

Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS)
State Rehabilitation Council Executive Committee
November 7, 2024
Approved Meeting Minutes

Members Present: Brandy Schantz, Joliefawn Liddell, and Nick Zweerink.

Members Absent: Christopher Martin.

Others Present: Ryan Mauzy, SRC; Ryan Haywood, SRC; Lillian Garland, SRC; Travis Staton, SRC; Marco Callender, SRC; Rebecca Ceja, VDOE; Catherine Harrison, DARS; Meghan Cox, DARS; Cara Kaufman, DARS; Lisa Robertson, DARS; Wil Barber, DARS; Carrie Humphrey, ASL Interpreter; Elaine Hernandez, ASL Interpreter.

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 9:31 a.m.

Introduction of Members: Schantz called the meeting to order. All members and others present introduced themselves.

Approval of meeting agenda: No changes. Agenda approved by unanimous consensus.

Approval of September meeting minutes: No changes. Minutes approved by unanimous consensus.

Matters of Public Comment: There were no public comments received.

Discussion: Cox provided an update on current membership/vacancies and previewed business meeting items, including changes to proposed agenda.

Meeting Adjourned: 9:35 a.m.

Meeting Handouts:

1. Proposed Meeting Agenda
2. Draft Executive Committee Meeting Minutes from September 9, 2024

Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS)
State Rehabilitation Council Quarterly Meeting
November 7, 2024
Approved Meeting Minutes

Members Present: Commissioner Kathy Hayfield, Brandy Schantz, Joliefawn Liddell, Nick Zweerink, Ryan Mauzy, Ryan Haywood, Lillian Garland, Travis Staton, Marco Callender, Heidi Lawyer, Becky Alwood, Gayl Brunk, Christopher Martin, Talisha McAuley-Davis, and Frederick Foard.

Members Absent: None.

Others Present: Dale Batten, DARS; Catherine Harrison, DARS; Julie Jacobs, DARS; Alison Shaner, WWRC; Cara Kaufman, DARS; Devin Bowers, DARS; Barbara Burkett, DARS; Wil Barber, DARS; Lisa Robertson, DARS; Meghan Cox, DARS; Betsy Civilette, DARS; Elaine Hernandez, ASL Interpreter; Carrie Humphrey, ASL Interpreter.

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 9:45 a.m.

Introduction of Members: Schantz called the meeting to order. All members and others present introduced themselves.

Approval of meeting agenda: Amended agenda presented to accommodate unaddressed items from 11/6 meeting. Motion to approve presented by Haywood, seconded by Lawyer, and passed by voice vote.

Approval of September meeting minutes: No changes. Minutes approved by unanimous consensus.

Matters of Public Comment: There were no public comments received.

Chairperson's Report: The Chair reviewed the November 6 SRC Annual Retreat and November 7 Executive Committee meeting.

Development of 2024 SRC Recommendations

SRC Chair Brandy Schantz curated a discussion of 2024 SRC Recommendations with assistance from DARS staff. In particular, the Council considered its recommendations from 2023 (and the agency responses thereto) and performance data derived from the presentation on VR Program Performance for FFY 2024.

Motion to approve the final SRC recommendations for the 2024 Annual Report presented by Haywood, seconded by Lawyer, and passed by voice vote.

Final 2024 SRC Recommendations

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) supports DARS in its commitment, in partnership with consumers and their informed choice, to provide services that prepare consumers through career pathways to enter the workforce in sustainable jobs with livable wages that decrease poverty, improve their economic quality of life and independence, and reduce their reliance on public benefits. The following SRC recommendations will help further these shared goals.

