

NH State Rehabilitation Council

Friday, May 4, 2018

Vocational Rehabilitation

21 South Fruit Street

Concord, NH, 03301

The meeting, via teleconference, was called to order at 1 pm.

Attendees: Nancy Rollins, Chair, Chuck Saia, VC, Darren Beattie, Sherry Burbank, Holly Cadwallader, Lisa Hinson-Hatz, Sandy Hunt, Michelle Lapointe, Courtney Lockwood, Kimm Phillips, Christopher Purington, Lorrie Ripley, Isadora Rodriguez-Legendre, Holly Rioux

VR Staff: Ella McAllister, Louise Belanger, James Piet, William Finn, Susan Roma

Guest: Christine Brennan, Deputy Commissioner of Education

Ella McAllister gave an overview of the public hearing that occurred the previous day. It was very well attended. Highlights include:

- 9 students spoke about their experience with the GSIL Impact Program and their concerns that reductions in program funding will have on students attending this positive program in the future;
- Several people expressed concern regarding the time line between the agency entering into an Order of Selection (OOS) and public awareness of the situation;
- Several people noted that there was a lack of transparency displayed in the process;
- The current administration points to the previous financial administrator as the cause of the financial issues facing the VR agency and is not taking responsibility for the situation.

There were concerns about entering into an order of selection itself, including:

- No independent verification of the revised numbers from the DOE has occurred. Why is the Department rushing into an order, including laying off staff, before these numbers are verified;
- Once entering an Order of Selection (OOS), agencies seldom come out;
- The categories that customers would be put into during the order should be reviewed and criteria further refined.

Recommendations:

- Investigate tapping into the State surplus funds to save student programming. Also the DOE has lapse money it could possibly use. Request the legislature grant the DOE the ability to transfer funds;
- VR should look at how services are provide in the most cost effective manner.

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- VR should provide a clear plan to exit the Order of Selection including timelines;
- VR should develop a clear plan for spending the 15 set aside for pre-ets.

Ella noted that the comment period for the State Plan amendments closes at 4:00 pm today, May 4, 2018.

Nancy Rollins stated that the purpose of today's meeting is to follow up with the recommendations of the SRC meeting on Tuesday and determine what we need to do about an OOS (i.e., vote whether to support, or not, the agency entering into an OOS at this time). Additional comments are also welcome to be submitted for inclusion in the VR State Plan Amendments.

2 members voiced their hesitancy about voting in favor of entering into an OOS without further analysis of the data the DOE used to make the recommendation. They believe the process is occurring too quickly and there may be more ways to explore to keep the agency out of an OOS.

Lisa Hinson-Hatz apologized that she may not have articulated the degree to which the Department looked at alternatives to free up funds, including merging of offices, providing services in-house instead of outsourcing, stopping all out-of-state travel, freezing supplies and looking at ways to decrease VR's fixed costs. The proposed lay-offs will save the Department 1.4 million a year and closing the Concord Regional Office alone will save \$36,000. Lisa will provide a list of comparable savings at the June SRC meeting from all the measures the VR agency is taking at this time. Going forward, she and her staff will be monitoring the budget weekly.

Chuck Saia made clear that VR is headed into an OOS and believes the opinions of the Department leadership, including the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner, carry a lot of weight. Going forward, he recommends that the SRC receive a de-brief at every SRC meeting on financial (including revenue) and case data. Both he and the Chair would like to be keep abreast of the financial situation at VR by meeting with DOE leadership monthly to review current data.

The Deputy Commissioner noted that both she and the Commissioner share the ideology of transparency within the Department and welcomes monthly meetings with the SRC.

VOTE:

After much discussion a motion was made and seconded, that the SRC **not support** New Hampshire Vocational Rehabilitation enter into an order of selection at this time.

Results of a roll call vote were:

7 Yeas

5 Nays

Motion passed.

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This vote will be reconsidered at the SRC's June 26th meeting.

Nancy Rollins thanked the Commissioner for pulling together staff when the discrepancies in the financials were discovered and noted that the situation would be more dire had he not acted when he did.

She also requests that a programmatic review of the agency occur and a thorough review of past KMG audit results be reviewed.

Nancy also wanted to go on record that she has received many comments indicating that currently there is no confidence in the VR Director.

Chuck Saia also gave thanks to the Commissioner for his exemplary work thus far. He noted that this is an opportunity for the SRC to insure that they live up to its mission. Going forward he encourages parents and providers to get involved with the process.

Meeting ended at 2:30 pm.

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