to find what they need to do, where they need to go, and who they can connect with. The website is to be rolled out in 3 phases. Phase 1 will be informational and look like a standard government website and launched in the winter or spring. Phases 2 and 3 will lean on DAWN, CIL, and SPAN as they incorporate the youth voice through videos and different trainings. This year they will start working with a 4<sup>th</sup> LEA, the Patterson school district, and next year they hope to add more.

- Joe Zesski, ADA – mentioned an item of note for those who use service dogs that the Department of Justice (DOJ) in September has sued Uber for refusal of services to many riders based on the fact that they had a service dog or collapsible wheel chair. There is an ADA title 3 case that will be proceeding against Uber and is in process. With the Federal Government shutdown, the avenues for filing ADA complaints through the Federal Government are not available, but the ADA centers including the Northeast center is available for technical assistance as their funding came through before the pause.
- Gwen Orlowski, DRNJ – Tuesday October 7 is the ATAC Conference at TCNJ.

### **Announcements:**

No additional announcements made.

### **Adjournment:**

Nicole motioned to adjourn the meeting. Joe seconded the motion. All were in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 12:10pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

*Bryan McClain*

Bryan McClain

Executive Secretarial Assistant



## **Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) – Project Plan**

New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NJ-CBVI)

FY 2025-2026

### **Purpose & Statutory Alignment**

The Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) provides a structured approach to identify the vocational rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities. It is conducted jointly by the Designated State Unit (DSU) and the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) to inform the VR portion of the WIOA State Plan. The assessment ensures compliance with Section 101(a)(15)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act and 34 CFR 361.29.

### **Approach and Methodology**

The CSNA will be developed collaboratively with the New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NJ-CBVI), its State Rehabilitation Council (SRC), and key community stakeholders. A mixed-methods approach will be used, combining quantitative data analysis with qualitative input to ensure a comprehensive understanding of statewide needs and alignment with guiding principles.

The CSNA will be carried out in five key phases:

- Project Planning
- Survey Development and Analysis
- Focus Groups and Informational Interviews
- Data Analysis
- Final Report Development and Delivery

Each phase will include milestone activities and robust stakeholder engagement, particularly with NJ-CBVI leadership and the SRC, to ensure the process is collaborative, transparent, and aligned with WIOA requirements.

### **Guiding Principles:**

- Work in partnership with the NJ-CBVI and their State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) as well as community stakeholders.
- Build on past efforts, including lessons learned from previous State Plans and CSNAs.
- Engage the community to ensure diverse voices and perspectives are included.
- Use data to drive priorities and focus study goals.
- Design a realistic and achievable process that fits available resources.
- Include a multi-disciplinary team to provide varied expertise and viewpoints.



- Go beyond the numbers by combining data with stories, experiences, and context.
- Plan for dissemination early, ensuring findings are shared effectively with all stakeholders.
- Leverage existing knowledge and resources within the agency.
- Use multiple methods and participants to gather comprehensive information.
- Balance art and science, blending evidence with informed judgment.
- Integrate quantitative and qualitative results for a complete picture.
- Learn from past successes and challenges to shape strategies for improvement.
- Provide a range of options for addressing identified needs.
- Link results directly to State Plan goals and strategies as documented in Attachment 4.11(a).
- Recognize that some actions can begin immediately, while others may require further study or development.

## **1. Project Planning**

The project will begin with the development of the CSNA Project Plan, including key stakeholder engagement and iterative review.

- 9/12/2025: Draft the initial version of the CSNA Project Plan.
- 9/19/2025: Review the draft plan with NJ-CBVI leadership and incorporate feedback via a meeting scheduled for 9/22/2025.
- 9/26/2025: Revise the draft and submit the next version to NJ-CBVI leadership for review.
- Participate in State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) meetings to finalize and refine the plan. Key meetings include:
  - 10/3/2025: Present the plan and gather feedback from SRC members.
  - 11/21/2025: Finalize the CSNA Project Plan and submit a final draft survey, focus group, and interview questions for review.
  - 12/5/2025: Review final versions of the CSNA Project Plan at the SRC meeting.

## **2. Survey Development and Analysis**

The GWU team will assist with design and analysis of surveys targeting consumers, staff, and the Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP).



- 10/30/2025: Develop the first draft of survey questions.
- 11/21/2025: Submit the final draft of survey questions to NJ-CBVI leadership and SRC.
- 12/5/2025: Review survey content at the SRC meeting and gather additional feedback.
- 1/16/2026: Finalize survey questions based on SRC and leadership feedback.
- 2/9/2026: Launch surveys.
- 3/9/2026: Close survey period.
- 4/24/2026: Deliver results and actionable recommendations to NJ-CBVI leadership.

