



STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES (DHS)

COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND & VISUALLY IMPAIRED (CBVI)

STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL (SRC)

MEETING MINUTES

OCTOBER 4, 2024 - HYBRID MEETING

130 LIVINGSTON AVE | NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ 08901

Voting Members Present: Donald Campbell, Vito DeSantis, Lauren Weishaar, John O'Connell

Members Awaiting Appointment Present: Breeanna Douglas, James Good, Steven McCoy, Jeanne McMahon, Dr. Amanda Philp, Gary Robinson, Joseph Zesski

Absent: Ronda Williams Banks, Alice Eaddy, Sioban Leahy, Kathleen Spata(appointed), Linda Melendez, Gwen Orlowski, Wanda Williford

Ex Officio Present: Dawn Corbett, Dr. Bernice Davis, John Tkacz

CBVI Staff: Esther Lavarin, Bryan McClain

Members of Public Present: Haley Carney, Susan Head, Janna Sheiman

Vito DeSantis, SRC Chairperson, welcomed everyone, calling the meeting to order at 9:30am.

Vito announced that the meeting was being held in compliance with Section 105 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act 1973 as amended; and in compliance with the New Jersey Open Public Meeting Act, NJSA 10:4-6.

All were reminded that a quorum cannot be reached because of the lack of appointments and reappointments received for the SRC nominees and members. A reminder was made for 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 send an email for a response to Charles Pat McKenna {Charles.McKenna@dhs.nj.gov}. Finally, all

members were asked to keep their remarks brief so as to move through the agenda in a timely fashion.

After attendance and introductions, Vito reminded all that the purpose of the SRC is to provide advice, review policies, assisting the Agency and ensuring that services are provided to the blind, visually impaired and deafblind residents of New Jersey. Referring to the Message from the Chair, Vito listed the efforts he made to get movement on the needed Governor appointments of the members to the SRC. The state plan is conditionally approved because of this, which also has not made any movements on the appointments. There could be ramifications from this, the state could be denied approval for certain Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Grant monies from the RSA. Vito reiterated that he has made many efforts but has not been successful.

Approval of Meeting Minutes:

The minutes of June 16, 2024 were acknowledged as received and reviewed. Vito asked if there were any comments about them, or corrections to be made. Vito also acknowledged that since there is no quorum of appointed members (although a majority of SRC members were present), they could not actually vote on acceptance of the Meeting Minutes from June 16, 2024.

These minutes will be put into the permanent record of the SRC.

Next Meeting Date:

December 6, 2024 (hybrid)

New Business:

Appointments and Current Lack of Quorum:

The number of actual appointed members were acknowledged as 3, not including 2 ex-officio members currently appointed to the SRC. This was later corrected due to a very recent term expiration to be only 1 actual appointed member on the SRC, all other voting members and 1 ex-officio member are pending appointment/reappointment.

Vito opened this topic for discussion by the SRC for suggestions that either he or the SRC collectively could do about this matter. Don inquired if Vito felt that it would be a good idea for him to reach out to his own State Representative to ask about it. Vito answered, yes, please try and went on to explain that the person responsible for the appointments is Samantha Parker.

Vito then inquired with John Tkacz if DVRS has a full SRC. He then asked for comments from Dr. Davis. Dr. Davis expressed appreciation for the efforts from Vito and the SRC to get the Governor's office to move on these appointments. Dr. Davis believes DVRS' SRC has a quorum but is aware of other State Agencies that are having challenges with appointments and reappointments.

John O'Connell, asked a question regarding reappointments, and whether that also needs to go through the Governor's Office. The answer is yes, and that the appointments and reappointments do come through in batches.

Vito also mentioned that what has saved the SRC up until this year, that there was a Governor who signed an Executive Order stating that persons waiting for reappointment could continue to act as members of whatever council or board that they are serving on. Unfortunately, for this SRC, there have been members who completed their 2-terms and left the SRC.

