

MINUTES
State Agency of Vocational Rehabilitation
Agency Board Meeting
December 5, 2018

1410 Boston Avenue
West Columbia, SC 29170

Present: Roxzanne Breland, D.C., Chair
Rhonda Presha, Vice-Chair
Ira Banks, Board Member
Lori Bell Beard, Member
Timothy Evatt, Member
Joseph Thomas, Member
Felicia Johnson, Secretary of the Agency Board/Commissioner

Staff: Margaret Alewine, Director, Planning and Program Evaluation
Kim Estes, Chief Financial Officer
Shirley Jarrett, Director, Disability Determination Services
Kimberly Jones, Director of Human Resources
Jeanne Lisowski, General Counsel
Eric Moore, Director of Administration
George Pullie, Director, Consumer Services
Mark Wade, Assistant Commissioner for Special Services

Guest: Rebecca Fulmer, Esq.
Client Assistance Program, Protection and Advocacy Agency

Nithya Pramekumar, Workforce Innovation Coordinator SC
Department of Employment & Workforce

Welcome and Opening Remarks:

Dr. Roxzanne Breland, Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m. Dr. Breland welcomed everyone and thanked them for their attendance. She welcomed board member Timothy Evatt, stating she was happy he was able to attend in person rather than via telephone. Mr. Evatt stated that he was very happy to see everyone and to be able to attend the meeting.

Approval of Minutes:

The minutes from the August 28 – 31, 2018 board meeting were reviewed. Ms. Rhonda Presha, Vice-Chair, made a motion that the minutes be approved as

presented. Ms. Lori Bell Beard seconded the motion. The Board voted unanimously to approve the minutes as presented.

Commissioner's Comments:

Commissioner Felicia Johnson, Secretary of the Agency Board, introduced Ms. Kim Estes, Director of Fiscal Operations to the board and asked Ms. Estes to share her work experience and background. The Commissioner also shared that in November Ms. Keri Dowd-Pugh joined the agency as Audit Manager and Ms. Allison Johnson joined the agency as Employee Relations Manager. Commissioner Johnson stated that a public meeting will be held on December 7 and additional information was included in the board's folder. She also stated that a list of agency acronyms and definitions of case statuses was included, as requested. The Commissioner stated that the agency has been assigned new liaisons by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) and the early interactions have gone well. The Commissioner provided an update to the information that staff shared at the Board retreat in August. She reported that the Palmetto Center is continuing its preparation to achieve CARF accreditation and that she had met with the Chief of Staff at the Department of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Services (DAODAS) to work on enhancing the relationship and foster better collaboration between SCVRD and DAODAS. Chair Breland asked about treatment provided to consumers with opioid addiction. The Commissioner stated that staff from the Palmetto Center have attended some specific training for this issue and will be improving services in that area, as part of the relationship with DAODAS. She further stated that research shows that in-patient treatment is not effective with opioid addictions and we are looking at various options for effectively treating that population.

The Commissioner updated the Board on the development of a Strategic Plan (which began on August 8). It is being revised and updated to ensure that goals and strategies align with the agency's Accountability Report and WIOA requirements. The Communication Department is assisting with the layout of the working document. The Commissioner stated that the expected completion date is in January and she plans to share the document with the Board. She also noted that the Charleston Area Office is currently being restructured which has presented an opportunity for us to ensure staffing patterns are in line with WIOA requirements, while meeting the needs of that community. The QA unit is revising the compliance review instrument to ensure alignment with WIOA; and, some job duties are being revised to include WIOA goals and expectations.

The Commissioner shared that the Emergency Response Plan is still in development and staff are finalizing a hazardous weather communication plan and a business continuity plan for the State Office. Chair Breland asked about the security of the agency's data information and was told that the information is backed up on the servers located at the Bryant Center in Lyman, SC. The Commissioner reported that active shooter training is ongoing around the state, and many area offices have

already completed the training. Other safety measures are being put in place to ensure that staff and consumers feel safe and know how to respond in those types of emergency situations.

The Legal Office is making progress on reviewing all files and updating processes. They have implemented a routing form specifically for Pre-ETS contracts to ensure each contract is properly vetted and a point of contact is identified to ensure deliverables are received. The department continues to review Work Training Center agreements. A contract template has been developed for staff to use in securing these partnerships. There are currently over 630 vendor agreements in the process of being reviewed, updated, and implemented.

