# State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) Quarterly Meeting

Wednesday, June 11, 2025, 9:00 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.

Thursday, June 12, 2025, 9:00 a.m. – 3:45 p.m.

Location: Department of Rehabilitation, 721 Capitol Mall, Room 301, Sacramento, CA 95814

Meeting Minutes

Approved on September 10, 2025

*Note: This meeting was held in accordance with California Government Code section 11123. There may be members of the public body who participated in the meeting who were granted a reasonable accommodation per the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).*

**SRC members in attendance:**

* In-person:Ivan Guillen, Theresa Comstock
* By Zoom: Gregory Meza, Hilary Lentini, La Trena Robinson, Shannon Coe, Yuki Nagasawa
* Absent: Michelle Bello

**Department of Rehabilitation (DOR) staff in attendance:**

* In-person: Kate Bjerke, Jessica Grove, Gabriela Montano, Luis Lewis, Victor Duron, Dante Allen
* By Zoom: Peter Frangel, Jennifer Umberg, Candis Welch, Kim Rutledge, Sean Nunez, Petre Deliivanov, Ravenn Moon

**Members of the public in attendance (by Zoom):** Danny Marquez, Connie Chu, Stephanie Ramos, Sarah Issacs, Michael McCullough

# WEDNESDAY, JUNE 11, 2025

# Item 1: Welcome and Introductions

Ivan Guillen, SRC Chair, welcomed attendees to the meeting. Kate Bjerke, SRC Executive Officer, reviewed the Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act requirements. SRC members, DOR staff, and members of the public introduced themselves.

# Item 2: Public Comment

Danny Marquez, representing the California Association of Social Rehabilitation Agencies (CASRA), suggested that the SRC receive an update at a future meeting on the DOR Pathways to Success Project (PSP).

# Item 3: Approval of the March 5 – 6, 2025 SRC Quarterly Meeting Minutes

It was moved/seconded (Comstock/Robinson) to approve the March 5 – 6, 2025 SRC quarterly meeting minutes as presented (Yes – Comstock, Meza, Guillen, Robinson, Coe), (No – 0), (Absent – Bello, Lentini), (Abstain – 0). The approved meeting minutes will be posted to the SRC’s webpage.

# Item 4: DOR Maintenance Regulations

Jennifer Umberg, Attorney I, DOR Office of Legal Affairs and Regulations, provided an overview of proposed changes to DOR’s maintenance regulations. Presentation highlights included the following:

* Background: Maintenance covers additional expenses for food, shelter, and clothing tied to participation in vocational rehabilitation (VR) services. The core definition remains unchanged.
* Court Case Impact: A 2023 California 4th District Court of Appeals ruling (*DOE v. DOR*) found that DOR could not deny maintenance requests solely because expenses were “long-term” (e.g., multi-year rent). Instead, DOR must evaluate requests case by case, considering whether additional costs are necessary for VR participation.
* Regulatory Changes: DOR is revising Title IX regulations (§7019, §7177, §7174) to remove language distinguishing short-term vs. long-term maintenance. The key substantive change is eliminating categorical denials based on duration of expense.
* Implementation: Counselors will assess each consumer’s normal baseline expenses before VR and determine if new costs exceed that baseline due to VR participation. Maintenance will cover the difference.
* Rulemaking Process: DOR is preparing a rulemaking package (text, Initial Statement of Reasons, and financial impact statement) to submit to the Office of Administrative Law (OAL). The public comment period is expected in Fall/Winter 2025, lasting 45 days. SRC members and stakeholders will be notified and may submit input.
* Next Steps: Following review of public comments and alternatives, the final package will be filed with OAL.

Jessica Grove, Deputy Director, DOR VR Policy and Resources Division, noted that

under the proposed regulatory changes, DOR will no longer distinguish between short-term and long-term maintenance expenses. Instead, each request will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis to determine whether the individual has costs beyond normal living expenses directly related to participation in VR services.

Following the presentation, SRC members asked the following:

* Whether individuals previously denied maintenance could request reconsideration, and how DOR counselors, managers, and administrators will be trained on the new regulations.
* The approval process for requests over $500 and the role of DOR District Administrators.
* How the new rules apply to housing-related situations, such as clients relocating for accessibility or students incurring dormitory expenses, and the need to ensure costs are tied to the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE).
* The timeline and process for the upcoming public comment period, and how stakeholders will be notified to provide input.

