**State Rehabilitation Council (SRC)**

**Policy Committee Meeting**

**January 9, 2025**

10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Location: Department of Rehabilitation (DOR) Central Office, 721 Capitol Mall, Room 407, Sacramento, CA 95814

*Meeting Minutes Approved on February 13, 2025*

Note: This committee meeting was held in accordance with California Government Code section 11123.5. There may be members of the public body who participated in meeting who were granted a reasonable accommodation per the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

**Attendance:**

* SRC Policy Committee members in attendance (by Zoom): Chanel Brisbane, Ivan Guillen, Brittany Comegna, Theresa Comstock
* SRC Policy Committee members absent: La Trena Robinson
* SRC members in attendance as members of the public (by Zoom): Yuki Nagasawa
* DOR staff in attendance: Kate Bjerke (present at DOR’s Central Office)
* Members of the public in attendance (by Zoom): Aaron Espinoza

# Item 1: Welcome and Introductions

Chanel Brisbane, SRC Policy Committee Chair, welcomed attendees to the meeting. Kate Bjerke, SRC Executive Officer, reviewed the Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act requirements.

# Item 2: Public Comment

None.

# Item 3: Approval of the October 17, 2024 Policy Committee Meeting Minutes

It was moved/seconded (Guillen/Comegna) to approve the October 17, 2024 SRC Policy Committee meeting minutes as presented (Yes – Guillen, Brisbane, Comegna), (No – 0), (Absent for vote – Comstock, Robinson), (Abstain – 0).

# Item 4: Debrief Discussion

The agenda item began with Bjerke providing an overview of topics of interest identified during the December 4 – 5, 2024 SRC quarterly meeting debrief session.

Bjerke explained that included with the meeting materials is a document titled “List of SRC agenda items and policy topics of interest”. This document begins with a listing of the SRC’s fifteen most recently identified topics of interest, followed by ten topics of interest that have been on the SRC’s list for a while (about over a year or more). Then the document lists five ongoing agenda items that the SRC addresses on a reoccurring basis, and thirteen policy questions. Bjerke explained that the goal of today’s meeting is to identify:

1. The top policy priorities for the SRC policy committee to address in 2025,
2. What questions the committee has on these policy priorities, and,
3. How to proceed with addressing the policy priorities.

The SRC Policy Committee then held an interactive discussion, a summary of which is provided below:

Top priorities for the SRC Policy Committee to address in 2025:

1. Staffing: What are the challenges to hiring and retaining Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselors?
2. Serving Immigrants and Refugees: How does/can DOR connect with groups that serve immigrants and refugees to provide information on VR services and Independent Living Centers?
3. Subminimum Wage: Understand and monitor the impact of the subminimum wage phase-out.

Topics for the full SRC to receive presentations on, and then the Policy Committee will explore these topics in greater detail:

* Housing: Learn about initiatives and efforts to connect individuals with disabilities experiencing homelessness with VR services and housing. Identify and understand DOR’s position on homelessness prevention for individuals with disabilities.
* Diversity, Equity and Inclusion: Learn about DOR’s Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility (IDEA) Division and the role of DOR’s new Chief Equity Officer.
* Public and Private Schools: Understand Cal. Code Regs. tit. 9 § 7155 regarding the use of public or private institutions, and the exceptions available.
* Mobility Evaluation Program (MEP): learn about DOR’s MEP program and the services available to consumers.

Comments, questions and feedback from the SRC Policy Committee members regarding these topics:

DOR Staffing

What are the internal and external barriers to attracting and retaining DOR field staff, particularly VR Counselors?

* Learn about the State of California requirement that staff work in the office two days per week.
  + Could increasing virtual services help alleviate the counselor staffing shortage?
  + Does working in the office have a financial burden on DOR staff?
  + Does working in the office present physical or other access barriers for DOR staff?
* Receive an update on counselor salaries, vacancies, staffing shortages and impacts in high cost-of-living areas.
* Is there a shortage of counselors for DOR consumers who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing? How can this be alleviated?
* How does low staffing impact the capacity of DOR to provide quality services and good customer service?
* Does DOR recruit by reaching out to VR Counseling programs at colleges and universities?
* What incentives are available to encourage people to pursue degrees in VR Counseling?
* Promote the mission of VR by conducting more outreach and highlighting consumer and VR Counselor success stories.
* Review Rehabilitation Services Administration technical assistance circulars for ideas.
* What supports and resources are available to VR Counselors who may be feeling overwhelmed?

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

* Learn about DOR’s Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility (IDEA) Division and the role of DOR’s new Chief Equity Officer. Understand the IDEA Division responsibilities, policy priorities, and current projects.
* How are inequities in DOR’s programs and services being identified, and what methodologies can be used to address these equity gaps?
  + What communities are unserved and underserved?
  + What data is being used to identify these communities?
  + How is DOR engaging with these communities and what are the outreach strategies?
  + How does DOR staffing impact underserved and unserved communities?
* The SRC has identified that individuals with behavioral health disabilities may be underserved. There is a need to increase coordination with mental health organizations.
  + What training is being provided to DOR counselors who are working with individuals with behavioral health disabilities?
  + Receive an update on the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model.
  + Revisit the SRC’s draft recommendation on the Integrating Employment and Recovery (IER) program.

Housing

* Learn about initiatives and efforts to connect individuals with disabilities experiencing homelessness with VR services and housing.
* Identify and understand DOR’s position on homelessness prevention for individuals with disabilities.
* Observation that the information on DOR’s website about housing can be confusing, as the guidance states for individuals to call their local Independent Living Center (ILC). It would be helpful if DOR adopted a no wrong door approach to provide “warm hand-offs” to ILCs. Does collaboration and connection between local DOR offices and ILCs need to be increased?
* Observation that the overall the DOR website is challenging to navigate/not intuitive, and the link to the VR application is hard to find.
* Suggestion that DOR should increase coordination with behavioral health agencies, as these agencies provide wrap around services that includes housing supports.

DOR Services for Immigrants and Refugees

* How will the upcoming change in federal administration impact services?
* How to mitigate possible fear people may have of reaching out to government agencies?
* How will changes to the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy impact services?
* Consider the intersectionality of the individuals that DOR serves.

Phase Out of Subminimum Wage

* There is a need for coordinated services and supported employment.
* Monitor transitions as individuals exit subminimum wage employment settings.
* Understand how DOR collaborates with the Regional Centers.
* How can we ensure that individuals are receiving quality vocational experiences and training? Several new programs are being launched and there is a need for quality control.

Public Comments:

* Yuki Nagasawa spoke about DOR’s collaboration with Alameda County and serving individuals with behavioral health disabilities. Nagasawa provided insight on the use of private versus public schools. Nagasawa spoke about the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) available to DOR staff.
* Aaron Espinoza asked if the policy priories align with the priorities of DOR consumers.

# Item 7: Adjourn

It was moved (Comstock/Guillen) to adjourn the January 9, 2025 SRC Policy Committee meeting.