Though the SCVRA Conference for fiscal year 2018 was cancelled, the Commissioner announced that recognition of the Consumer Achievement Award will still take place. She stated that she wanted to continue to acknowledge the hard work of the staff and consumers. A panel will make the selection and the award will be presented at the local area office. She stated that the Board will be notified when the presentation is scheduled.

Budget/Building Update

Mr. Eric Moore, Director of Administration, provided a budget update. Based on budget projections, the agency's expenditures the first five months of 2019 will be \$5.7 million less than the first five months of 2018. Mr. Moore noted that this may vary, depending on a possible increase in employer healthcare contributions. Capital project expenditures are managed out of the reallocation funds received. Ms. Presha asked for clarification of capital projects. Mr. Moore explained that these capital projects include the expansion of the Oconee-Pickens Area Office, as well as replacement roofs and paving needed at other area offices.

A reduction in expenditures has been experienced in salaries for FTEs, temporary employees, and travel. Also, the cancellation of the SCVRA conference contributed to the reduction in travel expenses. Mr. Banks asked what the feedback from the field has been regarding the conference cancellation. Commissioner Johnson stated that the cancellation of the conference was actually recommended by the Area Supervisors as a cost saving measure. The continuation of the Consumer Achievement Award, even though the conference was cancelled, has been positively received by staff.

Mr. Moore noted that expenditures at the Work Training Centers (WTC) have decreased significantly. Chair Breland stated that she is concerned about the return on our investment. She wants to see more employment of consumers by our business partners. Mr. Moore shared that the percentage of sustainability by the WTC is steadily improving, and that several actions initiated by WTC are assisting with the reduction in expenditures. Staff attrition is reviewed to determine if the position is

critical, or if the duties can be divided among other staff. However, quality of the delivery of services to the consumers continues to be the priority.

Mr. Moore shared an update on the pending expansion project to the Oconee-Pickens Area Office. The detailed architectural drawings are currently pending approval. Once approved, there is a mandatory 30 day bid process, approval and awarding of the bid. A list of needed capital projects and a spending timeline is being developed. Mr. Moore stated that he and his staff are working in collaboration with the Fiscal Operations Department on this task.

Legislative Update

Mr. Mark Wade, Assistant Commissioner, announced that the general session will convene the 2nd Tuesday of January. He stated that all House of Representative positions were on the ballot in November. An update of the elected representatives with the area offices. Each Area Office Supervisor has been asked to meet and develop a relationship with the representative in their area. The Commissioner and the State Office staff have met with the Governor's staff and the Senate Finance Committee to present the agency's FY20 budget request.

Commissioner Johnson stated that non-reoccurring funds were requested to replace the agency's computers and laptops, and to also replace HVAC units that are over 15 years of age. Re-occurring funds were requested for the Equine Therapy program. Capital Project requests were submitted to replace the roofs at the Camden and Orangeburg Area Offices. Mr. Wade stated that the General Assembly has approximately \$1 billion in one time and re-occurring funds available, however, there are several requests for the funds.

Mr. Wade stated that on the national level, the state of SC has 2 new representatives. Mr. Ralph Norman was re-elected and is very supportive of VR programs. Rep. Norman attended the Open House at Lancaster in October, 2018. Congress is scheduled to take action on the budget Friday, December 7 and should avoid a federal government shutdown. Also, VR funding has already been approved with no reductions.

DDS Update

Ms. Shirley Jarrett, Director of DDS reported that the SSA delayed funding at the close FY18, and she operated in the negative until November 26. DDS has funding through January 4, 2019. Ms. Jarrett stated that the SSA has informed Atlanta Regional Commissioner Buehler that the Region will not receive full funding until the Region commits to adjudicating more initial claims. Ms. Jarrett stated that the SC DDS has the capacity to adjudicate 42,264 claims, with a total workload of 67,592. Ms. Jarrett stated that she has requested 30 additional examiner hires and has lost 66 examiners over the last two years, and received no hires to replace them. She

further stated that the SSA has approved only 450 hires for the entire nation. The new Disability Program Administrator, Ms. Joanne Strange is more experienced and knowledgeable about SC and will be able to present a stronger case for hires.

DDS was able to reduce their footprint in Charleston, and released approximately 7,000 square feet of space that was not needed. Additionally, Ms. Jarrett stated that a new lease for the Greenville office has been negotiated, resulting in approximately 5,000 square feet less space.

Ms. Jarrett stated that SC DDS centralization is progressing well. The culture is adjusting from office competition to office cooperation. A workflow has been developed to allow one staff member to serve as the Vocational Specialist for the entire state, primarily assisting examiners with transferability of skills issues.

