**California State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) Quarterly Meeting**

March 6 – 7, 2024, 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. both days

Meeting location: Department of Rehabilitation (DOR), 721 Capitol Mall, Room 301, Sacramento, CA 95814

*Meeting Minutes*

*Approved on July 17, 2024*

# Attendance

SRC members (in-person): Theresa Comstock, Chanel Brisbane, Ivan Guillen.

SRC members (by Zoom): Susan Henderson, La Trena Robinson, Candis Welch, Yuki Nagasawa, Hilary Lentini, Elizabeth Lewis.

SRC members absent: Jonathan Hasak

DOR staff (in-person): Kate Bjerke, Jay Harris, Jessica Grove, Joe Xavier, Peter Frangel,

DOR staff (by Zoom): Shayn Anderson, Nancy Wentling, Michele Kaplan, Mark Erlichman, Carol Asch, Cruz Fresquez, Marla Harper, Judy Gonzalez, Antoinette Deboisblanc.

Members of the public (by Zoom): Shellena Heber, Brittany Comegna, Aaron Espinoza, Shannon Coe, Kenneth Brooks.

# Item 1: Welcome and Introductions

A quorum was established and Ivan Guillen, SRC Chair, called the meeting to order. SRC members, DOR staff, and community members introduced themselves.

# Item 2: Public Comment

None.

# Item 3: Approval of the November 29 – 30, 2023 SRC Quarterly Meeting Minutes

It was moved/seconded (Comstock/Henderson) to approve the November 29 – 30, 2023 SRC quarterly meeting minutes as presented. (Yes – Comstock, Henderson, Brisbane, Guillen, Robinson, Lentini), (No – 0), (Absent for vote – Lewis, Hasak, Welch), (Abstain – 0).

# Item 4: DOR Services for Individuals who are Justice-Involved

Shayn Anderson, Regional Director, DOR San Joaquin Valley District, presented an overview of DOR services available to individuals with disabilities in correctional settings as they prepare for release and transition back into the community. In the past, DOR had subscribed to the premise of “individuals must be available to participate in services” so this population was told they had to wait until exiting incarceration in order to access DOR services. In 2019, there was a paradigm shift at DOR to meet individuals where they are at and provide outstanding customer service regardless of incarceration status. DOR’s efforts have included:

* Developing a Memorandum of Understanding with the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation
* In 2022, the DOR San Joaquin Valley District began working locally with the California State Prison at Corcoran. Recently the DOR San Joaquin Valley District started working with the Central California Women’s Facility in Chowchilla.
* In August 2023, the DOR San Joaquin Valley District and the San Diego District began working with Community Re-entry Services (CRS) at the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. DOR is now working with multiple CRS sites in Bakersfield, Stockton, San Diego and Sacramento.
* DOR participates on a Statewide California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation Workgroup, and a Statewide Justice Involved Workgroup.
* DOR continues to make a concerted effort to serve this traditionally unserved/underserved population. Currently, it is estimated that DOR has served approximately 4,900 justice involved individuals in the last six months statewide. Local districts are proactively collaborating on adult and youth referrals from probation, parole agents, county public defenders, and a variety of other community partners.
* Upcoming activities include an April 30, 2023 training to DOR staff on how to work with individuals who are justice involved.

General lessons learned with serving justice involved individuals include:

* Engaged, energetic, and experienced designated counselors are the key to making this initiative and project work.
* Developing good rapport with the liaison at each facility is critical.
* Doing intakes and other appointments virtually can be effective and efficient in some cases.
* Developing good rapport with the justice involved individual before release is an important step.
* Develop and maintain a contact list of all key partners and DOR liaisons.
* The use of expedited enrollment and skilled interviewing is a must.
* Disability is often perceived as a weakness –  need to have less emphasis on the term “disability.”

SRC member feedback and questions included the following:

* A high percentage of incarcerated individuals in California have a substance use disorder; keep this in mind when providing DOR services.
* Providing opportunities for skill development and employment while individuals are incarcerated is essential.
* Suggestion to engage with and provide supports to families of incarcerated individuals. Families can help de-stigmatize disability.
* Request that a report out from the April 30, 2024 stakeholder workgroup be provided.

