

Draft Minutes

ADVOCACY, OUTREACH, AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Thursday, March 5, 2020, 12:15 PM – 1:45 PM

Waterbury Vocational Rehabilitation, Room Cherry C

HC 2 South 280 State Drive, Waterbury, VT 05671

Meeting called by:

Sam Liss, Chair, called the meeting to order at 12:16 p.m.

Members Present:

- Ana Kolbach (via Skype)
- Bill Meirs (via Skype)
- Calla Papademas
- Courtney Blasius
- Diane Dalmasse (ex-officio, non-voting)
- Helena Kehne
- Marlena Hughes
- Olivia Smith-Hammond (via Skype)
- Sam Liss
- Sherrie Brunelle (via Skype)

Members Absent:

- Brian Smith
- Cari Kelley
- Martha Frank
- Sarah Launderville

SRC Liaison:

- James Smith

SRC Coordinator:

- Kate Larose

Interpreters:

None

Speakers or Presenters:

None

Guests:

None

1) Introductions (Sam Liss)

Discussion:

Those in attendance went around the table and introduced themselves. Sam shared appreciation for Tim Bradshaw with the SILC transportation committee as he was able to help members arrange transportation for today's meeting.

Conclusions:

Thanks to everyone!

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

None

2) Approval of Agenda (Sam Liss)

Discussion:

Sam asked for any proposed additions or changes to the agenda. There were none. Calla moved to accept the agenda and it was seconded. No further discussion. All approved. Vote unanimous 6-0-0

Conclusions:

Motion passes: today's agenda accepted

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

None

3) Open for Public Comment (Sam Liss)

Discussion:

No one from the public was present.

Conclusions:

n/a

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

None

4) Approval of Minutes for January 9, 2020 (Sam Liss)

Discussion:

Sam asked for any proposed changes or amendments to the January 9, 2020 minutes. There were none. Calla moved to accept the minutes and it was seconded. No further discussion. All approved. Vote unanimous 6-0-0

Conclusions:

January 9, 2020 minutes were approved

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

- Upload approved minutes to the SRC website. **Kate Larose, 3/10/2020**

5) April 2nd Card Room Event Planning (Group)

Discussion:

The event starts at 8:30am and ends at 4pm, with a priority on having as many people as possible between the hours of 10:30am and 2:00pm. This date would have regularly fell on an SRC meeting date. Because this is the date that was won in the lottery, the decision was made to change the meeting schedule to the following week (April 9th). Sam shared historical context that generally a few VR staff members including counselors and Nat Piper representing Business Account Managers as well as Amanda Arnold. Diane shared that the Youth Advocacy Council meeting will be held concurrently that day at the Statehouse so there will also be youth present. Sam asked which members in the room are planning on attending. Helena, Calla, and Bill shared that they would like to attend. Wendy's cookies were unanimously praised. Sam shared that there is interest and engagement from legislators as supporting people to be employed has bi-partisan support. Diane reminded committee members that this is the 100th anniversary of Vocational Rehabilitation and suggested that this might be worth looking into a resolution for that day. She also shared that we should have access to federal materials about this to hand out at the Statehouse and will look into what is available. Diane shared that a short video will be created at Disability Awareness Day event and that perhaps it will be ready to share at the event. Kate shared that the 100th anniversary video is currently posted on the [SRC website](#).

Conclusions:

See below.

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

- Send out invitation and requests for transportation needs, **Kate Larose**, 3/10/2020
- Explore federal materials for 100th anniversary and WIOA and decide which to use, **Diane Dalmasse**, 3/27/2020
- Work with legislative counsel on drafting a resolution, **Sam Liss, Diane Dalmasse**, 3/27/2020
- Contact House Community & Economic Development committee for testimony opportunity, **Sam Liss**, 3/10/2020
- Coordinate printing of brochures, SRC banner, and other materials needed, **Kate Larose**, 3/27/2020
- Create a one pager brochure with a history of VR, 100th anniversary and Vermont specific information. **Diane Dalmasse, Bill Meirs**, 3/27/2020
- Create and send out sign-up sheet to all SRC members, Nat, and Amanda to manage timing and a list of materials. **Kate Larose**, 3/10/2020

6) Legislative Updates (Group)

Discussion:

Sam provided an update on the following:

Federal Legislation

A. MFP Reauthorization/Extension Act (HR 3253)

Money Follows the Person Bill (Medicaid)

Advocates are hoping that there will be a germane reauthorization vehicle in May to append these two reauthorizations to and are hoping for permanent authorization. Marlena asked if this includes people transitioning out of corrections. Diane said this is not the case. Sam shared that it sounds like Pellone's office is amenable to having some of this funding going to Centers for Independent Living.