### **3. Focus Groups and Informational Interviews**

Focus groups and interviews will provide deeper qualitative insight from key stakeholder populations.

- 10/3/2025: Solicit SRC feedback on priority topics and populations.
- 11/21/2025: Complete initial draft of discussion format and questions.
- 12/5/2025: Present drafts at SRC meeting for feedback and revisions.
- 1/30/2026: Finalize scheduling in collaboration with NJ-CBVI.
- 4/24/2026: Complete all focus groups and informational interviews.
- 5/29/2026: Submit a summary analysis report of findings to NJ-CBVI leadership.

### **4. Data Analysis**

A structured data analysis plan will be developed and executed, integrating both internal agency data and national datasets for comparison.

- 1/12/2026: Finalize the data analysis plan, in coordination with NJ-CBVI MIS staff.  
Areas of analysis will include:
  - Individuals with the most significant disabilities
  - Supported Employment and Deaf-Blind Services
  - Underserved and unserved populations
  - Coordination with the statewide workforce system
  - Youth and students with disabilities, including Pre-ETS needs
  - Transition services coordination with IDEA
  - CRP capacity (job development, placement, and coaching)
  - Overall performance based on WIOA indicators



- 5/29/2026: Complete data analysis.
- 6/26/2026: Submit a draft summary report to NJ-CBVI and SRC for feedback.
- 7/10/2026: Integrate analysis findings into the draft Final Report.

#### Data Collection Methods:

- **Quantitative Data**
  - VR agency case management data (e.g., demographic characteristics, service use, outcomes)
  - State and national labor force statistics (e.g., ACS, BLS, CPS)
  - Educational data (e.g., IDEA Part B reports, high school completion rates)
  - CRP provider data and performance reports
  - Integrated workforce and economic development data
- **Qualitative Data**
  - Online surveys of consumers, staff, and partners.
  - Focus groups.
  - Key informant interviews with agency identified partners.
  - Open-ended responses and thematic coding using qualitative software.

All data will be analyzed and reported in disaggregated formats to identify disparities in access, quality, and outcomes across disability, race/ethnicity, language, geography, and age.

#### Focus Areas

- Disability and demographic trends in the state.
- Educational and employment outcomes and barriers.
- Accessibility, satisfaction, and cultural competence of services.
- Effectiveness of transition services and Pre-ETS for students with disabilities
- Deaf-Blind Services.
- Capacity, availability, and quality of Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs) and service vendors, with emphasis on regional availability, service-specific capacity—particularly in Job Development, Placement, and Coaching—provider



workforce qualifications, and input from VR staff and consumers regarding service effectiveness and accessibility.

- Supported Employment Services for agency consumers with the most significant disabilities.
- Equity in service delivery across race, ethnicity, language, geography, and disability type, highlighting unserved and underserved populations.
- Impact of partnerships with secondary education, higher education, and workforce development.

## **5. Final Report Development and Delivery**

The report will be completed in three iterative phases:

- 7/17/2026: Submit first draft of the CSNA Report to NJ-CBVI leadership and SRC.
- 8/12/2026: Submit second draft incorporating stakeholder feedback.
- 8/28/2026: Deliver the final version of the CSNA Report to NJ-CBVI leadership.

### **Oversight and Quality Assurance:**

The CRCRE will oversee the project through a designated Project Director who will be responsible for daily operations, coordination with the State VR agency, and adherence to timelines. Performance and quality will be evaluated through the delivery of milestones on time, feedback from SRC and VR staff, and responsiveness to emerging needs during the project.

Oversight will include:

- Weekly internal team check-ins to monitor task progress and address barriers.
- Monthly coordination meetings with State VR staff and designated SRC liaisons.
- A shared project management platform to track deliverables and data collection status.
- Quarterly review points to assess quality and alignment with the SOW.
- Use of data quality protocols (e.g., validation checks, interrater reliability for qualitative coding) to ensure rigorous data analysis.
- Stakeholder feedback loops to measure the usability and accessibility of draft findings.



# DISABILITY RIGHTS NEW JERSEY

ADVANCING JUSTICE. ADVOCATING INCLUSION.