- 1) DARS shall continue to provide updates on WIOA performance measures, including the goals and targets established for these measures and DARS' progress towards those goals. DARS should provide detailed analysis of available data to the council related to outcomes, occupations, and data with the expectation that the median hourly wage increases to \$16.00 per hour (\$17.50 per hour in the Northern district) to best align with increases in the minimum wage and the current economy.
- 2) To address the decreasing number of individuals seeking full-time employment, DARS shall seek to maintain the number of hours worked and full-time employment rate of adults who access DARS services with a goal of ensuring that individuals who receive DARS services understand their options through benefits counseling and are able to make an informed choice regarding their employment. DARS should report on benefits counseling services at the first meeting of 2025, including current data and historical trends.
- 3) Equity in the provision of VR services is imperative. In order to achieve successful closures, DARS should examine barriers, successes, and service delivery—paying particular attention to marginalized and underserved populations-- as well as aligning efforts with available Census population and workforce participation data. Outreach should be targeted toward marginalized and underserved populations, working consistently toward representative customer demographics—particularly with regard to race/ethnicity, age, and location. DARS should prioritize outcomes and employment in competitive integrated settings for unserved and underserved populations, including individuals transitioning out of subminimum wage or at risk of entering segregated settings, individuals with mental health conditions, and justice-involved individuals. DARS shall report on their assessment and efforts at the second 2025 SRC meeting.
- 4) Increase the number of VR services, including Pre-ETS, provided by Centers for Independent Living across the Commonwealth.
- 5) DARS shall serve more students with disabilities and requests that DARS provides quarterly reports on efforts to serve this population, particularly students with disabilities.
 - a. DARS should continue to increase outreach to local education agencies, families, and students regarding the availability of and access to transition and Pre-ETS services. Increasing collaboration between DARS, the Virginia Department of Education, other community partners including providers, and local education agencies.
 - b. DARS should identify local education agencies in which Pre-ETS is under-utilized and conduct direct outreach.

c. Data on types of services utilized, geographic trends, and information on the frequency with which students who receive Pre-ETS services move on to VR services should be evaluated and reported to the SRC.

d. DARS should expand work-based learning experiences for transition age youth, preferably while still in school, to improve employment outcomes at graduation.

7) DARS shall define its existing workforce and examine opportunities for improved employee diversity with respect to populations served, while also recognizing recruitment and retention challenges among its highly skilled direct service workforce.

8) DARS will report on business development efforts including collaboration with ESOs, workforce development partners, and businesses that support the hiring of individuals with disabilities with an emphasis on the practices and procedures to onboard these partners at the first SRC meeting of 2025.

The SRC requests that DARS' updates to the Council on these recommendations include any available data and performance measures that can be meaningfully reported.

Ongoing 2024 SRC Annual Report Development

Betsy Civilette, Communications Director, presented a design mock-up of the 2024 Annual Report based on the subcommittee's prior recommendations and received feedback from the SRC on graphics and design. She also covered the two success stories to be featured in the report and took the Council photo. Once drafted, the 2024 Annual Report will be provided to the subcommittee for additional feedback.

Motion to delegate to the Annual Report Subcommittee the authority to review and approve the final Annual Report presented by Lawyer, seconded by Liddell, and passed by voice vote.

2024 Fair Hearings Report

Catherine Harrison, Director of Policy and Legislative Affairs, provided a 2024 Fair Hearings Report.

DARS received one request for an Impartial Hearing, which was carried over into the new Federal Fiscal Year. The RSA-722 report was submitted to the Federal Department of Education on October 29, 2024.

Since the last SRC meeting in September all three of the renewal contracts for the existing three hearing officers were signed. The new IFB to hire new hearing officers will be released in the coming months. Two DARS SRC volunteers are needed to assist with the IFB review committee to select new hearing officers. Haywood and Schantz volunteered to serve on the IFB review committee, and without objection were approved by the SRC.

Consumer Satisfaction Survey

Wil Barber, DARS Research Analyst, provided a 2024 Consumer Satisfaction Survey Report and presented the 2025 Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between DARS and SRC for administration of the Consumer Satisfaction Survey.

Motion to approve the MOA presented by Haywood, seconded by Liddell, and passed by voice vote. Cox will secure signatures of Commissioner Hayfield and SRC Chair to finalize the document.

Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment Update

Devin Bowers, DARS Grants Specialist, gave an update on the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment. The contract with Interwork Institute at San Diego State University started on August 1st and ends on April 30th of 2025. The Institute has worked on compiling and synthesizing secondary data (data already available from the Rehabilitation Services Administration, US Census Bureau, etc.), which helps establish a baseline and context for the needs assessment. Draft survey and interview questions were provided by the Institute for each stakeholder group (clients, partners, business, staff). Drafts were shared with DRS leadership and the SRC sub-committee to collect input. Compiled feedback and suggested revisions were shared with the Institute. Dissemination of the email invitations started at the end of October. Survey collection will continue until the end of November. Depending on response rate this deadline may be extended. The client survey was sent to a representative sample of current and former clients.

Staff survey disseminated internally by DRS leadership. The partner survey was disseminated to all Employment Service Organizations and Pre-ETS providers. DARS Business Development Managers disseminated surveys to businesses they work with and the WISA network, which includes around 130 providers. The survey for partners and business is also being promoted on DARS' social media accounts. Interviews will occur at the end of November and during the first half of December. Institute staff will be traveling to Virginia to conduct interviews in-person in three locations (Fairfax, Henrico, Abingdon). Some interviews will be conducted virtually.

Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center Report

Alison Shaner, Director of Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center, delivered a presentation that included updates on the facility and its services. The presentation is included among meeting materials.

Member Reports

- Joliefawn Liddell: Highlighted information from November 2024 dLCV newsletter and completion of voting survey. Provided information about upcoming Coming of Age Clinic in December. Asked that SRC Administrator forward newsletter to Council.
- Gayl Brunk: The 2025-2027 State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL) has been approved by ACL and the work has begun. The focus of the new SPIL is dedicated to supporting Centers for Independent Living developing and providing their communities with education and training opportunities that are specific to the needs of their individual communities. Most Centers will spend the first year researching the needs and developing the training. The Lower Planning District 9 grassroots project will continue for the 2025-2027 SPIL, as well.

This project is focused on elevating Independent Living in the unserved areas of Madison, Orange, Culpeper, and Rappahannock Counties. The SPIL also prioritizes the need for increased accessibility in all areas of emergency planning and the Council has representation on the VDEM Emergency Management Equity Workgroup, as well as the DSS Accessible Sheltering Workgroup. Hurricane Helene caused substantial damages in Southwestern Virginia. Appalachian Independence Center has been a vital support during this time, not only to the communities they serve, but also to emergency management agencies and efforts. Two members were able to attend the Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living. This was held in October in Chicago, IL. One attendee also presented a session on emergency preparedness for people with disabilities. The next meeting will take place on 1/23/25 at DARS Central Office.

- Frederick Foard: Commended the efforts of the new members in developing 2024 recommendations and efforts of DARS staff in responding to 2023 recommendations.
- Heidi Lawyer: PEATC continues to work with DARS on EPIC related activities. PEATC has developed training for parents and youth on work incentives as well as resource information that will be in English and Spanish. Those resources and draft flyers for the training are with DARS for approval. PEATC has four training programs this fall—Transition University, IEP University, Building Strong Parent Advocates, and Early Childhood Academy. These are done under contract to the Virginia Department of Education and are free, self-paced online trainings offered several times a year. They are geared to parents, but professionals also attend. PEATC continues to offer workshops and webinars in special education, early childhood, Medicaid waivers, transition and more. PEATC doubled its staff this fall and received a 1.1 million allotment in the state budget to establish family supports in all 8 of the VDOE Superintendent's regions. PEATC has a number of other collaborative initiatives with VDOE, the VCU Partnership for People with Disabilities, and other organizations. PEATC is in the 5th year of its foundational PTI grant and its RSA Grant that establishes it as the Parent Center for Transition in VA, GA, NC, SC, GA, and TN. PEATC is awaiting direction regarding reapplying for these grants which are competitive. That will likely come in the spring.

Matters of Public Comment: There were no public comments received. Having no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 1:53 p.m.

The next meeting will take place on March 10, 2025 at the Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services Central Office in Henrico.

Meeting Handouts:

1. Proposed Meeting Agenda
2. Draft Meeting Minutes from September 9, 2024 Meeting
3. 2024 Annual Report Design Mockup
4. Consumer Satisfaction Report Results
5. FFY 2025 Consumer Satisfaction Survey MOA
6. WWRC Presentation