Language in Bylaws Regarding Renomination:

Vito referred to the training that was held by Tom Jennings and Pat Tomlinson in June and the suggestion they made to have the SRC, through its bylaws, determine that former member could be renominated to the SRC and the duration of time that they would need to wait before being renominated, such as 3months, 6months, 1year.

Vito opened for comments from the SRC regarding updating the bylaws, and suggested that it could provide for continuity as a positive result, but could eliminate fresh ideas as a negative result.

A few members asked questions to clarify, and Joe Zesski mentioned that he feels it would be good to have something in the language of the bylaws so that if ever asked about it there would be something listed in the bylaws, and felt that 6 months would be a good timeframe which would allow for a few months to find nominees. Don agreed with that suggestion also adding that although there is no trouble finding nominees now there could be a time where it could be a challenge.

Vito will send suggested language to add into the bylaws to the SRC for their review and approval.

Discussion of New Chair:

Vito acknowledged that his term as chair will be ending in January, and so a discussion and decision on a new Chair of the SRC is forthcoming.

Dr. Bernice Davis – Executive Director's Report

Dr. Davis started off by stating it is October, and wishing everyone Happy Blindness Awareness Month. CBVI is holding its 3rd Annual Blindness Awareness Month (BAM) Community Outreach Event taking place on October 10th at the Cheesapeake State Park from 1pm – 3pm. There will be a gambit of educational activities, fun activities, and a nature walk that one of CBVI's O&M Specialists will be leading. The focus each year is towards the 55+ year old community, to help make this community aware of CBVI services. She stated that everyone is

welcome and the SRC can invite others to attend. There will be other state divisions and partners that will be in attendance as well.

The State Budget, will require some review regarding how to minimize and cut costs. There probably will not be an impact to the Federal Budget.

Vito inquired if there was something that the SRC should get involved in or if there will be an impact to some of the VR services to consumers.

Dr. Davis explained, this information is very new, once more information becomes available, she will provide an update to the SRC.

Regarding the Workforce Investment Opportunity Act (WIOA) there has been discussions over the last few years on amending WIOA again, which was recently approved by the House but not yet by the Senate, which is called “A Stronger America.” The House, in passing this amendment, is looking for a stronger One Stop Career Centers Network, increased performance accountability of the Job Corps, and to streamline an eligible training provider list so that the focus is on outcomes – ensuring that the programs are aligned with the hiring demands of employers. It would also authorize state and local workforce boards to aid employers in implementing skill-based hiring practices, and includes a greater emphasis on work-based learning for youth and workforce education programs in community colleges that align with in demand jobs. Finally, the amendment would like to see a strengthening of workforce data systems.

There was a recent notice published by RSA, there first time doing so, a list of VR Agencies that relinquished Supported Employment (SE) dollars. New Jersey Blind, which is CBVI, was on the list and Dr. Davis offered a clarification about that. SE funds are for blind and visually impaired adults and youths who have significant disabilities. There is customized employment and job coaching that may be included in job readiness to meet the WIOA mandates. The SE services can be received for 4 years, it can be extended if needed, and are for adults and youths under 25 years of age. When the Federal Government tacked on SE funds, CBVI was concerned as soon as it was notified in 2016. The reason is because whatever SE funds are being spent on adults, the same amount has to be spent on youth. CBVI already realized that NJ did not have a very large population of blind and visually impaired youth with significant disabilities who were seeking employment and job readiness. RSA has in their regulations that a State Agency can choose to support and provide services to SE adults and youths through their general VR grant from RSA. CBVI has been doing that. CBVI has used some SE funds but never to the level that RSA was requiring the agency to meet. Another barrier to using SE funds is around data mandates because the outdated system that CBVI has does not allow for the required data to be provided. Over the last year the Agency has been working to put in a new system to be used for case management which would allow the Agency to provide the required information.

There are some options around SE funds not yet utilized. If the General VR Agency is willing and is able to utilize the SE funds, a memorandum can be created in which those funds are transferred from CBVI to DVRS. The second option, which some Blindness Agencies have done,

is to permanently relinquish the funds, processed through a public hearing, etc. These options could only be facilitated at the DHS Commissioner's level.