GWEN ORLOWSKI, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

## Disability Rights NJ Report to State Rehabilitation Council

**Client Assistance Program (CAP) Reporting Period:** 04/01/25-06/30/25

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### Brief introduction of CAP

The Client Assistance Program (CAP) at Disability Rights NJ (DRNJ) provides legal advocacy and education to people with disabilities applying for or receiving services funded by the Rehabilitation Act, including vocational rehabilitation. CAP also provides legal advocacy and education about Title I (employment rights) of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

This year we are working to ensure equitable access to Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services for VR applicants and clients by providing self-advocacy assistance, limited legal assistance, and extended legal assistance as well as education emphasizing individual plan for employment (IPE) development, informed choice, and access to appeal rights. We also educate policymakers about access to VR services and engage in systemic advocacy including participation in State Rehabilitation Councils.

### CAP Goals and Objectives:

Goal 2: Ensure that people with disabilities can live and work in the community by accessing equitable person-centered services, supports, and resources.

#### A. Employment

- **OBJECTIVE 1:** Ensure equitable access to Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services for VR applicants and clients by providing self-advocacy assistance, limited legal assistance, and extended legal assistance as well as education emphasizing individual plan for employment (IPE) development, informed choice, and access to appeal rights. Educate policymakers about access to VR services and engage in systemic advocacy including participation in State Rehabilitation Councils.

### Individual Client Representation:

- Carry Over from 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter: 15 clients/15 SRs
- Opened: 10 clients/10 SRs
- Closed: 11 clients/11 SRs
- Carry over into 4<sup>th</sup> quarter: 15 clients/14 SRs

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Systemic Issue (repeat):

- In a client matter that went to fair hearing, an Initial Agency Decision was issued, and within 13 days, Disability Rights NJ issued exceptions. However, the Acting Director issued a Final Agency Decision prior to the 13<sup>th</sup> day, upholding the IAD against the client. Thereafter, the Deputy Attorney General wrote a letter positing that the ALJ may only issue a FAD under federal law because NJ had not adopted a two-tier fair hearing process allowed under federal law (pointing out that there was an expired regulation that did allow for the two-tiered process). Thereafter, the Acting Director issued a new letter saying that the ALJ decision was the FAD, and that her FAD was retracted.

Disability Rights NJ filed an appeal to the appellate division on the underlying substance, and the appellate division asked for a brief addressing the procedural issues. Disability Rights NJ filed the requested letter brief, but thereafter, at the client's request withdrew the appeal.

This issue needs to be resolved.

Examples of Client cases closed in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter:

- Disability Rights NJ represented a 21-year-old man diagnosed with quadriplegia to provide advice, counsel and limited advocacy regarding a reinforced frame and power wheels for the client's manual wheelchair. The client attends a college located on steep terrain with multiple campus buildings that are not wheelchair accessible. Client utilizes a power wheelchair and a manual wheelchair depending on the location of the classroom and need to access other campus buildings. The power wheelchair was paid for by the parent's employer-based insurer while the manual wheelchair was paid for by the client's parents. Due to the quadriplegia diagnosis and lack of wheelchair accessibility on campus that includes temporary ramps not designed for 400-pound plus power wheelchairs, the client utilizes both wheelchairs on campus. The client requested that DVRS fund the reinforced frame and power wheels for the manual wheelchair so he could ambulate independently around the campus to the maximum degree possible. DVRS advised client that prior to funding the wheelchair parts, he must submit a claim to his primary health insurer which was denied. DVRS then advised client that he must submit a claim to Medicaid, the secondary insurer. Based on the advice received from the wheelchair rehabilitation clinic and durable medical provider (DME), the client and his father expressed concerned that submitting a claim to Medicaid for the manual wheelchair parts could jeopardize the private insurer replacing the power wheelchair in 2026. We researched the relevant Medicaid regulations, spoke with Medicaid legal experts, a rehabilitation wheelchair clinician, and a leading DME provider. Without exception the information and advice we received was that payment for a "back up" or duplicate wheelchairs/parts is not permitted, and if Medicaid approved the claim for the power wheels and reinforced frame, both the private insurer and Medicaid would designate the manual wheelchair as the primary wheelchair, resulting in a denial of a replacement power wheelchair. We wrote to DVRS and provided the outcome of our research. On receipt of the letter DVRS approved the manual wheelchair parts and submitted payment of more than \$10,000 to the DME vendor.

