



## State Rehabilitation Council

### Fall Quarterly Meeting - September 4, 2024

<b>In Person:</b>	<b>Zoom Link:</b>
Illinois Center for Rehabilitation & Education-Roosevelt, located at 1950 West Roosevelt Road in Chicago, IL 60608	<a href="https://illinoisstate.zoom.us/j/95518997253">https://illinoisstate.zoom.us/j/95518997253</a>

**In Person Attendees:** Robyn Lewis, Erik Hanson, John Becker, Antonio Gomez, Aimee Julian, Shakira Pleasant, Karrie Pece, Kim Pickney, Andy Losasso,

**Online Attendees:** Kelsey Thompson, Coryn Barger, Antonio Gomez, Sabrina Bailey, Aimee Julian, LaDonna Henson, Calvette Brown, Christopher Garcia, Erin Compton, Grace Tsao, Lee Reese, Louis Hamer, Megan Mutti, Rahnee Patrick, Sharon Howerton, Sybil Nash, Tarita Love-Rutherford, David Friedman, Megan Sorey, Sarah Huttenlocher, Kristin Wagner

Time	Item	Presenter
9:00 am	<p><b>Call to order and Introductions.</b></p> <p>Ms. Kelsey Thompson called the meeting to order at 9:05 AM. She welcomed the group and opened the floor for introductions.</p> <p>Mr. Gomez facilitated in-person introductions. Tarita Love-Rutherford (DRS), John Becker (Challenge Unlimited), Kimberly Pinckney (DRS), Eric Hanson, Robin Lewis, and Shakira Pleasant introduced themselves and their programs.</p> <p>Online SRC Members introduced themselves to the group. Kelsey Thompson, LaDonna Henson, Louis Hamer, Grace Tsao, Calvette Brown, Sybil Nash, Kristin Wagner, Megan Mutti, Director Rahnee Patrick, and Sharon Howerton introduced themselves and their programs.</p>	How We Work Together - guidelines - Aimee Julian

<p><b>9:25 am</b></p>	<p><b>Approval of Agenda and Minutes</b></p> <p>A Quorum was determined to not be present. The minutes for the SRC Summer Quarterly Meeting will be approved during the next quarterly meeting.</p>	<p>Kelsey Thompson</p>
<p><b>9:30 am</b></p>	<p><b>Learning From Leadership</b></p> <p>-Address public comment from the last meeting</p> <p>Director Rahnee Patrick thanked the group for coming together and stated that she is very proud of the Roosevelt Center. She looks forward to others visiting in the future. She thanked her staff for their assistance.</p> <p>Director Patrick noted a monitoring visit that took place from August 6 to August 8. DRS is still responding to questions from the monitoring team to understand how they are aligning with the expectations of the program. She thanked Sybil Nash and her team for their work with the monitoring team. Director Patrick noted that the Department of Education secretary is visiting one of the grantees in Chicago. She indicated that she would have to leave the SRC meeting early as she has a meeting with the Human Services Secretary in Illinois.</p> <p>Director Patrick noted that the chief of staff of the secretary met with key stakeholders and leaders of the Blind community in Illinois and addressed existing vacancies. Chair Howerton has been sent an update on how positions are being filled. Monthly meetings with those stakeholders are taking place from here on.</p> <p>Director Patrick opened the floor for questions. There were none.</p> <p>Ms. Kimberly Pinckney was asked if she had an update from the chief of staff's office. She referred to Mr. Andy LoSasso for further comment.</p>	<p>Director Rahnee Patrick and Andy Losasso</p>