Paul DeCarlo, Fiscal Manager – Fiscal Operations Report

Update on Reallotment Monies:

CBVI's Fiscal Manager, Paul DeCarlo presented a brief report on the reallocation process.

Due to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, RSA permits the reallotment of a grant recipient's annual grant award that could not be used. The purpose is to maximize the use of all appropriated funds underneath all of RSA's grant programs across all agencies throughout the United States.

Each grant recipient is required to submit a reallotment form during the reallotment period in which the funds were awarded in order to indicate if they are relinquishing grant funds, requesting additional grant funds, or seeking no changes to their grant award. RSA also authorizes grantees to carry over funds that are reappropriated, which are not required to be spent by the end of the year in which they were awarded.

In summary, RSA allows the states to decide if they will not be able to use the monies granted to them and relinquish them so that another state may use them, or to request additional funds through the reallotment process which are made available through other states. In this past Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) there were 15 agencies that relinquished about \$138 million in VR funds. The total reallotment pool was about \$174 million. Of the 78 VR agencies throughout the nation, 34 requested about \$334 million in reallotment funds. CBVI requested funds in the amount of \$2.1 million, which was a little increase over last year.

For NJ CBVI, this increase in requested funds was due to increases seen in College Services (tuition / room and board), as well as salary increases for current employees.

Vito asked what part of the Federal grant is SE funding?

- Dr. Davis said it is usually under \$95,000. Paul specified \$92,600 for this past FFY.

Vito then asked to clarify if this amount is for both youth and adult?

- Paul responded yes and that it is evenly split between both groups.

Vito next asked what is the disposition of the funds now and if conversations have been had with DVRS?

- Dr. Davis responded that conversations are being held and the transfer process is being explored to see if this would be a possibility.

Following the Fiscal report, John commented that he represents Blinded Veterans, and the Veterans Association (VA) has made significant cuts in their funding. Because of this, CBVI

may see a significant uptick in requests for services, especially in the 55-year-old and up category.

Esther Lavarin, VR Coordinator- Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Update:

Joseph Kohn Training Center (JKTC)

The JKTC had 5 Students complete the program including 1 deafblind consumer. One of the 5 students was hired because of his work experience prior to the program. LIFE 101 program consisted of a lively intelligent and dynamic group. Susan Engstrom, the JKTC manager, has retired at the end of September and Pat McKenna will serve as the Acting Manager until a new manager has been selected. The process for hiring a replacement manager has already begun.

Employment, Development, Guidance, and Engagement (EDGE) Program:

EDGE Program is currently at 94 students. Previous EDGE Director left the program for an exciting new opportunity at CBVI. Interviews for the next Director has already begun by Arc of Ocean. Planning for the summer of 2025 has already begun for LIFE 101 and the TCNJ programs.

Fellowship Program with Vision Loss Alliance of New Jersey (VLANJ):

Was launched on March 20th, and held the first of 2 in person sessions on September 27th with 10 participants. The program focused on the following topics:

- Technology
- O&M Workshop and Skills
- Fit & Balance Exercise Class

There was an open and collaborative spirit throughout the program, which was great to observe.

Business Relations Unit (BRU) Updates:

The BRU is having a Dining in the Dark event at the end of October at JKTC. There will be approximately 25 participants in attendance. Event will focus on the similarities of hiring a person who is blind or visually impaired and one who is not. Employers will also receive O&M instruction and may choose to be blindfolded.

Business Enterprises of New Jersey (BENJ):

BENJ continues to explore new location opportunities as well as preparing to expand locations into Community Colleges. Training opportunities were recently held in Atlantic City and one is upcoming in Nashville, TN. BENJ will be holding an in person meeting at JKTC on December 7th and moving forward, in person meetings will be held every quarter.