DOR representatives indicatedthat training will be provided across all levels; maintenance will continue to be assessed case by case and connected to IPE goals; dormitory and relocation costs may be considered if they represent additional expenses linked to VR services; and the public comment period will be held in Fall/Winter 2025 for 45 days, with notice provided to stakeholders via email and the DOR website.

Public comment: Connie Chu, Disability Rights California (DRC), sought clarification regarding the implementation of the *DOE v. DOR* decision. She confirmed her understanding that counselors are already applying case-by-case analysis to maintenance requests and emphasized that staff should not wait for formal training before doing so. Chu also asked what resources will be available to counselors and managers in the interim. DOR staff responded that training materials are being developed with examples and scenarios, and field leadership has already been informed of the court’s findings.

# Item 5:

## DOR Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility (IDEA) Division Overview

## Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) Update

## Consumer Satisfaction Survey (CSS) Update

Candis Welch, Deputy Director of DOR’s IDEA Division, presented an overview of the division, established in 2024. She shared that its mission is to empower Californians with disabilities by promoting independence, expanding employment and educational opportunities, and using data-driven strategies to remove barriers. Internal goals for the division include fostering an inclusive workplace culture, employee recognition, leadership development, collaboration, and work-life balance. External goals focus on equitable access to employment resources, stronger education and career pathways, community partnerships, and modernization through data. Welch highlighted the launch of the division’s first intranet page with resources and affinity group pages, an external webpage in development, and described the division’s structure, which includes the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) and the Stakeholder Initiatives Office (SIO). Welch emphasized the division’s commitment to strengthening and expanding employee affinity groups, which foster cultural awareness, grassroots engagement, and professional development. Each affinity group will host at least one in-person and one virtual or hybrid event annually.

Gabriela Montano, Stakeholder Initiatives Office (SIO), outlined the office’s three teams. The Consumer Affairs and Ombudsperson’s Office addresses complaints with impartiality and identifies service improvement needs. The Data Equity Team manages equity-focused analysis, the CSNA, and the CSS. The Workforce Diversity Section, led by Brian Hughes, oversees the Upward Mobility Program and works to recruit and retain a diverse workforce. Montano reported that the CSNA is underway, with data elements identified, stakeholder engagement being planned, and subject matter experts convened to guide the process.

After the presentations, SRC members had the following questions:

* Members asked whether SRC members could participate in DOR’s affinity groups and how the Council might collaborate with those efforts. Staff explained that affinity groups are limited to DOR employees, though future opportunities for collaboration with SRC members are being explored.
* Questions were raised about the sources of data being used to build strong, collaborative, data-focused teams, and how this connects to the CSNA and CSS. Staff noted that data will be drawn from organizational surveys, the CSNA, the CSS, and U.S. Census data to provide a comprehensive understanding of consumer needs.
* Members inquired how the Stakeholder Initiatives Office analyzes complaints or concerns received through the Office of Civil Rights and Consumer Affairs, and whether insights could be shared with the SRC while maintaining confidentiality. Staff explained that the office is working to identify patterns in complaints, which could be incorporated into the CSNA or reported separately to the SRC in a way that protects confidentiality.
* Staff emphasized their commitment to ongoing engagement with the SRC, regularly sharing data findings, and incorporating Council feedback.

Luis Lewis, Manager in the Stakeholder Initiatives Office, presented an overview of the CSS, which is required under federal regulations (34 CFR 361.17) and developed collaboratively between DOR and the SRC. The CSS evaluates the effectiveness of VR services and consumer satisfaction with DOR counselors, districts, and service providers. Lewis emphasized that beyond compliance, the survey is a key tool for gathering insights, identifying service gaps, and guiding program improvements. Goals of the CSS include measuring program effectiveness, understanding the consumer experience, tracking trends, and strengthening stakeholder engagement.