Public comment: Shellena Heber, Valley Center for the Blind, suggested that training be provided to Community Rehabilitation Programs.

# Item 5: DOR Consumer Application Process

Nancy Wentling, Chief, Policy and Resources Division (VRPRD) presented an overview of DOR’s consumer application process:

* Individuals can apply for VR services in one of three ways:
  + Submit a completed and signed Department application form.
  + Submit a completed and signed common intake application from a “one-stop” center.
  + Has otherwise requested VR services from the Department.
* Individuals must provide information necessary to initiate an assessment to determine eligibility and priority for services.
* The individual needs to be available to complete the assessment process.

The DR 222 VR Services application form requires that applicants provide the following information:

* + Name, Other Name(s) Used
  + Street, city, zip code, county; Mailing address if different.
  + Phone Number/Cell Number
  + Date of Birth / Age
  + Email Address
  + Description of impairment
  + How can DOR help
  + Who referred you
  + Full name of person who will always know where you live / relationship / contact information
  + Release of Information to Perspective Employers – authorization Yes/No
  + Orientation Materials: received and read with counselor and applicant initials and date initialed.
  + Immigration Status
  + Signatures for applicant, parent/guardian, counselor

In the near future, updates to state regulations will make the following changes to the application process:

* Deletes requirement that applicants must complete and sign the DR 222 form.
* Deletes reference to a specific form number and name.
* Identifies the minimum information an individual must provide to apply for VR services:
  + Name, Other Name, Preferred Name
  + Date of Birth
  + Primary Language
  + Contact Information: Address, phone number, OR email address
  + Description of disability and how it gets in the way of work.
* Removes signature requirement.

These changes align with DOR’s commitment to customer service and person-centered philosophy. The application process will be streamlined and will remove the unnecessary and duplicative process for individuals who apply using DOR’s online portal or other methods.

Michele Kaplan, Program Analyst, DOR Program Policy Section, gave a demonstration of the VR Connections online application. Following the demonstration, SRC members had the opportunity to provide feedback and ask questions. Highlights included the following:

* Appreciation that applicants receive an automated message after the application is submitted online.
* Suggestion that a field be added to the application for individuals to list if they need additional reasonable accommodations (besides or in addition to American Sign Language interpreting).
* Question if the paper and online version of the applications are translated into the top five threshold languages.
* Consider if the terms “disability” and “conservator” should be defined within the application.
* Suggestion that clarification be added to the application that individuals are not required to complete every field.
* Discussion about referral processes, how cases are opened after DOR staff receive the application, and suggestion to add a field for individuals to indicate if they were referred by a Community Rehabilitation Program or Regional Center.
* Suggestion that functionality be added so individuals can track the status of their application in the VR Connections online portal.

# Item 6: DOR Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB) Program Update

Jay Harris, DOR OIB Program Manager, shared information on the OIB program which aims to assist Californians, 55 and older, who are blind or severely visually impaired, live in their community of choice, function at maximum capacity, and feel valued in society.

Funding for OIB service providers is awarded through a competitive process. DOR released the first of three Request for Applications (RFA) in January 2023 and completed the third of these RFAs in September 2023. The results provided coverage for the entirety of the State when the final grant was executed with an effective date of November 1, 2023. The new grant cycle began October 1, 2023. DOR made 3-year awards with an option to extend for two additional one-year periods in order to facilitate funding stability for the grantees. All counties in California have OIB services available to eligible residents. An additional $4,000,000 in Social Security Administration reimbursement dollars has been incorporated into the OIB grants to provide enhanced funding for OIB programs and to extend OIB equivalent services to the 18-54 population.

Assembly Bill 2480 (Arambula) allowed the DOR to fund services for individuals under 55 who are visually impaired and not seeking employment. This bill updated previous regulations and facilitated funding distribution without a separate competitive process, aiding seamless service provision across age groups.

Individuals who are older and who have reduced or low vision, or blindness, can visit a DOR funded OIB service provider in their community and receive independent skills training which can include learning to use a smart phone, assistive technology devices, and orientation and mobility. It was noted that individuals receiving OIB services are not considered DOR consumers.