Agency Information:

In an effort to enhance service delivery to deafblind consumers, CBVI is looking to hire a deafblind VRC, and ASL Interpreters in the weeks ahead. There was an in-person training held on September 18th to the IL Staff on the effective provision of services to deafblind consumers.

The SHORE program is taking place this week at the Resorts Hotel in Atlantic City, NJ. The program has 12 consumer-participants and 10 companions. It focuses on essential areas such as: technology, O&M, adjustment to vision loss, and other independent skills for consumer participants and companions.

CBVI is excited about the upcoming BAM Event on Thursday October 10, 2024 at the Cheesequake State Park.

There have been a number of success stories received for the SRC Annual Report, which are currently under review.

Following the VR report, Vito inquired further about the BENJ item that mentioned looking into Community Colleges as locations for the program, and asked if Jim Good knew about this. Jim explained that he and the committee was aware of this and have been working with Pat McKenna on these efforts. They will be looking at the exploring the best opportunities at present and then seeking to expand. This location type, of community colleges is something being explored with success in other states.

Old Business:

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

The CAP Report was reviewed and submitted by Janna Sheiman, the CAP Coordinator of Disability Rights New Jersey (DRNJ) for inclusion with the meeting minutes and are appended at the end of these meeting minutes.

Review of Training from June SRC Meeting:

Vito inquired if there was anyone at the meeting that missed the training. There were none that mentioned missing the training. Vito asked for those who took the training to be annotated.

June SRC Training Meeting-SRC Members present: Donald Campbell, Dawn Corbett, Bernice Davis, Vito DeSantis, Breeanna Douglas, Alice Eaddy, James Good, Steven McCoy, Linda Melendez, Dr. Amanda Philp, Gary Robinson, Kathleen Spata, John Tkacz, Lauren Weishaar, Wanda Williford, Joseph Zeski.

June SRC Training Meeting-SRC Members requested a copy: Ronda Williams Banks, Gwen Orłowski (via Janna Sheiman)

June SRC Training Meeting-SRC Members absent: Sioban Leahy, Jeanne McMahon, John O'Connell

Committee Reports:

- Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) – Chaired by Vito DeSantis
 - Vito recalled that the CSNA was completed, but the results were not readily recalled. However, it was mentioned that Pat McKenna presented the results.
 - It was asked that the results be shared with the SRC.
- Policy and Procedures – Chaired by Lauren Weishaar
 - Lauren stated that there were no updates to be given at this time, however, a discussion to update the College handbook is in the process and she will present an update on its progress at the next SRC meeting.
- Business Engagement Committee – Chaired by John O'Connell
 - John did not have any updates to present at this time, however, there is a Disability Employment Job Fair on October 8th at Ocean County College from 9:30am – 3:00pm at the Student Center. John will attend to do networking.
- Quality Assurance Committee – Chaired by Gary Robinson
 - Vito announced that Gary Robinson has agreed to be the Quality Assurance Committee Chair, and has an extensive background in this area. Moving forward into the new year, the issue of strategic planning and really looking at the SRC and establishing those goals would be important to accomplish through this committee.
 - Gary expressed appreciation for the role and looks forward to the challenge, as well as being able to help in working with CBVI on these tasks.
- SRC Annual Report Committee – Chaired by Breeanna Douglas
 - Breeanna reported that every unit has to give an update in the annual report and this has been requested. Gathering the updates are in progress.
 - Secondly, the success stories already have been vetted and those that have been selected are going through the editing process.

- Vito asked if the success stories covered a broad range of success stories.
- Breeanna answered yes, there was a broad range of students that are represented in the success stories.

Conversation on SRC Committees:

Following the Committee Reports, Vito mentioned that he would like to address a concern he has regarding the committees. He would like to adjust the SRC Meeting format in 2025 a little bit, to where the main part of the meeting is ended earlier allowing 30-45 minutes for the committees to meet together and have an active conversation on what items they need to accomplish.

Vito then asked if that sounds like something that could facilitate the committee process?