Lewis presented the 2025 CSS, which includes 25 questions with simplified language, a three-point scoring system (reduced from seven), skip logic to reduce survey length, and the removal of double-barrel questions. Following Lewis’ presentation, SRC members had the following questions and comments:

* Members expressed appreciation for the collaborative approach and the survey’s evolution based on SRC feedback, particularly the use of plain language.
* Questions were asked about whether consumers must complete the survey in one sitting, with staff noting this would be reviewed further.
* Clarification was sought on why the survey uses a three-point scale (satisfied/average/unsatisfied) instead of a longer Likert scale. Staff explained that the simplified format reduces cognitive burden while still capturing meaningful data.
* It was asked if the survey is translated into multiple languages. Lewis confirmed it will be translated into the top five languages spoken by DOR consumers, with additional consideration given to ASL.
* The timing of survey distribution was discussed. Lewis noted the CSS is typically administered in May, though the exact schedule for the 2025 survey is still being determined.

Public comment: Stephanie Ramos, Cal Voices, suggested that quality of life measures be incorporated into the CSS. She explained that while traditional data often focuses on service utilization or compliance, the mental health field has shown gaps in capturing outcomes such as self-direction, empowerment, purpose, and overall life satisfaction. Ramos noted that many individuals find purpose through employment and emphasized that including these measures could provide a more complete picture of recovery and consumer outcomes.

# Item 6: Directorate Report

Kim Rutledge, DOR Director, provided an update on federal developments impacting VR and related programs. She reported that the federal administration has proposed eliminating the U.S. Department of Education, which currently houses the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA). While no RSA positions have been cut to date, if the department is dissolved, RSA would likely be moved to either the Department of Labor or the Department of Health and Human Services. California DOR, along with most other states, has expressed support for transferring RSA to Labor. Rutledge reported that the President’s proposed budget, which would reduce state VR grants to 2024 levels, cut approximately $500 million overall, and eliminate funding for the Client Assistance Program as a stand-alone grant, university training programs, technical assistance centers, supported employment for individuals with developmental disabilities, and protection and advocacy programs. She noted that while these proposals are concerning, VR itself has not been a major target for funding cuts.

Rutledge reported on impacts to independent living and other programs overseen by DOR that currently fall under the federal Administration for Community Living (ACL). The proposal would eliminate ACL and merge it with the Administration for Children and Families into a new entity called the Administration for Children, Families, and Communities. Rutledge explained that funding for California’s 28 Independent Living Centers, the Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) program, and the Assistive Technology program remain intact.

Rutledge reported that she is currently in the Senate confirmation process, with a preparatory interview scheduled with Senate Rules Committee staff and a formal hearing anticipated in August.

Victor Duron, DOR Chief Deputy Director, provided an overview of current state budget developments, return-to-office requirements, and major policy initiatives. Duron explained the state budget process, noting that the Legislature has reviewed the May Revise and provided its own proposals, with a final budget due July 1. Duron reported that direct impacts to DOR’s budget have been minimal due to its strong federal funding base. Duron spoke about the return-to-office mandate which requires most state employees under the Administration to work in the office four days per week beginning July 1. He noted that DOR is well positioned to implement this mandate because staff already work extensively in schools, job centers, and community locations. He emphasized that DOR remains committed to the reasonable accommodation process. Duron then spoke about the Master Plan for Developmental Services and the Master Plan for Career Education and encouraged SRC members to review both master plans.

SRC members had the following questions and comments:

* Ivan Guillen asked how DOR employee reasonable accommodations requests are processed. Duron explained that requests are handled within DOR through an individualized process involving the employee, their supervisor, and with consultation from DOR’s HR team.
* Theresa Comstock asked whether DOR anticipates continued federal reallotment funds. Rutledge indicated that reallotment is still expected this year. Comstock asked about the return-to-office order’s impact on district office leases. Duron said DOR is finalizing an inventory but expects to mitigate any space shortages through partnerships with job centers, colleges, and community providers.
* Comstock asked whether proposed changes to federal asset limits would impact CalABLE accounts. Rutledge indicated that CalABLE accounts are designed not to count against asset limits.
* Shannon Coe suggested that the SRC receive a future presentation on CalABLE.

Public comment: Danny Marquez, CASRA, asked if DOR coordinates with the Department of Health Care Access and Information (HCAI). He noted that HCAI is investing significant resources in developing the behavioral health workforce to meet statewide needs and inquired if DOR has any collaboration or communication with HCAI in this area.

