# **State of California**

# **Health and Human Services Agency**

# **Department of Rehabilitation**

**DHHAC meeting notes**

**September 15, 2022**

**DOR Central Office, 721 Capitol Mall, Room 301, Sacramento, CA 95814, with virtual participation via Zoom.**

**In-attendance:**

DHHAC Members (virtual), Callie Frye, Toni Chapman, Frank Lester, Michelle Bronson, Anthony Davis, and Hugh Lafler.

DOR staff (in-person): Kate Bjerke, Susan Pelbath, Craig Rubenstein, Michael Thomas, Joe Xavier, and Edward Ly.

DOR presenters: Danielle Hackworth

DOR ASL interpreters: Elise Thompson, Judy Spohn

DOR staff (virtual): Michael DeNisco, Anthony Davis, Tiffany Barlow, Kristin Connor, Erica Lopez, Louise Trobel, Lyes Bousseloub, Angelica Martinez, Jacquelyn Quijada, Karina Cortez, Toni Solorzano, Marnee Wafer-Hoecke, Roberto Solorzano

**Item 1: Welcome and Introductions**

Callie Frye (DHHAC Chair) welcomed attendees and conducted a roll call.

**Item 2: Public Comment**

Callie asked public members if there were any issues or concerns to address that were not on the agenda. The following public comments were made:

* Michael DeNisco: briefly discussed SB105 and 203, discussed Blind Field Services, and wanted to note that services are separate. BFS has been successful. Seeing more and more deaf counselors feeling stressed and overwhelmed. Michael feels the counselors don’t understand the system and so much responsibility is put on them. Many deaf counselors are also not able to promote. Would like to make time to consider making a separate division for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services and follow the lead of Blind Field Services. To be continued.
* Kristen Conner: Kristen is a counselor with the Depart of Rehabilitation and would like to see that DOR makes sure job postings are available for everyone to apply. Would like to discuss a possible proposal for a deaf and hard of hearing specialists for the job postings.

**Item 3: Update Regarding the June 16, 2022 Meeting Minutes**

Kate Bjerke: In regard to the June 16, 2022 meeting minutes, DOR is navigating staffing transitions/working on getting the minutes for the future.

**Item 4: DOR Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services (DHHS) Section Report**

* Craig Rubenstein: informed that the next DHHAC is 12/15/22. Craig discussed the report on Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services. Michael Thomas is not present for the meeting so Susan Pelbath will discuss this topic. The Van Nuyes District office hired a counselor. On July 1st, a memo will be sent out to explain about new processes. Instead of having SB105 meeting, would like to replace it with COP (Community of Practice). Not sure if there will there be SB105 next year? Will check next year. Craig is providing deaf and sensitivity training to IED for all staff, information will go out. SSAI is short staffed, trying to recruit more. DHHAC will have VRI services. SSAI can meet with consumers and counselors virtually instead of contracting out with other interpreting agencies, it’s brand new and has been going well. The numbers of cases for deaf and hard of hearing that are opening statewide: as of the August 31st report, 677 full cases have been opened in the state. Counselors partnered with RCD’s to know how to provide appropriate services such as hearing aids. 37 RCD’s statewide. DHHAC set up a coffee and tea chat for SSAI interpreters and one for the RCD’s to listen to concerns how DHHAC is doing and how to reach out to the community. Some interpreters do not have laptops, so laptops were sent to them at home. DHHAC listened to RCD’s concerns in their department to see what was needed in each area. Hoping to have a deaf and hard of hearing mental health presenter in October. Craig attended a workforce meeting in Monterey. It was more of a “meet and greet” but different training programs were discussed, and Craig is hopeful to set up partnerships. Craig suggested the need to contact charter schools because students do not know about DOR services. Craig would like to see DOR update their intranet and inquired about installing different videos to reach out to deaf and hard of hearing communities.

Committee members questions and comments:

* Callie Frye: Callie had a question about the total of 677 cases? Wondering if that was pre-Covid, how many cases were open that year?
* Hugh Lafler: Would like to know if DOR is updating their website because it is important to reach out to different schools and the deaf and hard of hearing community. Would like to know if sign language can somehow be used on the DOR website?

Members of the public questions and comments:

None.

**Item 5: Danielle Hackworth, Manager with Pathways to Success and the Pathways to Success Project (PSP).**

PSP will focus on six, high wage, high skilled, and high demand careers. Service delivery will be based on consumers identified goal rather than geography. PSP is a research grant and is collaborating with San Diego State University Research Foundation Interwork Institute partnering with Career Index as assistive technology to advance DOR services to participants in a virtual service delivery model. SARA is a virtual assistant and can text consumers and check in with them. The consumer can respond/reply and the information gets put into a case note for the counselor. SARA will work with consumers even after their case is successfully closed. The program is also working on a cohort website. All consumers will have to sign a release of information, so their information and vocational goal can be shared with the university. PSP can do direct placement/can offer plans so the consumer can get their foot in the door. Hoping to build relationships with businesses to help individuals get job.

Committee members questions and comments:

* Anthony Davis: Many high school students have completed programs in school and have experience in IT systems. Can they still enter program? Some people get work experience in high school, recent graduates can benefit from the program, do they need more experience to get into the program?
* Michelle Bronson: Would like to know, what Coursera is? It’s an associate degree/it’s a program that some businesses use. Michelle also mentioned that individuals who are interested in nursing, physical therapy, etc, that there is resistance in the field hiring people who are deaf and hard of hearing. Individuals do well in the program and graduate but then they can’t get hired, they need special equipment and businesses feel that deaf people can’t do the job. Hoping barriers will be let down.
* Callie Frye: Commented on Coursera and that she has some familiarity with it.