	<p>Mr. Andy LoSasso thanked everyone for their patience and gave an update on Ms. Pinckney's behalf, noting that they have been making strides on their job postings over the summer.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Since Thursday there are 8 positions in the background check phase for blind services with additional options for hire.</li> <li>• There have been several promotions for more critical positions as well.</li> <li>• DRS has done well with retention.</li> <li>• Outside of hiring, as of this morning, DRS is without open cases. No violations or investigations are currently pending.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>10:00 am</b></p>	<p><b>Policy Update -</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What are the initiatives that are in the pipeline</li> </ul> <p>Ms. Robin Lewis noted that several rules are currently going through changes, with a few in first notice right now.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The exempt (exempt from financial participation) services list has been increased. Ms. Lewis and her staff will look at how the rule is applied and make some changes after their Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) visit.</li> <li>- Other rules currently under revision are the hearing aid evaluations, policy evaluation and the self-employment rules.</li> <li>- Six counselors have been assigned to specialize in self-employment. They have begun their training on the Virtual Reality (VR) Guide and will complete said training in the next couple weeks. Ms. Lewis will direct the group to the website containing more information.</li> <li>- Subminimum Wage to Competitive Integrated Employment (SWTCIE) Update</li> </ul>	<p>Robyn Lewis</p>

SWTCIE is finishing its pilot year. As of the beginning of August, there were around 60 participants. There will be a formative review available in October. Contracts were renewed for FY25 with all 6 agencies in the SWTCIE project. For FY25, they will focus on data collection methods. An additional community resource specialist has been hired to engage in youth outreach and employer engagement.

- Needs Assessment Update

Ms. Lewis noted that they used the information from the previous Needs Assessment to help develop their goals for the Unified State Plan. They are starting over again now. They will be thinking about their plans for the next Needs Assessment, which is due in 2026.

Ms. Lewis noted challenges in gathering information for the Needs Assessment. Ultimately, this report influenced goal development for the Unified State Plan.

The reporting structure for the Needs Assessment, additionally, was updated. Ms. Lewis asked for feedback on the new reporting structure. A separate form had to be created for some affiliates such as the Bureau for Blind Services (BBS), Statewide Independent Living Council (SLC), and Equipped for Equality (CAP). She also asked for feedback on how these entities can better work together. Ms. Lewis stated that she would like to see more SRC members participate in the EEOPD (Economic Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities) Taskforce.

Ms. Calvette Brown (a traumatic brain injury survivor) complimented Ms. Lewis on the new questionnaire. She noted that it was very helpful and streamlining the questions allowed her to have a more focused approach to reporting.

	<p>Ms. Megan Mutti also noted that the new layout was easier to follow and she appreciates the changes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- New Member Training</li> </ul> <p>Ms. Lewis noted that Ms. Henson has information on this subject.</p> <p>Ms. Lewis provided the policy update.</p>	
<b>10:30 am</b>	<b>DRS Bureau Liaison Reports</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bureau of Customer &amp; Community Services (BCCS)</li> </ul> <p>Mr. Erik Hansen provided an update for BCCS. He mentioned two accomplishments:  (1) A successful recent visit from DRS admin.  (2) Increased timeliness (86.3 days average) regarding case progression.</p> <p>On the horizon, he anticipates the implementation of recommendations from RSA. They will focus on youth with disabilities. They will be looking to improve their electronic document scanning system. They have been reviewing their use of office spaces as their leases expire soon.</p> <p>Ms. Kristen Wagner noted that they have implemented a series of monthly micro sessions. Links were sent to all internal and external staff. These are scheduled through June 2025. There has been good participation and questions. A PowerPoint and recordings will be sent out to everyone later. She also highlighted their work with the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) on the Technical Assistance Center on Interagency Agreement. Documents and tools will be rolled out with this at the annual Illinois Statewide Transition Conference in November and again at the Symposium in April 2025.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bureau of Support Services (BSS)</li> </ul>	<p><i>Erik Hansen and Kristin Wagner</i></p> <p><i>Rebecca Hawkinson</i></p> <p><i>Louis Hamer, Marcus Deamer</i></p> <p><i>Sybil Nash</i></p> <p>Erik Hanson</p>

There were no representatives for BSS present. Director Patrick noted that she has been working with Mr. Andy Losasso to fill the vacant Chief Budget Officer (CBO) position. Sean Hender is temporarily assigned as CBO and could not attend on short notice. There have been opportunities to adjust relationships in terms of disability services. Disability services depends on the Department of Special Assistance (DSA) for infrastructural support (paychecks, compliance, etc.) They are looking for help and feedback on their reporting structure. They are looking for a way to better report to the federal government in a more complete and functional way.