# Item 7: DOR Workgroup Report Out – Increasing Employment Outcomes for Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (ID/DD)

Sean Nunez, Regional Director, DOR Redwood Empire District, presented on DOR’s statewide workgroup focused on increasing employment outcomes for individuals with ID/DD. The workgroup includes DOR staff from across the state to ensure broad perspectives. Their efforts are organized around key deliverables for four groups: consumers, employers, rehabilitation program providers/regional center staff, and internal DOR staff.

* For consumers, the workgroup created plain-language materials and worksheets to help individuals articulate their strengths, interests, and employment goals, including resources on customized employment options.
* For employers, resources include disability awareness workshops, guidance on reasonable accommodations, and training on disability etiquette to encourage inclusive hiring practices.
* For providers and regional center partners, the team developed guidebooks, professional development resources, and technical assistance to strengthen coordination with DOR.
* For internal DOR staff, flowcharts, templates, and training modules were created to standardize customized employment planning and build confidence in authorizing services.

In addition, the group developed technical assistance documents such as an automated job-matching process that connects qualified consumers with posted job openings through CalCareers, helping counselors quickly link consumers to real employment opportunities.

Looking ahead, the workgroup will continue supporting individuals impacted by Senate Bill 639, which phases out subminimum wage employment in California.

Following Nunez’s presentation, Council members had the following questions and comments:

* Ivan Guillen highlighted the importance of efforts to expand employment options following the end of subminimum wage. He raised concerns about duplication of services between DOR and Regional Centers, noting that different rules around comparable benefits and generic resources can cause confusion for families. Guillen suggested developing clear protocols to reduce back-and-forth and quickly identify which entity will provide services such as job coaching.
* Theresa Comstock asked whether the workgroup had uncovered new employment sectors or positions that were surprising or unexpected. Nunez said there were no major surprises but emphasized that the process has been valuable for dispelling misconceptions about DOR services and strengthening collaboration with regional centers and providers.
* Shannon Coe shared her perspective as a family member, stressing the importance of plain-language and translated materials for families with limited English proficiency. Coe asked whether the automated job-matching tool eliminates the need for consumers to take state exams; Nunez clarified that exams are still required, but the tool helps counselors identify and guide consumers to relevant opportunities.
* Guillen inquired about the limited number of vendors providing customized employment services. Nunez confirmed that expanding vendor capacity is a priority.

# Item 8: Election of the 2024 SRC Nominating Committee

Kate Bjerke, SRC Executive Officer, reviewed the role and responsibilities of the SRC Nominating Committee. She explained that during the May 20, 2025 SRC Executive Planning Committee (EPC) meeting, the SRC EPC identified the following members to serve on the Nominating Committee: Gregory Meza, Hilary Lentini, Michelle Bello and Ivan Guillen. Bjerke then opened the floor for additional nominations (none received).

It was moved/seconded (Comstock/Guillen) to approve the 2025 SRC Nominating Committee slate of members as presented (Yes – Comstock, Guillen, Coe, Meza, Lentini), (No – 0), (Absent – Bello), (Abstain – 0). The Nominating Committee will convene in August 2025.

# Item 9: DOR Community Resources Development (CRD) Process Improvements

Petre Deliivanov, Chief, and Ravenn Moon, Manager, DOR CRD Section, shared updates on efforts to modernize and streamline the vendor certification and application processes. The DOR CRD Section oversees more than 250 fee-for-service vendors statewide. CRD is responsible for vendor certification, ongoing technical assistance, service structures, and rates. Eight CRD specialists cover DOR districts across California. Staffing retirements in late 2023 and early 2024 temporarily caused delays in vendor approvals, but the section is now fully staffed, with improvements implemented to prevent similar issues in the future. Their focus is on reducing administrative burden, improving vendor onboarding, and ensuring timely, high-quality services for DOR consumers.