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- Disability Rights NJ represented a 20-year-old college student diagnosed with spinal muscular atrophy by providing advice, counsel and limited advocacy concerning the amount of financial sponsorship DVRS was providing for his bachelor's degree at the University of Michigan. DVRS had provided full sponsorship to the client since he started his bachelor's degree in Fall 2023, however DVRS had recently informed client that they would only provide funding at the Rutgers University rate for the Fall 2025 semester onwards. As part of our agency's fact-finding process, we ordered and reviewed documentation from client's DVRS case file and spoke with the CAP program in Michigan about potential representation by the Michigan CAP program. Client wanted to speak with DVRS and ask them if they would continue to fully fund his bachelor's degree prior to any further advocacy by our agency. Client spoke with his DVRS counselor by phone, and was informed that DVRS would continue providing him with full financial sponsorship at the University of Michigan. Based on this confirmation client requested we close his case after recommending that client email his DVRS counselor summarizing his understanding of the phone call with DVRS, and specifically that DVRS had agreed to provide him with full financial sponsorship at the University of Michigan for the duration of his bachelor's degree.
- Disability Rights NJ entered into a fact-finding retainer agreement with a 42-year-old woman diagnosed with epilepsy regarding a denial of funding for a certified animal control officer certificate training. DVRS initially indicated they would reimburse client for the training that cost \$995.00 if she paid for the training on her credit card, but subsequently advised client they would not reimburse her. Shortly after forwarding client a retainer agreement to conduct fact-finding the client informed case handler that after she advised DVRS that she had contacted DRNJ, DVRS agreed to reimburse her for the animal control officer training.

### **Educating Policy Makers:**

Disability Rights NJ has been attending regular meetings with the State Rehabilitation Councils and providing information and updates on activities and systemic concerns that have been identified through our work. In August, Executive Director Gwen Orłowski attended the yearly SRC retreat.

- **OBJECTIVE 2:** Increase awareness of the Client Assistance Program (CAP) and Protection and Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security (PABSS) through outreach about CAP and PABSS to Vocational Rehabilitation constituencies, including VR clients and prospective VR clients, VR agencies and staff, and other stakeholders.

### **Outreach:**

- **ASPYIR How To Presentation for DVRS Lead Transition Counselors – April 21**  
Disability Rights NJ presented about ASPYIR to the Lead Transition Counselors at DVRS. This presentation focused on using the ASPYIR planning tool through an employment lens. Participants were walked through the portions of the planning tool that focused on employment questions and areas that would assist users in getting a better sense of their vocational goals, wants, and needs. The employment section of the planning tool asks about the preferred environment, type of work, accommodations, and more subtopics related to employment. The presenter spent most of the presentation discussing how to personalize the planning tool and the

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importance of using person-centered planning combined with ASPYIR to assist DVRS counselors in effectively helping their clients determine their employment goals, and the best ways to obtain and maintain employment of their choice. Approximately 20 professionals attended the workshop.

- Disability Rights NJ ATAC is making presentations in local DVRS offices on an ATAC Toolkit.
- **OBJECTIVE 3:** Advocate for an end to subminimum wage and for equitable access to competitive, integrated employment for people with disabilities, especially people with complex medical, physical, and behavioral needs, through a public report and systemic advocacy.

With the reduction in staff, this objective and the public report is on hold.

#### E. Education and Transition Services for Youth

- **OBJECTIVE 1:** Promote student involvement in accessing pre-employment transition services (ETS) and transition services from the vocational rehabilitation agencies and school districts by providing self-advocacy assistance, limited legal assistance, and education to students with disabilities between the ages of 14-22. Engage in systemic advocacy and collaborations with stakeholders to ensure youth have timely access to transition services while in school and through VR agencies.

#### **Outreach/Education/Training:**

On April 2, 2025, Disability Rights NJ hosted Classroom to Careers: Transition Services and Vocational Rehabilitation Conference at the NJ Bar Law Center in New Brunswick. The event opened with a keynote address from Dr. Charyl Yarbrough, acting Executive Director of DVRS titled Serving Our Youth: Where We've Been and How We Move Forward Together. The event offered opportunity to attend individual breakout session: Supporting and Building Youth Voice in the Transition Process (SDM); Planning for Transition: Why It Is Vital For Your Future, Including Social Security Basics; Empowering Transitions: Resources and Support for Individuals with DD and a closing panel with representatives for DVRS, CBVI, and Dept of Education. The conference was attended by 72 individuals with disabilities, family members and professionals. Conference evaluation results indicated over 95% of attendees rated the content from the presentations as excellent or good. Individual comments included: "The event was so informative. The presenters were amazing. I am so glad I attended. I hope you do it again next year. It was wonderful." and "well planned conference. Will definitely attend next year".

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