Feedback and questions from the SRC members included:

* Personal experience with older family members who had blindness later in life but never got connected to a local OIB program – how can connections be made in the community?
* How is a successful closure defined for the population that receives OIB services? Harris explained that case closure is not a component of the OIB program.
* It was confirmed that no tribal organizations applied for the OIB funding.
* If an individual has a dispute regarding the OIB services they received, the individual would follow the service provider’s specific dispute resolution process. The individual could also contact the Client Assistance Program.

Public comment: Shellena Heber, Valley Center for the Blind, noted that her organization receives OIB funds. In her experience she has seen individuals build confidence and skills through the OIB program and then transfer over to DOR pursue VR services to obtain employment.

# Item 7: Directorate Report

Joe Xavier, DOR Director, reported on leadership and policy topics of interest. Highlights included the following:

* March observances - National Brain Injury Awareness Month, Developmental Disability Awareness Month, Cerebral Palsy Awareness Month, World Down Syndrome Day (March 21st), National VR Counselor Appreciation Day (March 22nd), and Cesar Chavez Day (March 31st).
* Federal updates: A significant amount of reallotment funding is anticipated to be available this year along with a disability innovation fund grant opportunity, both of which DOR will be monitoring. Due to DOR’s strong fiscal condition, the Department would be able to withstand a potential federal budget impasse for several months.
* State updates: The Governor’s proposed 2024-25 budget includes a $38 billion deficit. Within the budget are proposed reforms including the modernization of the Area Agency on Aging (AAA) system, the development of a Master Plan for Developmental Services, and reform of the foster care rates to increase services that holistically and effectively serve youth in the foster care system and provide a better trajectory into adulthood. Throughout the proposed budget, the importance of innovation and transformation is emphasized, and as such, there is a responsibility to ensure that disability is meaningfully accounted for in the proposed reforms.
* Department updates:
  + DOR’s proposed budget for 2024-25 is approximately $576 million and includes 1,883 total positions. The budget includes an interagency agreement with the Public Utilities Commission to make the Voice Options Program permanent. It was suggested that the SRC receive a future update on the Voice Options Program. DOR is currently undergoing the Assembly and Senate budget hearing process.
  + DOR’s annual reports include information on mediation and fair hearings, the Older Individuals who are Blind program, the Business Enterprise Program, the Traumatic Brain Injury program, Social Security Reimbursement report, and the assistive technology and independent living reports. These reports provide the public and legislature with policy information and the SRC is encouraged to review these reports as well and provide recommendations on opportunities for improvement.
  + DOR continues to lead nationally in the development practices and models of how to modernize and reimagine vocational rehabilitation services. Examples include expedited eligibility and aligning caseloads by sector strategies. DOR continues to see an increase in the number of consumers served. A new student services team has been established.
  + DOR’s hybrid and site-based work design is based on the needs of consumers and ensuring they receive supportive and effective services.
  + DOR continues to lead in the phaseout of subminimum wage employment in California.
  + DOR has established an ombudsperson position to address complaints that are unable to get resolved at the local level. Michael Thomas has been appointed as ombudsperson and will act as an impartial party who can engage with the consumer and DOR staff.
  + Victor Duron, DOR Chief Deputy Director, has been temporarily reassigned to lead the development of California’s Master Plan for Developmental Services.
  + Department leadership transitions include the appointment of Maliheh Lotfalian-Rizk as Assistant HR Chief. Current vacancies include DOR’s Chief of Business Services, Greater East Bay District Administrator, Labor Relations Officer, San Francisco Regional Director, Redwood Empire Regional Director, Assistant Deputy for Specialized Services, and Chief Equity Officer.

SRC member feedback included:

* Appreciation for serving individuals involved with the justice system and having DOR counselors provide services in prisons.
* Appreciation that Proposition 1 includes the use of the Individual Placement and Support model within behavioral health services.