Deliivanov and Moon reviewed process enhancements that have been implemented:

* A centralized certification desk and email inbox
* Fillable PDF forms
* Standardized tracking and archiving of applications and records
* Automated reminders
* Updated vendor lists
* Mini-Guide for Vendors: A simplified, 20–30 page overview of certification and services
* Faster approval for vendors expanding services into multiple districts

CRD’s future efforts will include the following:

* Provider Survey: Launching in July 2025 to gather feedback on CARF accreditation, certification processes, service structures, rates, and provider challenges. Results will be shared with the SRC at a future meeting.
* Addressing Service Gaps: CRD is working to respond to shortages of job coaches and orientation and mobility providers.
* Technology Integration: Plans include moving from PDFs to automated, web-based forms that route directly to the correct staff, further streamlining the vendor process.
* Technical Assistance and Liaison Role: CRD will continue supporting vendors through certification, CARF preparation, and service delivery.

Following the presentation, Ivan Guillen, SRC Chair, asked if the vendor lists provided to DOR Districts are also available to the public. Staff explained that while the lists are currently public through the online Rehabilitation Resources Directory (searchable by zip code). Guillen also asked if former Individual Service Providers (ISPs) are becoming CRD-certified vendors. Staff confirmed that while less common now, some have transitioned, particularly orientation and mobility specialists.

Public comment: Sarah Isaacs, Disability Rights California, raised concerns about the CARF certification requirement, noting that it is burdensome for vendors and that legislation has been introduced to eliminate the requirement for DDS vendors.

# THURSDAY, JUNE 12, 2025

# Item 10: Reconvene, Welcome, and Introductions

Ivan Guillen, SRC Chair, reconvened the meeting. Attendees introduced themselves.

# Item 11: Public Comment

A DOR counselor who asked to remain anonymous shared concerns about the department’s reasonable accommodation process for employees.

# Item 12: Conversation with Danté Q. Allen

SRC members met Danté Q. Allen, DOR’s new Deputy Director, Office of Legislation and Communications. Allen began by sharing his personal experience as a wheelchair user and his journey to a career focused on advancing equity and disability rights. After working at the California Department of Public Health, he became the Executive Director of the CalABLE program. His work at the federal level followed, as he was nominated by President Biden and served as the Commissioner of the RSA, overseeing all state VR agencies nationwide. In his role at DOR, the Office of Legislation and Communications is responsible for the following:

* Analyzing legislation impacting DOR and people with disabilities,
* Providing feedback and recommendations to policymakers,
* Responding to legislative inquiries, and,
* Managing all internal and external DOR communications (website, social media, newsletter, public information requests, etc.).

Allen emphasized his intention to reframe how DOR communicates, shifting from a process-focused message to one centered on impact and consumer stories. His goal is to better define DOR, clearly communicate the value of its services, and reach people who may not know they are eligible.

Q&A and discussion with the SRC members included the following:

* Ivan Guillen expressed support for the idea of highlighting consumer success stories.
* Shannon Coe asked Allen to share any national trends or policy developments that he’s seeing in the disability or VR space, so the Council can begin thinking proactively about those issues. Allen highlighted two national trends he believes the Council should closely watch: 1) unspent federal VR funds and potential funding cuts, and 2) rollbacks to disability rights and protection.
* Yuki Nagasawa reflected on her own lived experience. She noted that while the department is making a meaningful impact, staffing shortages remain a challenge.
* Greg Meza explained that reluctance to self-identify as having a disability is a barrier to youth accessing DOR’s student services programs.

Public comment: Stephanie Ramos, Cal Voices, emphasized how powerful personal disclosure can be in reducing stigma. She noted that in the mental health field, seeing someone with lived experience who has successfully overcome challenges is often what gives others hope.

# Item 13: VR Services Portion of the Unified State Plan

Peter Frangel, Manager, DOR Policy and Performance Section, provided an update on the VR Services Portion of the Unified State Plan. He explained that the State Plan is a federally required four-year document that outlines goals, priorities, strategies, funding, staffing, and other operational details for California’s VR program. It is part of the Combined and Unified State Plan under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), developed in collaboration with the California Workforce Development Board and other partner agencies. The current four-year cycle began July 1, 2024, with a two-year modification required effective July 1, 2026.

Frangel reviewed the modification process timeline. The final draft modification will be presented to the SRC in December 2025 before submission to the California Workforce Development Board. The Workforce Development Board will open a 30-day public comment period in January 2026. DOR will submit the modification to the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) in March 2026. The plan will go into effect on July 1, 2026.