Dir. Patrick asked attendees to send her any possible candidates for the CBO position.

- Bureau of Engagement & Support Services (BESS)

Mr. Hamer noted that they work closely with the National Employment Team. Next week, that team will hold a Summit in NC. Two of their staff will attend in person. He also noted that they are working with employers who are looking to hire more individuals with disabilities. Yesterday, Mr. Hamer met with CVS. They are interested in apprenticeship hires and have funding set up so that Mr. Hamer and his team do not have to provide that funding. He will have continued meetings with them to discuss logistics.

BESS is targeting Hispanic Services and deaf and hard of hearing individuals. They are working on creating brochures aimed at these populations.

Additionally, Mr. Hamer mentioned that benefit planning currently has one staff member. They are looking to make more hires.

Ms. Thompson asked how customers access benefits planning. Mr. Hamer noted that they

must be a customer of DRS. The council then refers the individual to a benefit planner.

Ms. Shakira Pleasant asked how the VR counselor knows that a referral has been made. Mr. Hamer noted that the VR counselor must ask if the customer is on social security, from there they need to discuss if that individual is concerned about their benefits. Depending on the answer the individual is referred to the benefit planner.

- Bureau of Planning & Strategic Management (BPMS)

Ms. Sybil Nash noted specific accomplishments: they have been heavily involved with the audit of the Rehabilitation of blind services administration. They will be providing RSA with the information that they need to close out the audit.

3 Main areas of focus: develop centralized policy procedure manual-make sure that practices that are typically engaged in are recorded and put into writing, extend reach, make a change to the referral process (RSA said that application should start at time of self-referral). There will be workgroups to implement these changes.

Additionally, they will be looking at an auditing tool.

Ms. Henson asked how they plan to reach more adults with disabilities. Ms. Nash noted that the RSA was more focused on youth, but acknowledged that more adults with disabilities need to be reached. Raising visibility in the community is important.

- Bureau of information Customer and Community Support for the Blind (BCCBS)

Mr. Hanson provided an update for BCCBS. Bureau Chief vacancies are being

	interviewed for. The Assistant Bureau Chief position was filled on September 1 <sup>st</sup> .	
<b>11:30 am</b>	<p>Blind Services Planning Council (BSPC)</p> <p>Ms. Sharon Howerton noted that they have been charged to interview candidates for the Bureau Chief position. A few weeks after the last meeting, they were given the names of four candidates and have been asked to provide potential applicants. She noted that they are not in a circle that would allow them to provide applicants. She reached out to former contacts, but both were retired and did not reach out.</p>	<i>Sharon Howerton</i>
<b>11:40 am</b>	<p>Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC)</p> <p>Ms. Grace Tsao noted that her team hosted a webinar on April 20. They are continuing to gather transportation complaints and preparing for possible litigation. She gave an update on the State Plan for Independent Living for 2025-2027. She mentioned that SILC is in need of more funding. Lastly, she gave an update on a series of webinars that SILC is hosting. The webinars will be live this month.</p>	
<b>11:50 am</b>	<p>Equip for Equality (CAP)</p> <p>Mr. Christopher Garcia provided the CAP update in Sujatha Branch's stead, noting that there were 2 options rendered by attorney Pat Brown. The 1<sup>st</sup> was no reimbursement for tuition or housing, the 2<sup>nd</sup> was that even with a hearing order, they would not have to comply. Mr. Garcia noted that the reaction from DRS was almost immediate. Some of the reimbursement issues are being resolved. He noted that there is still a disconnect between the attorneys (not DRS attorneys). He noted that he told his attorneys that Eric asked for data, collected, and will help where he can. However, he cannot ethically assist in dealing with DRS attorneys.</p> <p>He noted that they are hopeful and the DRS response was immediate and appreciated.</p>	<i>Sujatha Branch</i>