# Item 8: Administrative Law Judges

Cruz Fresquez, Appeals Analyst, DOR Office of Legal Affairs, presented biographies of the following, proposed Administrative Law Judges (ALJs) for the SRC’s consideration:

1. Abraham Matsui
2. David Mazzi
3. Bonnie Fong
4. Lisa McLain
5. Lotte Colbert

SRC member feedback included the following:

* It was noted that ALJ McLain has held numerous positions in the past three years. It was confirmed that ALJ McLain currently works for the California Department of Social Services, State Hearings Division.
* It was requested that moving forward, if possible, to provide the proposed ALJ names with plenty of advance notice to the SRC so stakeholders can review past decisions the ALJs have ruled on.

It was moved/seconded (Robinson/Henderson) to approve the following ALJs to conduct fair hearings and mediations for DOR consumers: Abraham Matsui, David Mazzi, Bonnie Fong, Lisa McLain, Lotte Colbert. (Yes – Comstock, Brisbane, Guillen, Robinson, Henderson), (No – 0), (Absent for vote – Lewis, Hasak, Welch, Lentini), (Abstain – 0).

# Item 9: Fair Hearing and Mediation Statistics and Decision Summaries

Cruz Fresquez, Appeals Analyst, DOR Office of Legal Affairs, reviewed fair hearing and mediation statistics, nature of issues and complaints, and legal decision summaries from Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2022-2023 (October 1, 2022 – September 30, 2023). Fresquez began by providing background information on the appeals process. Federal and state laws and regulations provide applicants and consumers with the right to request a mediation or fair hearing on any department action or decision that occurred within the previous year relating to their application for, or receipt of, services. Mediations and fair hearings are conducted by impartial hearing officers (also known as ALJs) and DOR contracts with the Department of Social Services, State Hearings Division, to provide this service. DOR is required to submit an annual report to the federal Rehabilitation Services Administration on the number of requests for mediations and fair hearings, and the number of disputes resolves through these processes. Included with the SRC’s meeting materials was the FFY Year 2022 – 23 annual report. In context, the number of fair hearings and mediations is a small percentage of DOR’s overall caseload. In total, eighteen legal decisions were issued. Potential trends and reoccurring issues from the FFY 2022-23 decisions included:

* The issue of maintenance support and whether DOR is required to pay for a consumer’s everyday living expenses.
* Communication issues/breakdowns between the consumer and DOR staff.
* Issues regarding the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) including amendments, changes, contents, and whether or not the IPE is being followed.
* Reimbursement costs.

SRC member feedback and questions included the following:

* The information and trends from the mediation and fair hearing decisions helps inform the SRC as they consider potential policy recommendations.
* The Client Assistance Program also receives concerns from consumers regarding the quality of counseling services and communication breakdown between the consumer and DOR. Suggestion that DOR prioritize training on quality customer service and communications.
* Some issues resolve themselves at hearings – what can be done to resolve the issue sooner in the rights and remedies process?
* Suggestion that DOR consider allowing for in-person mediation or hearings as a reasonable accommodation for consumers.
* The issue of maintenance supports for everyday living expenses could benefit from development of an integrated referral system amongst agencies like DOR, CalAIM, Independent Living Centers, CalFresh, etc. The policies and regulations regarding maintenance supports can be vague and confusing to DOR consumers and families.
* Ensure that trends and reoccurring issues from the mediations and fair hearings are shared with the appropriate DOR staff.

Public comment: Brittany Comegna provided comment about her personal experience with maintenance issues and school options. Aaron Espinoza asked how the FFY 2022-23 maintenance cases were resolved.

# Item 10: Client Assistance Program (CAP) Report Out

Connie Chu, Managing Attorney, Disability Rights California (DRC), and Ivan Guillen, SRC Chair and CAP Senior Advocate, DRC, provided an overview of CAP’s advocacy efforts, trends, outreach, training, and initiatives. Highlights included the following:

* DRC is the agency designated under federal law to protect and advocate for the rights of Californians with disabilities. DRC works in litigation, legal representation, advocacy services, investigations, public policy, and provides information, advice, referral, and community outreach.
* In 2023, DRC provided more than 21,000 individuals with advocacy services, provided 1,435 outreaches and trainings impacting more than 66,000 people, analyzed 816 bills, took positions on 156 bills, and sponsored 11 bills.
* The CAP advises and informs DOR applicants and clients about services and benefits available to them, assists and advocates for people applying to (or getting services from) Independent Living Centers, and informs people about services and benefits available to them under Title I of the ADA (employment discrimination). Common issues identified by CAP in 2023 included:
  + Breakdown in communication/relationship with the counselor
  + Self-employment
  + Delays with application process
  + Private vs. public school training
  + School accreditation issues
  + Case closures due to non-cooperation
* In addition, CAP identified the following systemic trends:
* Segregated/sub-minimum wage employment.
* Language access
* Importance of providing quality customer service
* Need for improved supports for clients with mental health disabilities.
* Lack of written notice when services are stopped.
* Concerns with assessments and evaluations
* Need for clarity regarding services.
* Denials of informed choice related to vendors.
* Concerns with Individualized Plans for Employment.
* Need for reasonable accommodations, particularly regarding communication needs.
* DRC has collaborated with DOR on the local level by offering trauma-informed training to DOR staff in Van Nuys/Foothill and Santa Barabara Districts, collaborating to work with justice-involved individuals in the San Diego District, and attending DOR District Team Manager meetings. At the executive level, DRC partners with DOR through the SRC, discussing initiatives like the Consumer Payment Card and regulation packages.

SRC member questions and feedback included:

* When is the best time to refer an individual to CAP and what is the best referral method? Response – anytime an individual is experiencing challenges with VR services they can contact CAP by calling the intake line or submitting a web intake.
* Suggestion that the SRC revisit CAP’s systemic trends as future policy recommendations are developed, particularly regarding customer service.

Public comment: Brittany Comegna asked if DRC has a Deaf specialist.

# Recess

The SRC quarterly meeting recessed until March 7, 2024 at 9:00 a.m.

# THURSDAY, MARCH 7, 2024

# Item 11: Reconvene, Welcome, and Introductions

Ivan Guillen, SRC Chair, reconvened the meeting. SRC members and meeting attendees introduced themselves.

# Item 12: Public Comment

None.

# Item 13: Monitoring and Evaluation Committee

Peter Frangel, Manager, DOR Planning Unit, and Marla Harper, Research Analyst, DOR Planning Unit, joined the SRC to present the results of the State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2022-23 Consumer Satisfaction Survey (CSS) and to provide responses and proposed changes to the CSS based upon suggestions submitted by the SRC in December 2023.Harper began by explaining that the CSS is conducted annually to ensure that DOR is meeting its VR program responsibilities to its consumers by providing high-quality, effective services that ultimately result in employment outcomes. The CSS gathers anonymous feedback from individuals who received services from DOR in the previous SFY. The CSS results are utilized to increase effectiveness and efficiency in the service delivery process. A summary of the 2022-23 CSS results was provided:

* Surveyed 7.2% of DOR’s total population.
* Received 955 responses:
  + VR consumers = 849 responses
  + Potentially eligible (PE) consumers (also known as students) = 106 responses.
* VR respondents most reported learning, psychiatric, and physical disabilities.
* PE respondents most reported learning and intellectual and development disabilities.
* Ages 20-39 and 30-39 were most common among VR respondents.
* VR respondents gave satisfied ratings for services provided by DOR, DOR counselors, service providers, employment services, and current employment. PE respondents reported that all Student Services are important, and they are satisfied with them.
* Still looking, being a student, or needs additional help to find a job were top reasons for being unemployed.
* VR and PE respondents gave positive, negative, and constructive feedback.

SRC member feedback and questions regarding the SFY 2022-23 CSS results included:

* Request for clarification on what “job opportunities” means in the context of the survey.
* Suggestion to add a question that asks about the amount of time consumers are involved in a job search, which may help determine if there is a perception or belief that jobs will be immediately available, or if consumers are experiencing lengthy timelines when searching for jobs.