- Don commented that he agrees with this approach and it makes a lot of sense to him.
- Gary commented that this would improve on the effectiveness and the cohesion within the groups allowing them to become more effective.
- Dr. Davis also agreed.

Vito will look into putting together an updated format for the agenda to see how this could work and look to start this new format in 2025.

Determine Who Is Serving On The 6 Committees:

The current list of the committees and their members was read by Bryan. There are two committees that need more members, currently only having a chairperson. It was asked that the list be sent out to the SRC, so that all will know which committee each member is on, and which committees can use more members to volunteer for.

This was sent out to the Council via email shortly after the meeting and a current list will be appended at the end of the meeting minutes.

Member Updates:

Members were called upon to provide updates to the SRC.

- John O'Connell provided additional information regarding the funding cuts for the VA. At the end of this FFY in June, the VA was in a deficit of \$3billion and significant shortfalls for the new FFY of \$15billion.

- Ronda Banks sent the following Access Link update for inclusion in the minutes:
 - **Replicant** - the Artificial Intelligence software that we have partnered with now offer customers the option to book simple next day reservation requests to and from addresses that are already associated with the customer's account from 5:01am to 5:00pm daily.
 - **Appointment Time Booking Pilot:** Allows you to request either a pick-up time or drop-off time for your Access Link reservation. *These rides can only be scheduled with a live agent.* You can call and request to assist with this pilot. If you need help or want to volunteer for the Appointment Time Booking Pilot call 973-491-4224 and select option #5 for our Customer Service team.
 - My contact is rpbanks@njtransit.com for additional information.
- Donald Campbell provided information regarding an upcoming virtual public forum event for the SILC on October 10th, to get input regarding the State Independent Living Plan. The flyer was sent out to the Council via email shortly after the meeting.
- Lauren Weishaar provided information regarding her company hosting a Job & Resources Fair for those with disabilities on October 12th. A second event will be happening on the same day in honor of National Disabilities Employment Awareness Month. The information for these 2 events was sent to the Council via email shortly after the meeting.
- Vito mentioned an update regarding Alice Eaddy who is receiving an award for one of her paintings from the American Printing House for the Blind. Dr. Davis added that she sent via email a picture of her artwork. This notice was sent to the Council via email on September 30th by Selina Gooden on behalf of Pat McKenna.
- Jim Good mentioned attending his first National Convention of the NFB this past summer and was very impressed with the turn out, and encourages everyone to get involved. They are doing a lot of great things on the national level.
- Dr. Davis mentioned 2 updates.
 - The National Federation of the Blind of New Jersey is having their 48th Annual State Convention, October 24th – 27th, with the theme: Don't Stop Believing. Pat McKenna will be speaking at the conference, also the Deputy Commissioner Katy McGuire.
 - Dr. Davis herself will be in Seattle, WA, October 19th – 25th, attending two national VR conferences; Council of State Administrators of Vocation Rehabilitation (CSAVR) and the National Council of State Administrators of the Blind (NCSAB).

Announcements:

The next SRC meeting is scheduled for December 6, 2024.

Vito announced the meeting date then made a suggestion for one of the SRC meetings to be scheduled for a Thursday instead of Friday, so that the SRC members can come to the JKTC and see the facility when the students are there and experience the activity that goes on.

- Lauren likes the idea.
- Jim Good feels it is a great idea.
- Jeanne McMahon left a comment in the Zoom chat stating it would be a great idea.
- Dr. Davis mentioned that if the SRC would like to make the December meeting on Thursday CBVI can work out the logistics, but there is current transition happening as the JKTC Manager retired at the end of September and Pat is currently the Acting Manager. This is why the beginning of 2025 was suggested.

