

# NH State Rehabilitation Council

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## NH STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

### MEETING MINTUES

April 23, 2020

#### ZOOM Teleconference Meeting

**Attendees:** Charles Saia, Chair, Holly Cadwallader 1<sup>st</sup> Vice Chair, Chris Purington, 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice Chair, Lorrie Ripley, Isadora Rodriguez-Legendre, Theresa Wilkomm, Dawn Breault, Kristin McGraw, Kimm Phillips, Courtney Lockwood, Brent Cote, Benjamin Adams, Nancy Rollins

**Members Excused:** Lauri Jean Pevear, Jo Moncher

**Advisory Non-Voting Present:** Carrie Dudley, Peter Darling

**Staff:** Lisa Hinson-Hatz, Louise Belanger, Daniel Frye, Ella McAllister, Jim Piet, Michelle Lapointe, Dee Clanton, Sue Roma, Tina Greco

**Guests:** Frank Edelblut, Education Commissioner, Christine Brennan, Deputy Commissioner of Education

**Interpreters:** Laurie Meyer, Rebecca Mallory

The meeting of the SRC was called to order by Chair Saia at 1:05 pm. The Covid-19 pandemic necessitated today's meeting occur remotely via Zoom.

A roll call was made of those present and the agenda sent out to members previously was reviewed.

**Commissioner Update:** Commissioner Edelblut was in attendance today to give the Council an update of the Department activities surrounding the Covid-19 outbreak in NH. The Commissioner first recognized Nancy Rollins, and thanked her for her efforts in helping the students at the Easter Seals facility in Manchester where an outbreak occurred. Fortunately, all those affected are on the mend.

Relative to the VR Program, the Commissioner reported that VR staff are meeting with all customers remotely. All offices are open, however, equipped with PPE and staffed by at least one person. The remainder of employees are working remotely.

The Commissioner and staff are tracking VR performance metrics and mentioned that since the quarantine some areas are in decline. Not unexpected is a decline in referrals and applications. Eligibilities and plans are down as well, but annual reviews are strong. He is troubled by the decline in services authorized as he is worried about the affect this decline will have on service providers. He is looking for feedback from this group to how best connect with customers and keep things flowing and encourages council members to feel free to send him ideas as we move through this pandemic.

Carrie Dudley offered that in her experience as a service provider the lack of technology can be a real issue. Many customers have minimal technology and creativity is needed when reaching out to customers. It is important that both customers and staff feel comfortable connecting with each other with available technology. ZOOM has definitely made it easier to engage with some clients, but not everyone is versed in that application.

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Therese Willkomm of the Institute on Disability at UNH shared that **NH AT4ALL** is a program that offers a variety of assistive technology devices for loan that support mobility, vision, hearing, speech communication and activities of daily living for individuals with disabilities. Anyone interested in exploring what the program has to offer can contact her or visit the program website at <https://atinnh.at4all.com/>

The DD Council is also offering small grants for technology and assistive tech equipment that is a barrier to NH residents. The grants of \$500 for individuals or \$1000 for a family could be used for internet service or a tablet, etc. The information on this program is at [https://www.nhcdd.org/small\\_grants.php](https://www.nhcdd.org/small_grants.php) Isadora Rodriguez-Legendre will forward information on this program to the Council after today's meeting.

## Report of the Director:

**Covid-19 Update:** Lisa Hinson-Hatz described how the VR program went into a remote work environment. Once the virus was identified as a threat to both staff and customers, telecommuting agreements went into effect for most staff able to work from home. A virtual private network (VPN) was set up to access files from home with laptops already in place for most staff. Our case management system is web based so counselors are able to access their case files. "Jabber" allows staff to receive their office phone calls through their computers. The agency is in the process of getting a software document signature program in place which will allow for signing of customer bills and plans. Our encrypted email is up to speed. The agency has sent out guidance to all counselors on how we want them to use these tools in their remote work. The agency has been very responsive to counselors in helping them to do their jobs. The first couple of weeks were very positive. Lisa acknowledge that production has declined a bit but much time is being spent connecting with individuals and customers are understandably fearful of the risks.

As we are move through the pandemic, counselors are getting more comfortable working remotely and are keeping in regular contact with CRP's. Cases are not being closed at the moments unless a customer is adamant about closure. Instead, there are a host of outside services the agency can help with such as filing for unemployment, etc. All in all, our customers seem appreciative to all the work the counselors are doing for them.