Members of the public questions and comments:

None.

**Item 6: DOR Specialized Services**

Susan Pelbath appointed by Governor Newsom as the new Deputy Director over the Specialized Services Division. Sue oversees sections: Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Older Individuals Who Are Blind grant program, Blind Field Services, The Orientation Center for the Blind, DHHAC, and the Business Enterprise Program. Sue was sworn in on 06/26/22. Sue shared her experience and background with the department. September is Deaf Awareness Month, and the following week is International Deaf Awareness week. There are a lot of RCD’s for the Pathway’s to Success Program. The adult work experience program is a way to get consumers exposed to potential employers. Would like to see more people with disabilities become employed and advocate for them and be placed in a real career.

Committee member questions and comments:

* Callie Frye: Would like to know what Sue’s priorities are with her new position and what she would like to see happen.
* Toni Chapman: Toni would like to see more consumers become successful in a variety of fields. How can we educate consumers about DOR? Would like to see more training for consumers and would like to see how DOR can come up with different ideas. Currently, the cost of living is up. How do we create opportunities to come together and address concerns?

Members of the public:

* Angelica Martinez: Would like to know more about the next SB105 meeting.

**Item 7: Directorate Report**

Joe Xavier, DOR Director, reported on national, state, and departmental topics on interest. Highlights included the following:

Acknowledgments and commemorations: consumers that want to work; they need to go to work and think about having a conversation with DOR about advancing in employment and getting a job now to meet needs; consumers can get DOR services concurrently to get a better job.

**National level updates:**

* Labor Day is important to recognize how we ended up with a 40-hour work week and many of the things that are enjoyed in the workplace.
* National Rehabilitation Awareness week takes place this month. The importance of continuing the work we do collectively and as a community to continue to provide services to individuals that need services.
* Deaf awareness week, important to continue to give voice, face, and visibility and continue to present opportunities for the community.
* It is Suicide Prevention Awareness month.
* This month, we commemorate individuals who died in state hospitals and were placed in unmarked graves.
* Native American day is taking place this month.
* 9/11 aka Patriot Day, remembering lives lost and the first responders.
* The department continues to develop and explore opportunities and partnerships. The national conferences are traditionally held the end October/beginning of November. The conferences this year will be held in Texas but Texas is a state that we are prohibited to travel to so we will not be attending. DOR will be attending the spring conferences and there may be some virtual sessions.
* The reallotment are grants that cannot be used, so they are sent back to RSA and RSA makes those funds available to other states. 22 agencies relinquished $350 million dollars. 15 agencies requested $87 million dollars. Which means that $263 million dollars went unallocated. In the past, those dollars had been used for disability innovation funds.
* RSA Commissioners have a nominee, Dante Allen from California. He is currently the Executive Director of the California Able board. He is an individual with a disability. Dante does not assume his responsibilities until confirmation by the senate. Date TBD.

**State Level updates:**

* The Governor published an executive order. It is focused on advancing equity within the State of California. Some highlights from the executive order: The Department of Finance is now required for any budget change proposals to ask for resources and analysis of the equities and inequities within the respective program areas to be considered as part of any future budget. Strategic plans will need to include analysis of the programs in terms of equities and inequities and the disparities they are in and the plans need to engage the respective communities and receive input from those communities in the planning effort. Those plans will now be made publicly available.
* Under the Department of Human Resources, they are going to be required to collect and analyze and report on equity measures which will include employment of individuals with disabilities within the state’s workforce. The Department of Human Resources is going to be collecting data on vacancies and hard to fill positions and address and develop pathways and strategies. The order also creates a Racial Equity Committee which is composed of 11 individuals, (7 appointed by administration 2 appointed by the senate, 2 by the assembly).

**Department updates:**

* DOR received $48 million dollars of additional funding.
* DOR is preparing an agency action plan to address inequities, Targeted Universalism.
* DOR has an impact goal: the targeted population is behavioral health; will target increasing employment outcomes from 44 percent to 49 percent, target lifting quarterly earnings, and to pay attention to black and brown communities and lift their earnings to be equal with individuals who are Caucasian.
* DOR is Transitioning to the states financial information system which is a platform the state will use for budgeting, accounting, procurement, and other functions. AWARE will still be used for case management systems. More information to come.
* The electronic workflow is a goal. This will include two levels of development, one at the business level, and one, at the professional development level (i.e. time sheets). Student services have the funds. Goal is to serve 60k students annually within the next few months. Add service delivery models and going to apply targeted universalism.
* DOR now has a consumer payment cards; it is a debit card and using state dollars, pays the bills for consumer books and tuition.

Committee members questions and comments:

None

Public members questions and comments:

* Angelica Martinez: would like Joe to attend/visit various meetings trainings. Have a separate sector for deaf and hard of hearing.
* Michael DeNisco: agrees with Angelica and would like to have a separate sector and that the proposal will be discussed. Would like to know how the student debit card works.

**Item 8: Bylaws**

Committee members questions and comments:

None

Public members questions and comments:

* Marnee Wafer-Hoecker: Marnee mentioned there are no RCD’s on the committee and thinks they should be added by the Bylaws.
* Michael DeNisco: Commented that recently there was a disability council board, and every member was from DOR. Is that a conflict of interest?

**Item 9: Future Agenda Items**

Committee member questions and comments:

* Michelle Bronson: Would like to separate special education and deaf education. What are the different issues concerns for RCD’s?

Public member questions and comments:

* Kristen Connor: Would like the DOR job posting to include a very specific job title and detailed description (specifically for the deaf and hard of hearing/Southern California) and it be a separate posting from the RCD position.