Frangel then provided an update on DOR’s responses to the SRC’s December 2023 suggestions regarding the CSS:

* SRC suggestion: Research the principles of survey methodology to identify and establish effective sampling processes.
  + *Planning Unit has been exploring methodologies to improve the sampling process, response rate, and questions.*
* SRC suggestion: Send the CSS to consumers who have received services within the last six months.
  + *Updating the criteria to address this. Current process is looking at application dates, update would look at service dates.*
* SRC suggestion: Instead of sending out surveys once per year, send the surveys out within three months of the consumer receiving services.
  + *Challenging under current methodology and resources. Would require greater shift toward digital delivery only.*
* SRC suggestion: Consider alternatives to providing survey links directly in emails, as some email providers may relegate a message that includes links to the junk or spam folder.
  + *Planning Unit is exploring SurveyMonkey upgrade to address sender and link information, as well as Aware functionalities.*
* SRC suggestion: Utilize texting as a survey distribution method.
  + *Exploring potential to upgrade current tool (SurveyMonkey) to have access to texting features. Also looking into field staff resources to accommodate for students.*
* SRC suggestion: Explore how the DOR website and the VR Connections Consumer Portal could be used to facilitate survey completion.
  + *Planning Unit met with different sections to explore. VR Connections are limited to current features; website would greatly impact sample methodology.*
* SRC suggestion: Ensure that DOR has accurate and up-to-date emails on file for consumers.
  + *Over the past five years, the deliverable rate has been 89.8%-93.7%. DOR has a process for obtaining email addresses.*
* SRC suggestion: Have DOR staff discuss the CSS with consumers during the first encounter and talk about the information that will be collected.
  + *CSS surveys a sample of the population, not the entire population of consumers. Could include language in existing record of services communications.*
* SRC suggestion: Provide consumers with incentives for completing the survey.
  + *The DOR's Procurement Section responded that DOR is not permitted to provide any type of monetary incentive because it is strictly prohibited under RAM Chapter 9 Section 904, the California State Constitution Article 16, Section 6, and SCM Vol. 3 Section 9.A2.0.*
* SRC suggestion: Have SVRP-QPRs reach out to consumers and students directly and request that they complete the survey.
  + *Impact on the field staff and would require adjustments on anonymity.*
* SRC suggestion: Emphasize that the goal of the survey is to improve services.
  + *Already included in cover letter.*
* SRC suggestion: Assure consumers that their responses are anonymous.
  + *Already included in cover letter.*
* SRC suggestion: Inform parents about the survey. Many students are learning about online safety and may be hesitant to complete an online survey.
  + *Planning Unit met with Student Services managers to gain a better understanding of more effective ways to communicate with students.*
* SRC suggestion: Have State Internship Program participants send individual emails and follow up with consumers about the survey.
  + *CSS is anonymous, so we have no way of knowing which consumers have not responded. We have a feedback loop in place where DOR’s Consumer Affairs analyst follows up with consumers who said they would like to speak with DOR directly about their experiences.*
* SRC suggestion: Consider a shorter survey and let the consumer know upfront how long it will take to complete.
  + *Survey Monkey estimates 7 minutes to complete. Typical time spent on 2022-23 CSS was 3 min 44 sec. Survey drop out rate increases with each category. Exploring removing the demographic questions, and reprioritizing question order.*
* SRC suggestion: Add a comment box after every question for consumers to leave additional details.
  + *There is already an open-ended question at the end regarding suggestions to improve DOR services. There are "other" fields for the demographic questions that get categorized into one of the other fields. Possibly add to question category rather than every question.*

SRC member feedback included the following:

* Suggestion that there is a way to set up a webpage that is not searchable but the link can be shared with individuals – this may be an option for posting the CSS online.
* Clarification that State Internship Program participants could conduct general follow up without knowing who has responded or not.
* Suggestion to add a comment box under response option of “still looking” as a reason for why an individual is unemployed. There is a lot of room for interpretation with this question.
* Many students reported having learning disabilities, explore if this could be a factor for a low response rate and consider alternative survey methods (example: verbal survey instead of in writing).

Public comments:

* Shannon Coe asked if the CSS is offered in different languages and suggested considering different cultural approaches to offering the survey (example: 1:1 conversations).
* Kenneth Brooks asked for clarification on the CSS sample size, asked about how individuals are selected for the survey, and suggested shortening the survey.