**Data Review:** Lisa went over the agency caseload and financial data, which is being presented in a new format. This information was previously sent to the Policy Committee for quarterly review. In that we are just opening up the agency from the OOS, we cannot compare numbers with past data from a year ago. We are going to be looking at this anew and ask that Council members let Lisa or the Executive Committee know if there are additional data points you would like to focus on.

There are currently 6 vacant field positions (2 in Berlin, 1 in Concord, 1 in Portsmouth and 2 in SBVI). The State is currently under a hiring freeze order but we plan on asking for waivers to hire as things open up within the state. The average caseload is 127, which is a reasonable number.

We have strong numbers in our status caseload movements and will be able to compare them against next quarter.

It is hoped that before the June meeting, an official Policy Committee meeting will convene to look at and define future data needs.

**Financial:** We have healthy resources to be able to do our work at the moment. We are in the second year of the 2020 budget. Money remains in the 2019 grant; 9.7 million is available in the

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2020 account. Additionally, there is 2.2 million within the state grant. Lisa will go into more depth on finances at the Policy Committee meeting once it is scheduled and report at the June meeting.

Several contracts within the agency are in various stages of development. They are:

- The purchase of a new van for the Business Enterprise Program
- Conducting a Customer Satisfaction Survey
- Older Blind IL Instruction
- A program for students who are blind
- Video Conferencing for all offices
- Staff Development for new supervisors and RC III's

The Council is reminded that we are still technically in an OOS and will remain there until things fully stabilize before exiting.

**Rulemaking Update:** NHVR is in the process of updating its state administrative rules. These updates will be presented at the June State Board of Education meeting. Lisa will share a draft beforehand with the SRC.

**Audit Update:**

A draft report of the federal audit completed last May has been received, with the final report expected soon. The draft contains very few issues. There were no programmatic findings. Lisa will share the report once the final is received.

**LBA:** The Legislative Budget Assistants office has indicated they are ready to send a draft of observations and issues that will be in their final report, expected to be released in late summer or early fall. This will be put on the June agenda for follow up.

**Services for Blind & Visually Impaired:** Dan Frye, Administrator of SBVI, introduced himself to the Council and gave a brief update on some of the projects he is working on. Within the Older Blind program, *The Silver Retreat*, a five-day residential retreat focusing on intensive training on blindness skills and older blind technology is currently under development.

Another program is a series of workshops around the state to provide access technology instruction to eligible individuals.

Under Pre-Ets, the *Youth Empowerment Skills* program, or *YES*, will be working with the transition aged population of blind and visually Impaired students throughout high school to provide self-advocacy skills.

A second program, *ICE NH*, (Interdisciplinary Collaborative Engagement) is a program for bringing together students, parents and teachers in workshops on social skills development, networking, etc. Mentors will be assigned to each student to assist them throughout the workshops.

**Call for Nominations:** Chair Saia is terming off after 6 years of membership on the SRC. Chuck opened the floor for names of interested persons willing to serve on the Executive Committee as Chair or Vice-Chair.

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*Isadora Rodriguez-Legendre* indicated she is interested in a position on the Executive Committee, other than Chair. She has just begun her second term on the SRC and is interested in taking on a leadership role.

*Chris Purington* is interested in continuing on within the Executive Committee, either as Chair or Vice-Chair.

Chair Saia would like each person that expresses interest to forward a quick bio and statement on why you wish to serve on the Executive Committee within the next few weeks. Voting will take place at the June meeting.

Chuck does term off the SRC on 6/17/20 but would be willing to stay until the end of June to be at the June meeting and hand over the Chairpersonship to the new chair. He is also willing to stay beyond in an advisory, non-voting, capacity as Immediate Past Chair if it does not violate the by-laws. Lisa will ask for the Attorney General's opinion on whether this would be an appropriate action.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES:** A roll call vote for approval of the minutes of the SRC special meeting of November 15, 2019 was conducted. The minutes were approved with 0 opposing and 2 members abstaining.

A roll call vote for approval of the minutes of the SRC meeting of January 23, 2020 was also conducted. The minutes were approved with 0 opposing and 3 members abstaining.

As there was no further business to discuss, a motion was made to adjourn the meeting at 3:00 pm.

**The next meeting will be:**

**June 25, 2020**

**1:00 – 3:00 pm**

**Location: TBA**