	<p>Ms. Thompson asked if there were any trends. Mr. Garcia noted that they are focusing on reimbursement because they are looking at a lot of hearings and litigation. They are also focused on outreach, attending fairs and conferences to bring in more clients.</p> <p>Ms. LaDonna Henson noted that a previous needs assessment showed that few people are aware of CAP and she was glad to hear that they are doing outreach. She noted that it appeared in the past that before there was litigation, some of the issues could be resolved between CAP, the counselor, and other DRS personnel. She asked if things could be worked out that way or if things are escalating. Mr. Garcia noted that he does not believe that things are escalating, but he believes that DRS attorneys are overwhelmed and do not pick up on the helpful conversations that are started with Bureau Chiefs before legal advice is sought.</p> <p>Ms. Henson asked if there was anything that the SRC can do to help in any way. Mr. Garcia noted that they were invited to meet with the SRC Executive Committee, but have not had the opportunity due to structural changes. He would like to schedule a meeting to discuss how things can be worked out with the DRS counsel.</p> <p>Ms. Kimberly Pickney added to the Chief of Staff Report, noting that training for the state-wide meeting took 8-9 months to complete. 900 people (approx.) attended. Much of the training revolved around training new managers. Ms. Pinckney gave an update on the number of new employees and managers who were hired in FY24.</p>	
<p><b>12:00 - 1:00 pm</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Committee Debrief</b></p> <p>Ms. Thompson expressed interest in checking in with those attending about their committees and how the SRC executive committee can assist.</p>	

Erin with the Member Engagement Committee asked for help in staying organized. Ms. Thompson asked about committee goals. Erin noted staying organized and on top of the schedule are both goals.

Ms. Robin Lewis noted that she would like to talk about membership, noting today that there are 9 members absent. She would like to enforce the bylaws which state that any 2 unexcused absences in 12 months require questioning of desire to remain on the council and determine a course of action for replacement. The process has been started with two members already. She opened the floor for further comment. Director Patrick noted that for her to function in her own job, the SRC has to function within its own rules as well and continue to comply. Ms. Thompson agreed, noting that a few absent members had work conflicts.

Mr. Losasso asked if the chair would entertain the addition of youth representation from our schools. Ms. Thompson noted that she would. Ms. Henson noted that under the bylaws they need someone who is under 24 on the committee. Erin currently fills this requirement.

Ms. Sharon Howerton asked if ISD, ISVI, etc. are included when schools are mentioned because they are more short-term. Ms. Thompson noted that she would welcome representation from either of those. Ms. Howerton asked how they would be approached, whether it be through the Superintendent or other means. She offered to approach the current superintendent if necessary. Mr. Losasso noted that he would like to meet with the schools officially and have the interested students attend the next meeting to discuss how they can help and why they would like to help. Ms. Henson noted that they do have a public time in the meeting for students to share thoughts and opinions. Director Patrick noted that they want to comply with the expectations of that role, and asked for suggestions of who can take over when Erin no longer fills the requirement.

Ms. Henson asked what positions currently need to be filled and which positions will be vacant in the near future. Ms. Robin Lewis noted that if every current member attended, every position would be filled. Positions based on attendance that need to be filled are: former applicant or recipient of VR services, advocacy, disability, groups, business, industry & labor, and workforce innovation board representative. Director Patrick offered to message current VR members to recruit for membership.

Ms. Henson emphasized the need to update the SRC training guides.

Ms. Lewis nominated Mr. John Becker to attend a conference on behalf of the SRC in October. There were no objections.

Ms. Henson added that, as David Friedman is leaving the SRC, he will need to be replaced as Vice-Chair. She asked that if anyone wished to be added