Frangel emphasized the plan components most relevant to SRC involvement: the dedicated SRC section, which includes Council recommendations and DOR’s responses, the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA), and, the goals, priorities, and strategies, which are developed based on CSNA results, WIOA accountability measures, and SRC feedback. Frangel reviewed seven questions that will be used to gather feedback from stakeholders.

Frangel acknowledged the challenges of revising goals mid-cycle, noting that some goals will remain in progress while new ones must be drafted. He reiterated the importance of timely SRC and stakeholder feedback to ensure the VR program effectively meets consumer needs.

Ivan Guillen, SRC Chair, expressed appreciation for the regular updates and the establishment of the SRC’s State Plan Committee. Guillen highlighted the usefulness of the State Plan modification timeline which helps community partners understand when feedback is needed. Guillen also suggested broadening policy feedback to include not just barriers but also new policy ideas that could improve services.

# Item 14: Policy Committee Report Out

Kate Bjerke, SRC Executive Officer, provided an update on the committee’s recent work.

* The SRC Policy Committee met twice in the last quarter.
* During the May 8, 2025 Policy Committee meeting, DOR representatives presented on employment services for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, including coordination with regional centers and school districts. After the presentation, the committee reviewed and prioritized policy questions, identifying DOR staffing as the top policy priority for the year.
* During the June 5, 2025 meeting, Victor Duron, DOR Chief Deputy Director, presented an overview of staffing issues, covering recruitment, minimum qualifications, pay, upward mobility, caseloads, and strategic planning. He framed this as a broad initial overview, with more detailed presentations planned throughout the year.
* Going forward, monthly Policy Committee meetings through 2025 will focus on staffing, with Duron and other invited guests presenting on specific initiatives to support workforce development.

Theresa Comstock, SRC member, appreciated that DOR leadership is considering the SRC’s recommendation regarding staffing and that DOR is engaged in processes and planning to improve staffing within the department. Yuki Nagasawa, SRC member, reflected on the May 8, 2025 Policy Committee discussion about collaboration with regional centers and DOR.

# Item 15: Adopt-a-Region Report Outs

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

Ivan Guillen – DOR San Diego District
Guillen reported on his quarterly meeting with Jeff Noyes, the newly appointed DOR San Diego Regional Director. Their discussion highlighted efforts to expand outreach to African American and Latinx communities, including participation in Promise Zones to integrate education, employment, and disability perspectives. Noyes emphasized counselor training, cultural understanding, and encouraging staff to “find the way to yes” when serving clients. Business specialists are strengthening partnerships with federal employers, with the goal of creating consistent hiring pipelines. The district is also hosting apprenticeship fairs, collaborating with community colleges, and providing disability etiquette training. Looking forward, the district is exploring AI to reduce administrative burden for DOR staff.

Theresa Comstock – DOR Redwood Empire and Santa Barbara (Central Coast) Districts
Comstock met with DOR Regional Directors Sean Nunez (Redwood Empire) and Brian Winic (Santa Barbara, soon to be renamed Central Coast). She reported that Nunez is revitalizing Local Partnership Agreements, reframing “DEI” as Disability, Employment, and Independence, and strengthening trust with monolingual populations through culturally sensitive engagement. The Redwood Empire District is working with tribal communities in Mendocino County, where Starlink internet now connects 60 students in Pinoleville to online learning.

In Santa Barbara, Winic highlighted a record number of new intakes, employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities involved with the justice system, and increasing employment outcomes. The district also faces office space constraints as staff return to in-person work. A new Community Resource Navigator position is providing warm hand-offs to community partners, particularly in housing support, further expanding access to essential resources.

Shannon Coe – DOR Los Angeles South Bay and Orange San Gabriel Districts
Coe reported that in the Los Angeles South Bay District, efforts are taking place to expand career training and placement opportunities for justice-involved consumers, including construction and IT jobs tied to fire recovery, Olympic preparations, and LAX renovations. Over 650 consumers have been placed in the past five years, with some earning up to $45 per hour. The district has piloted innovative transportation supports, such as providing e-bikes, and is working to re-engage inactive consumers.

In the Orange San Gabriel District, Coe met with Sherri Han-Lam, who reported that a shortage of ASL interpreters as a top challenge. Han-Lam also noted that negative employer perceptions and consumer fears of losing benefits remain significant barriers to employment. Underserved communities, including Asian populations and Afghan and Iranian refugees, need more targeted outreach, as language barriers and mistrust of government reduce service access.