B. National Council on Independent Living (NCIL) Proposals (S. 3010; HR 5429)

- 1.) **Eliminate work disincentives for Childhood Disability Beneficiaries** (CDBs), and
- 2.) **Eliminating the termination age of 65 for Medicaid Buy Ins** (MBIs) as authorized in the Ticket to Work Program of 1999. Senator's Portman and Casey may sponsor the bill appending it to an appropriations bill or the Empower Care Act. It is moving slowly.

There continues to be bipartisan support here and it's just about getting people's attention. In Vermont this is called Medicaid for Working Persons with Disabilities. Vermont did away with buy-ins a few years after it was instituted as they found that the administrative cost outweighed the revenue from the buy-ins. In Vermont it can continue beyond age 65. Federally we want to remove the age restriction from the Ticket to Work language. For some reason we don't understand the other proposal was dropped which would have cost- at most- \$2 million a year. Sam recently spoke with Congressman Welch's office last month and he is intent on introducing both.

C. [The ABLE Age Adjustment Act](#) (S.651; HR 1814)

This continues to pick up more and bipartisan support. For it to have a good chance of passing alone or being appended we will need more bipartisan support from Senate Finance, Senate Appropriations, House Ways and Means, and House Appropriations. Senators Grassley and Wydan would also be key sponsors to have on this. Sam will be speaking with Senator Leahy's office in the month ahead and he will mention this if Sen. Leahy is not already a sponsor. Sam mentioned that the raise to age 46 is especially important because of veterans, neuromuscular disorders that don't get diagnosed until later in life, and due to the fact that this has been unfunded. The question was asked why the lower age limit had initially been established. Diane shared that many of the advocates who initially helped to pass this were wealthy parents who wanted to be able to have funds available to their children without affecting benefits.

D. President's 2021 Budget

The president's budget includes many across the board decreases, particularly for independent living. About \$5 million was transferred from the Part B funding stream to Part C. There was a stipulation that these funds go only to employment incentive programs located within Centers for Independent Living, but this is now dead on arrival. Diane shared that this is something the administration can do without Congressional approval and shared that HHS and SSA partnered with support from Mathematica Policy Research and have \$40 million in grant funds to prevent people from going onto Social Security benefits. Sam reminded the committee that historically Independent Living was under the Department of Education like Vocational Rehabilitation but that it was moved after WIOA to the Administration for Community Living.

E. Other

- **Social Security Administration Rulemaking**

Public comment period was extended and nearly 150,000 comments were submitted that were not in favor. The decision is still pending and Sam suspects that SSA is reviewing the comments before making a decision. During the Reagan administration a similar process happened resulting in many people being kicked off of benefits. Sam shared that after this time period there was an increase of people with disabilities dying by suicide and that this was mentioned numerous times in the comments and there is a concern that this will be done in a reckless manner. Sherrie shared concerns that SSA is already unable to meet their current role given decreased capacity and that these proposed changes will only further exacerbate these problems while at the same time resulting in negative outcomes for people with disabilities. Sam mentioned that the rule regarding non-fluent English speakers is now in effect.

State Legislation

A. \$15 Per Hour Minimum Wage/Family Leave Bills

The legislature overrode the Governor's veto. Diane shared that DAIL is concerned that the legislature did not do adequate research before passage and that it will result in service reductions. Diane shared that benefits counselors could help to provide additional information about work incentives and benefits cliffs. Family Leave did not override the veto, failed by one vote. Expects this to come back up again next biennium.

B. Attendant Services Program (ASP)

Sam shared that advocates are now favoring having a waiting list as a compromise. Another compromise would be to have a high income/asset limit threshold. Diane asked if there has ever been discussion about tying the program to employment (at the moment very few people in the program are employed). Sam said that this discussion has happened in the past though it currently not part of the legislation. Sherrie wondered if this might be tied to people being able to stay in their homes and communities instead of going to skilled nursing facilities.

C. Other:

- **An act relating to health insurance coverage for hearing aids** (H. 348, S. 137)

There is momentum in these bills on both the house and senate sides given that the states of Maine and New Hampshire recently passed similar laws. Group members acknowledge that they would like to see similar legislation in the future for dentures, especially given that lack of dentures present barriers to people seeking employment.

Diane said that she is surprised that there isn't currently a constituent group working on this, mobilizing and contacting their legislators. Members wondered if it would fit well under the work of Community of Vermont Elders (COVE), VCDR, or AARP. Diane said that she will follow-up to see if Commissioner Levine has come up with an estimated cost of increase in subsidy to the state under the Affordable Care Act. Will Pendlebury and Bill Hudson have been taking a lead on this but due to being state employees their involvement in this must be limited and they will be available to the Ad Hoc committee to provide information. Sam shared that recent studies have confirmed that untreated hearing loss contributes to increase in dementia and it was noted these costs are considerably more expensive than the cost of a hearing aid, not to mention the loss of being able to live independently and be employed. Marlena shared that people in corrections facilities are unable to get hearing aids and it impacts them negatively. Sherrie asked if a smaller group can work on this.