When the two DDS offices, Columbia and Charleston, were shut down earlier this year due to Hurricane Florence and Hurricane Michael, the Greenville Office was able to handle the calls from across the state. Program Services has developed a motto “SC DDS Strong!” and as part of the initiative a “best practice” flyer has been developed.

Consumer Services Update

Mr. George Pullie, Director of Consumer Services, stated that effective November, 2018 all post-secondary cases are reviewed at the State Office. The Consumer Services staff is working with the Legal Department to update the policy manual for this area. The policy will be firm, but the procedures will be flexible, reducing paper, but including WIOA as appropriate. Mr. Pullie reported that Consumer Services and Quality Assurance are working closely together and the goals will be met.

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)/Pre-ETS Update

Ms. Margaret Alewine, Director of Planning and Program Evaluation presented an update on Pre-Employment Transition Services. Ms. Alewine said that the agency is expanding Pre-ETS services. She shared the following background information on CareerBOOST, which was initiated by the SC Commission for the Blind in 2016 in partnership with local school districts, SC Centers for Independent Living and the National Federation of the Blind of South Carolina. Ms. Alewine stated the SCVRD staff has worked collaboratively with the CareerBOOST staff in local school districts and 12,389 Pre-ETS certificates were completed from October 2016 through September 2018. Ms. Alewine stated that based on the success of the pilot program, SCVRD is contracting with CareerBOOST vendors to continue services and expand the program. The vendors currently cover 56 schools, providing self-advocacy training and work readiness training.

Ms. Alewine stated that another part of the expansion of Pre-ETS services includes Transition Services Specialists' (TSS) Programs with the following: School Districts Greenville, Laurens 55, Lexington 4, Edgefield, and Spartanburg; Cyber Academy of South Carolina and South Carolina Connections Academy. Chair Breland suggested that Ms. Beard provide information to Ms. Alewine regarding home school students. Ms. Alewine stated that contracts for self-advocacy services have been awarded to SC Spinal Cord Injury Association and Brain Injury Association. Commissioner Johnson stated that these contracts are specifically for providing Pre-ETS services. The Commissioner emphasized that the number of adults served still needs to improve. Chair Breland stated that she was happy to see the services offered to eligible students.

Ms. Alewine stated that the expansion also includes Peer Mentoring and Leadership Academy (ABLE SC and AccessAbility); Project HOPE Foundation and Autism Academy; and Midlands Education and Business Alliance (MEBA).

Equine Therapy Update

Ms. Jeanne Lisowski, General Counsel shared that SCVRD received funding for a pilot equine therapy program to assist veterans with PTSD. A contract was awarded on November 19, 2018 to Willowbend Farms out of Montana. Ms. Lisowski stated that she and other staff have visited the facilities upstate where the pilot program will take place. The pilot program will consist of a three-day weekend session, with plans to expand the curriculum to include veterans and consumers in a six week program, and ultimately expand to other sites in the state. Chair Breland stated that this is a special project. Mr. Evatt stated that he hopes the program will not be limited to just veterans. Commissioner Johnson stated that this is not a federally approved program and only state funds can be used. She also noted that she is hopeful that the program will expand to other areas to ensure that all consumers that can benefit from equine therapy are served, acknowledging that it will be challenging.

Human Resources Update

Ms. Kimberly Jones shared that the total number of employees as of November 2018 is 933, a 151 reduction since November 2017. During 2018, the agency had 22 interns from various colleges and universities; and 11 have been scheduled for 2019. The interns are not compensated, and the Department of Labor regulations prohibits the interns from independently running a caseload if they are not compensated. The Human Resources Department worked with the Communications Department to obtain a veteran intern through the U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs. The intern is working in the Human Resource Department, serving as the front desk receptionist and switchboard operator. The collaboration allows for six months of on-the-job training, with the possibility of hiring interns for available positions for which they qualify. Ms. Jones reminded the board members that the EEO report includes data

regarding the number of veterans the agency hires. Ms. Presha asked what the duration of service was for most interns. Ms. Jones stated that most interns serve one school semester.

The Wellness Championship Competition has been well received. Future activities include the Agency participating in a virtual food drive which will support two food banks in the state. Staff who contribute to the food bank are allowed to participate in the agency's "Jeans Day" on December 14, 2018.

Closing Remarks

Dr. Breland thanked the staff for their hard work. She shared the upcoming meeting dates that were included in the board packet. Dr. Breland wished everyone a safe holiday season.

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Mr. Evatt and seconded by Ms. Presha. The motion passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 11:57 a.m.