La Trena Robinson – DOR Golden Gate Silicon Valley District
Robinson spoke with Denise Dorsey, DOR Regional Director, and Sinaya McCoy, DOR District Administrator, about the newly created Golden Gate Silicon Valley District, formed from the merger of San Francisco and San Jose. No staff or community partners were lost, and a redistricting team is monitoring impacts to ensure smooth transitions. District leaders are focusing on filling vacancies, while also addressing employee satisfaction. A leadership workgroup has adopted a “3 Cs” framework: Customer Service, Case Closure, and Case Management, with a focus on improving job placements. Business specialists are aligning placements with trending industries and living-wage opportunities. The district has already placed 21–30 clients through a civil service pilot program and is developing sector-specific initiatives in health, education, hospitality, and other emerging fields. The district is approaching redistricting as an opportunity to improve staff morale, service delivery, and consumer outcomes.

Gregory Meza – DOR Golden Gate Silicon Valley District
Meza also met with Dorsey. He reported that socioeconomic barriers such as unstable housing, limited healthcare access, and lack of family or community support remain significant obstacles for consumers. The district is exploring solutions such as expanding housing opportunities, improving transportation, and strengthening external support networks. Dorsey identified case management, case closure, and customer service as the top priorities for improving vocational service delivery. The district is committed to addressing systemic barriers while refining core rehabilitation functions to better meet client needs.

Hilary Lentini – Greater Los Angeles District (GLAD)
Lentini met with Erwin Petilla, District Administrator, DOR GLAD. Petilla reported that many clients lack essential soft skills, such as communication and workplace etiquette, and that vocational services often do not align with consumer strengths or labor market demands. Underserved groups include foster youth, justice-involved individuals, people with substance use disorders, communities of color, and individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Service delivery challenges include delays in online referrals, insufficiently detailed intake interviews, and lengthy plan development for clients pursuing higher education. Many consumers disengage early, suggesting a need for better follow-up and clearer value. To improve outcomes, Petilla recommended expanding virtual service delivery, integrating AI to reduce documentation burdens, and tailoring services to individual career goals. He also emphasized strengthening employer partnerships by demonstrating return on investment, encouraging internships and apprenticeships by highlighting employer benefits, and clarifying policies on career advancement. Lentini concluded that GLAD is addressing long-standing barriers with innovation, employer engagement, and a commitment to modernizing VR.

# Item 16: Debrief and Recommendations Discussion

The Council reviewed and discussed a draft letter opposing proposed federal budget cuts to the VR program. The draft letter addressed to Congressional leaders emphasized the importance of maintaining VR funding to support employment, independence, and economic opportunities for individuals with disabilities in California. Members suggested revisions to strengthen the letter by including more detail on the proposed cuts, highlighting broader societal impacts, and expanding data references to demonstrate program reach.

It was moved/seconded (Comstock/Guillen) to approve the draft letter opposing proposed federal budget cuts to the VR program, with revisions reflecting member feedback, and to authorize the SRC Chair and Executive Officer to finalize and submit the letter on behalf of the Council (Yes – Comstock, Meza, Lentini, Guillen, Robinson, Coe, Nagasawa), (No – 0), (Absent – Bello), (Abstain – 0).

Kate Bjerke, SRC Executive Officer, then provided a high-level recap of the discussions and presentations from the two-day meeting. Following the recap, SRC members discussed and debriefed on the following:

* Ivan Guillen noted that the Council should reflect on recent discussions to determine where recommendations can be made or where more information is needed.
* Nagasawa emphasized the need to improve both the speed and consistency of the accommodation process. She also highlighted the emotional strain counselors face when working with the public, particularly when interacting with demanding parents. Ivan Guillen suggested that the issue of employee accommodations should be included in the upcoming series of staffing-related presentations. Teresa Comstock emphasized the importance of continuing to track Nagasawa’s concern regarding counselors’ need for support.
* Comstock also noted that as she prepares to conclude her SRC service, she would like to see follow-up on the Council’s prior recommendation regarding behavioral health. She referenced recent conversations with DOR’s Cooperative Programs and the need to strengthen collaboration between local behavioral health agencies, DOR offices, and contractors to expand service capacity.
* Hilary Lentini asked about the next steps for the seven State Plan questions, specifically whether responses gathered from Adopt-a-Region meetings would be compiled and elevated into SRC recommendations. Bjerke confirmed that she is collecting and will summarize the input submitted by SRC members and stakeholders.
* Jessica Grove, DOR Deputy Director, suggested inviting DOR’s new Deputy Director, LaCandice Ochoa, to present to the SRC.