Sam asked for a motion to create a time limited Ad hoc work group. Sherrie moved it was seconded. No further discussion. All approved. Vote unanimous 6-0-0

Conclusions:

Motion to create Ad hoc work group for hearing aid coverage passes.

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

- Email Diane with items for the upcoming congressional planning call, **Sam Liss**, 3/11/2020
- Create standalone document for legislative updates to go out with AOE meeting packets, **Kate Larose**, 3/27/2020
- Email AOE committee with information about increase in suicide increases and link to SSA benefits reduction, **Sam Liss**, 3/27/2020
- Schedule Ad hoc committee workgroup and invited interested AOE members, Will Pendlebury, and Bill Hudson, **Kate Larose**, 3/11/2020
- Check if Commissioner Levine has come up with an estimated cost of subsidy increase to the state under the Affordable Care Act, **Diane Dalmasse**, 3/27/2020

7) Recent Event Report Out (Group)

Discussion:

A. SILC Networking Breakfast

Sam attended and shared that it was a successful event and that Tom Hamilton handed out a two-page overview of the SILC with engagement from Congressional delegation staffers, Lt. Gov, and the House Committee on Commerce & Economic Development.

Conclusions:

It's a great event and hope more SRC members can join next year

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

None

8) Calendar of Upcoming Events (Group)

Discussion:

Upcoming Events

A. [VFN's 2020 Annual Conference](#) (March and April dates)

VFN is hosting four conferences in four locations in the state with one presenter. Sara Forward is performing the presentation. "Power of Play: Opening Doors in a Small Town" is the name of her presentation. The intent is to reach more families of children with disabilities or special health needs and the professionals who support them, especially those who may have never had an opportunity to attend in the past.

- Saturday, March 21, 2020 from 10 am – 2 pm at a location to be determined in Springfield, VT
- Tuesday, March 31, 2020 from 4 pm – 8 pm at the Eastside Restaurant in Newport, VT
- Thursday, April 2, 2020 from 8:30 am – 1 pm at the Delta Hotel (formerly Trader Duke's) in South Burlington, VT
- Saturday, April 4, 2020 (time/location to be determined) in Burlington, VT. The focus audience will be parents from New American communities. As with all conference dates, everyone is welcome to participate!

B. [Disability Awareness Day](#) (March 12th – Statehouse)

Karen Lafayette with VCDR will have a full agenda for the day available soon. The agenda will include opening remarks by elected officials, reading of resolution and award winners on the house floor, a keynote, and workshops. There are 15 reserved ceremonial seats in the Senate for the award winners and gallery seats will be available for others.

C. [SILC Olmstead Summit](#) (June 2nd – Capitol Plaza)

The State Independent Living Council (SILC) hasn't had this event for three years. We were asked by the Vermont Affordable Housing Coalition and Housing Conservation Board to present before the Olmstead Meeting.

September 5 Update: This is the 20th anniversary of the SCOTUS Olmstead decision that forced the integration mandate in 1990. The Vermont Olmstead Plan is gathering dust with legislators never hearing of it. We are looking to find out what has been done to date to fulfill the Olmstead requirements and what needs to be done going forward.

November 7, 2019 Update: There has been much interest and more information will be available as the date approaches.

January 9, 2020 Update: Much progress has been made in the planning. There are new partners aboard and it will most likely be held at Capital Plaza. The planning team is currently looking for sponsors to help cover the cost of the event.

March 5, 2020 Update: The date has been set for June 2, 2020 at Capitol Plaza. It will take place from 10am-2pm and will include a working lunch, keynote speaker, and a panel discussion. More information will be sent out to members soon.

Conclusions:

See above for events to attend and/or to play a role in helping to plan.

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

- Send out Disability Awareness Day invitation, **Kate Larose**, 3/10/2020

10) Adjournment (Sam Liss)

Discussion:

Diane requested a consensus vote to adjourn, citing the time. All approved.
Vote unanimous 6-0-0

Conclusions:

The meeting was adjourned at 1:54pm

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

- Draft minutes uploaded to SRC website, **Kate Larose**, 3/10/2020
- Draft minutes emailed to Committee members, **Kate Larose**, 3/10/2020
- Minutes approved, **Committee**, 5/7/2020
- Approved minutes uploaded to website, **Kate Larose**, 5/12/2020