# Item 14: Unified State Plan Committee

Peter Frangel, Manager, DOR Planning Unit, and Antoinette Deboisblanc,

Program Analyst, DOR Planning Unit, provided a quarterly update on the Department’s progress in meeting the goals and objectives in the 2020 – 2024 VR Services Portion of the Unified State Plan, which are:

1. Provide effective VR services with quality IPE developments consistent with workforce needs that lead to a career track with upward mobility offering sustainable living wages.
2. Develop innovative approaches to support an increase in obtaining and sustaining employment for all consumers including those with the most significant barriers to employment.
3. Improve systems alignment, coordination, and integration with partners to create a pathway toward successful employment outcomes for Californians with disabilities, including individuals with the most significant disabilities, with priorities focusing on individuals with behavioral health disabilities, students with disabilities, transition-age foster youth with disabilities, individuals with ID/DD, and justice-involved individuals with disabilities.
4. Meet business talent needs by preparing consumers for in-demand jobs using local and regional labor market information.

Throughout the update, SRC members asked clarifying questions regarding the interpretation of how results/percentages were presented. It was noted that the number of paid work experiences far exceeded the original goal that was set.

# Item 15: DOR Demand Side Employment Initiative

Megan Davis, Manager, DOR VR Policy and Resources Division, shared information on the $10 million Demand Side Employment Initiative (DSEI) which supports businesses that are diversifying their recruitment by incentivizing them to employ individuals with disabilities. The DSEI consists of four key elements: 1) training for HR professionals, 2) earn and learn opportunities, 3) the EmployABILITY business grants, and 4) a targeted marketing campaign. DOR has awarded 32 contracts to small and medium sized businesses throughout California in amounts ranging from $20,000 to $200,000. These businesses are using the grant funds for physical location improvement, barrier removal, disability inclusive consulting services, equipment purchases/training, new hire costs for individuals with disabilities and learning and training programs. Elizabeth Lewis, SRC member, requested to connect with Davis about opportunities for posting job announcements.

Public comment: Shannon Coe asked about grants being used for barrier removal and if DOR works with employer grantees to determine wages for individuals with disabilities being hired through the DSEI.

# Item 15: Adopt-a-Region Report Outs

SRC members reported out from recent discussions with their assigned DOR Regional Directors.

* Ivan Guillen, SRC Chair, met with Peter Blanco, Regional Director, DOR San Diego District. The district is expanding customized employment, internships and work experience opportunities for consumers, including the State Internship Program. New partnerships are being explored with the Department of Defense, local Employment Development Department offices, and a local Senator’s office. DOR staff are being trained on interim employment.
* Theresa Comstock, SRC member, met with David Wayte, Regional Director, and Sean Nunez, District Administrator, DOR Redwood Empire District. Wayte announced that he is retiring. The district is collaborating with several agencies on an event for individuals experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness. The district is serving justice involved individuals at Napa State Hospital, where VR Counselors visit once a week with individuals who are nearing discharge.
* Theresa Comstock also met with DOR Santa Barbara District leadership. Challenges in the district include VR counselor vacancies and the high cost of living in the area. Other districts have been helping with intakes and they are receiving support from graduate student assistants and student assistants. Three offices in the Santa Barbara District need to move and more in-person ASL interpreters are needed. Colleges have been reaching out to the district asking for learning disability testing.
* Elizabeth Lewis, SRC Member, met with Sharon O’Sullivan, District Administrator, DOR Northern Sierra District. Three staff are working with youth involved in the justice system. In Chico, DOR is working with local homeless shelters, providing work experience and assisting individuals with connecting to behavioral health services. The district is partnering with Tri-County Banks to assist individuals with setting up bank accounts.
* Susan Henderson, SRC member, met with Della Randolph, Regional Director, DOR Greater East Bay District. Challenges include filling positions. The district is having interns help in the local offices to provide clerical assistance. District staff are participating in local job fairs.

Public comment: Shannon Coe provided an update on the activities of the State Independent Living Council (SILC).