# Item 17: SRC Officer and Member Report Outs

SRC members shared updates from their organizations, networks and constituency groups.

Ivan Guillen shared highlights from his recent engagement with the DOR San Diego District, including attending their annual spring partners’ luncheon that brought together vendors, disability rights organizations, and DOR staff. He reported on his work with the Client Assistance Program (CAP) to clarify maintenance regulations, produce a consumer fact sheet, and align messaging across CAP, DOR, and the SRC. Guillen closed with a success story of a client pursuing a career in character makeup artistry.

Shannon Coe provided updates from the State Independent Living Council, focusing on advocacy to prevent elimination of the Administration for Community Living. Coe noted that funding freezes earlier in the year disrupted independent living services, underscoring the urgency of stable funding. She also highlighted ongoing federal budget advocacy, reviews of California’s Master Plan for Developmental Services, and contingency planning in case of further budget reductions.

Theresa Comstock reported on developments from the Department of Health Care Services regarding the Behavioral Health Transformation, which will soon require all counties to integrate the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model into services. Comstock emphasized this as a major step to embed employment supports into behavioral health. She has organized a panel to showcase county partnerships with DOR and expressed interest in a future SRC presentation on IPS.

Gregory Meza shared updates from the DOR Student Services Program, noting nearly 70 students participated in work experiences this year, many placed in after-school programs. Meza highlighted the long-standing partnership with “Cool School” and reported that up to 52 students are expected to be employed this summer, demonstrating continued program growth.

La Trena Robinson reported from her labor union role and as SRC Treasurer. Robinson highlighted SEIU “Know Your Rights” webinars supporting immigrant communities and tuition-waived scholarship programs for entry-level healthcare careers. As Treasurer, she reported that as of April 30, 2025, the SRC has expended 56% of the Council’s budget.

Yuki Nagasawa shared that while students are on summer break, she continues to connect them with opportunities. Nagasawa highlighted a grant-funded partnership with Pacific Coast Community Services employing 50 students at the Climate Center in Alameda, providing valuable hands-on experience in farming and landscaping.

# Item 18: Selection of 2025/26 Quarterly Meeting Dates

It was moved/seconded (Robinson/Coe) to approve the proposed 2025/26 SRC quarterly- meeting dates: December 3 – 4, 2025; March 11 – 12, 2026; June 10 – 11, 2026; and September 9 – 10, 2026. (Yes – Comstock, Meza, Lentini, Guillen, Robinson, Coe), (No – 0), (Absent – Bello), (Abstain – 0).

# Item 19: Future Agenda Items

SRC members reviewed the future agenda items that had been suggested throughout the meeting:

* Update on the Pathways to Success Project
* Follow-up on maintenance regulations implementation, training, and interim resources for counselors and managers
* Presentation on CalABLE
* Collaboration with behavioral health:
* Presentation on the Individual Placement and Support model and coordination with DOR
* Presentation from a county behavioral health director on integrated services and outcomes
* DOR staffing-related topics:
	+ Recruitment, minimum qualifications, pay, upward mobility, caseloads, and strategic planning
	+ Employee reasonable accommodations process
* Assessments overview: Different types of assessments used by DOR (eligibility, skills/interests, psychological, etc.), including purpose and application
* Updates on the State Internship Program
* Updates on Adult Work Experience opportunities
* Updates from the California Department of Education
* Follow-up on the Consumer Satisfaction Survey
* Updates from Community Resources Development section:
	+ Results of the July 2025 provider survey
	+ Vendor certification improvements and strategies to address service gaps
* Overview of the Limited Examination and Appointment Program
* Updates on the Mobility Evaluation Program

# Adjourn (3:45 p.m.)

It was moved/seconded (Coe/Robinson) to adjourn the June 11-12, 2025 SRC quarterly meeting.