Adjournment:

Janna Sheiman on behalf of Gwen Orłowski made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Donald Campbell seconded the motion. All were in favor.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:20pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Bryan McClain

Bryan McClain

Executive Secretarial Assistant



**STATE OF NEW JERSEY
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES (DHS)
COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND & VISUALLY IMPAIRED (CBVI)**

**STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL (SRC)
SRC COMMITTEES**

Joseph Kohn Training Center
130 Livingston Avenue, New Brunswick, NJ

October 4, 2024

Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA)

Chair, Vito DeSantis
Alice Eaddy

Business Engagement

Chair, John O'Connell
James Good
Steve McCoy
Ronda Banks

Policy & Procedure

Chair, Lauren Weishaar
Dr. Amanda Philp
Joseph Zesski

Quality Assurance

Chair, Gary Robinson
Joseph Zesski

SRC Annual Report

Chair, Breeanna Douglas
Alice Eaddy
Lauren Weishaar
Kathleen Spata

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: 4/1/2024-6/30/2021

Report Prepared by: Janna Sheiman, Managing Attorney – Employment Team and CAP Coordinator

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.

Highlights and Summary of Accomplishments

- **Trainings/Outreaches/Resource Development**
 - **Rights to VR Services, how to access through how to appeal:** Disability Rights NJ presented a webinar designed to walk applicants through their entitlements to VR services under the Rehabilitation Act and Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act, including how to apply for services, how to seek the development of an Individualized Plan of Employment, and how to appeal an adverse decision.
 - **VR Applicant Self Advocacy Guide:** Disability Rights NJ published a self-advocacy guide for individuals seeking VR Services called “Navigating Your Rights to VR Services: A Self-Advocacy Guide.” This guide is a companion to our informational webinar series and walks potential applicants through their rights to VR services, how to connect with the VR agencies, how to apply for services, requesting an IPE, and how to appeal an adverse decision. This self-advocacy guide is focused on helping individuals understand and navigate the VR process.
 - **Midland School:** Disability Rights NJ staff did two presentations at The Midland School, advising participants of their rights to VR services and how the Client Assistance Program is able to assist them.
 - **Transition Services presentation to Family Resource Network:** Disability Rights

NEW JERSEY'S DESIGNATED PROTECTION AND ADVOCACY AGENCY.

NJ completed a presentation on Transition Services and how to access them to educate the employees at the Family Resource Network on services available through the Board of Education and the Division for Vocational Rehabilitation Services and how the two agencies can work together to provide services to students with disabilities.

- **Serving individual clients.**

Number of client cases during DRNJ's 3rd fiscal quarter 2024 (April 1 – June 30, 2024):

Program	Carryover from 2nd Quarter	New Since April 1, 2024	Closed as of June 30, 2024	Current Active as of July 1, 2024
CAP	17	5	3	16 DVRS 3 CBVI

- Examples of issues in client cases:
 - Communication breakdowns where DVRS clients and DVRS counselor do not have a shared understanding of DVRS client goals and objectives.
 - Clients not getting timely response from their VR counselors.
 - Clients' cases being closed without notice to them.
- Number of active appeals (administrative, mediation, and fair hearings)
 - Administrative: 0
 - Mediation: 0
 - Fair Hearing: 1
- Examples of outcomes for clients from the Quarter:
 - DVRS: Disability Rights NJ worked with a 35-year-old woman diagnosed with a mental illness in securing appropriate support services and job search support. DRNJ worked with DVRS until Client's requested services were agreed upon at which point DRNJ assisted Client with drafting her IPE and presenting it to DVRS. DRNJ attended Client's IPE with her at the Newark DVRS Office on May 28, 2024 at which point an IPE was generated and signed off on. Client's new IPE covers her requested services and her accurate employment goal.

Goals and Objectives for Next Fiscal Year (October 1, 2024, through September 30, 2025)

- Develop and deliver posters regarding the Client Assistance Program to DVRS and CBVI to be displayed in the field offices.
- Provide further outreach and training to the CILs and their participants on their employment rights.

NEW JERSEY'S DESIGNATED PROTECTION AND ADVOCACY AGENCY.

- Provide outreach and training to individuals with disabilities about their rights to VR services and the Client Assistance Program

NEW JERSEY'S DESIGNATED PROTECTION AND ADVOCACY AGENCY.

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