# Item 16: SRC Bylaws

Kate Bjerke, SRC Executive Officer, introduced a bylaw amendment for the SRC’s consideration. Bjerke reviewed the proposed amendment to add the position of Immediate Past Chair (if available) as an SRC officer position. The duties of the Immediate Past Chair will be advising the incoming Chair and Vice-Chair to support effective transition, ensure continuity, and serve on the SRC Executive Planning Committee. It was moved/seconded (Comstock/Henderson) to approve the proposed bylaw amendment as presented (Yes – Guillen, Brisbane, Robinson, Henderson, Lewis, Comstock, Welch, Lentini), (No – 0), (Absent for vote – Hasak), (Abstain – 0).

# Item 17: Policy Committee Report Out

Chanel Brisbane, SRC Vice-Chair and Policy Committee Chair, reported out from the February 2, 2024 SRC Policy Committee meeting during which questions and topics related to Administrative Law Judges (ALJs) were discussed. Lisa Niegel, Chief Council, and Cruz Fresquez, Appeals Analyst, with DOR’s Office of Legal Affairs, joined the meeting to discuss the following questions and topics:

* Do ALJs receive disability etiquette and implicit bias training?
* Are ALJs with disabilities and/or lived experience being hired?
* How are ALJs trained on the DOR regulations?
* Do DOR consumers have a right to an in-person hearing or mediation, or only when requested as a reasonable accommodation?
* Continued interest from the SRC about learning if the transition to utilizing the California Department of Social Services, State Hearings Division to conduct fair hearings for DOR consumers has resulted in positive changes, increased engagement, and neutrality, and if it is more user friendly for DOR consumers.
* Thoughts on offering DOR consumers a post hearing/mediation survey.
* Consumers receiving DOR evidence and position statements three days in advance.

After the discussion with Niegel and Fresquez, the SRC Policy Committee identified follow up questions and information requests regarding ALJs and fair hearings. These follow ups will be addressed during a future SRC Policy Committee meeting.

Brisbane explained that the SRC Policy Committee discussed that last year, there was a fair hearing decision that SRC members thought showed perhaps a lack of disability awareness, etiquette and understanding. After reviewing the eighteen hearings today it was asked if there are similar concerns. Overall, no significant concerns were raised on this year’s decisions related to disability awareness.

Future SRC Policy Committee topics will include the Master Plan on Career Education and self-employment.

# Item 18: Debrief and Recommendations Discussion

SRC members debriefed from the meeting discussions. Kate Bjerke, SRC Executive Officer, reviewed meeting highlights and policy questions under consideration. SRC member discussion highlights included the following:

* Transportation: Continue looking into transportation as a barrier for individuals obtaining and maintaining employment. This issue has come up numerous times in the CSS over the years. The DSEI initiative was able to provide transportation. How can DOR assist employers build transportation supports (examples: bus passes, parking reimbursement) into compensation and benefits packages?
* Maintenance: continue exploring issues and solutions regarding maintenance supports for DOR consumers, and the need to provide consumers with resources, referrals and alternatives. When DOR issues a denial of a maintenance good or service, there should be extra steps taken to explore what other resources are available.
* Consumer Satisfaction Survey: determine if the questions can be rearranged, and how to shorten the survey.
* DOR application: the SRC members held an in-depth discussion on, and review of, the DOR application, including the need to gather information from applicants on how they were referred to DOR, applicant reasonable accommodations and supports, adding a field for applicants to list a CRP and/or individual that can support them during the application process, having the online application available in other languages, and adding an asterisk next to required elements on the application. Brisbane noted that some DOR Districts are still using the health questionnaire form. It was confirmed that this form is no longer required or utilized. Brisbane will inform Bjerke of the Districts that are still using the health questionnaire.
* Trainings: request copies of the cultural competency trainings that DOR staff and ALJs receive.

# Item 19: Future Agenda Items

SRC members identified the following topics to be of interest for future SRC meetings:

* Learning about self-employment and apprenticeship programs.
* Understanding the Limited Examination and Appointment Program (LEAP)
* Further exploration of maintenance supports
* Further discussion regarding the DOR application
* Overview of the Ombudsperson role and responsibilities.

# Adjourn

The March 6 – 7, 2024 SRC quarterly meeting was adjourned.