	<p>to the pool of potential candidates, that they attend the next SRC Executive Committee meeting.</p> <p>***Addition to the chief of staff report: An all-staff meeting to assist customers, stakeholders, and vendors to serve them more effectively with empathy and kindness was held. There were two half days of presentation instructing on how to avoid burn-out, and how to better serve transgender customers. She also touched base on supervisors' and managers' training modules. FY24 positions (over 202) were filled. 29 HSP counselors, 41 HSP coordinators, 49 VR counselors, 36 coordinators, and 8 field supervisors, were examples given.</p> <p>Lunch On Your Own</p>	
<p><b>1:00 pm</b></p>	<p>DRS Data Report</p> <p>Mr. Arterberry was unable to attend.</p>	<p>Wolfgang Arterberry</p>
<p><b>2:30 pm</b></p>	<p>Strategic Planning Discussion</p> <p>Mr. Friedman facilitated a strategic planning discussion. He first noted all of the different plans that are being discussed: State Unified Plan, DRS State Plan, IWIB Strategic Plan, SRC Strategic Plan. He reviewed each for clarity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- State Unified Plan for the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) - sets up strategy for entire workforce system</li> <li>- DRS State Plan - the DRS section of the previous plan</li> <li>- Illinois Workforce Innovation Board (IWIB) Strategic Plan - strategies for that specific workforce board</li> <li>- SRC Strategic Plan - part of the DRS State Plan and ultimately State Unified Plan which SRC contributes</li> </ul> <p>He then discussed the planning for the SRC Strategic Plan.</p> <p>Purpose:</p>	<p>David Friedman</p>

	<p>Provide input to DRS leadership on priorities and goals from the SRC/customer perspective. Aligned with overall workforce system goals. Allow DRS to update SRC on plans for those priorities.</p> <p>-traditionally, this has taken the form of a statement/response document. DRS responds with their priorities and alignment with this plan. This then goes into the State Unified Plan.</p> <p>Ms. Robin Lewis noted that the Comprehensive Needs Assessment and how it influences the SRC's direction as a division should be included.</p> <p>-Ms. Henson noted that all members should be given a copy of the comprehensive needs assessment and the satisfaction surveys.</p> <p>Ms. Thompson commended Mr. Friedman for laying out the information in such an organized manner.</p> <p>Mr. Friedman presented the WIOA State Unified Plan, specifically noting a section about the SRC as well as comments from DRS.</p> <p>Mr. Friedman noted that a new strategic plan is due now and opened the floor for conversation, asking whether they would like to do something more comprehensive or more high-level.</p> <p>-Ms. Lewis stated that she had been serving as the temporary liaison of the EOPT task force and asked how they could incorporate having their voices on some of these other committees and work groups. Additionally, seeing how they can unify efforts in more of a strategic approach to employment for people with disabilities. She also asked how they could incorporate some initiatives that are employment-related to move the entire state forward.</p> <p>-Ms. Megan Mutti asked Ms. Lewis if it would be helpful to map the committees that SRC</p>	
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	<p>members participate on that there may not be general knowledge of. Ms. Lewis stated that it was her belief that all committees were outlined in the bylaws, but she thought it might be helpful to include a PowerPoint overview in the agenda for the next meeting. Ms. Thompson noted that Ms. Mutti may also be referring to committees external to the SRC that are doing similar work. Ms. Mutti offered to compile a list of state agencies that are doing similar work as well to identify crossover.</p> <p>Dr. Aime'e Julian stated that she and the ICSPS team would be happy to help in this process. ICSPS also has a document outlining members, their visions, and goals.</p> <p>Ms. Henson stated that she believes that the needs assessment and surveys need to be reviewed to incorporate feedback from the public. Ms. Thompson will ensure that everyone has access to that information for the next meeting. Ms. Henson suggested a booklet or information packet.</p> <p>Ms. Thompson asked the group if they would like to add a strategic planning discussion to the November meeting or if they would prefer to set aside an entire day. Ms. Henson noted that in the past, an entire day has been set aside. Mr. Friedman noted that it would be helpful to discuss this at length during the next meeting to organize and decide how much time commitment is necessary. -A tentative spring date for a full-day meeting will be discussed during this meeting.</p> <p>Ms. Henson asked about a timeline. Mr. Friedman noted that a revision to the USP will be done in 2026, so input will be needed in about a year (July 2025) to be included.</p>	
<b>3:00 pm</b>	Tour of Facility Roosevelt	
<b>3:55 pm</b>	Public Comment	

	<p>Ms. Thompson opened the floor for public comment.</p> <p>-Ms. Lewis noted that the November meeting had to be moved up a week. You will need an appointment letter available in case the hotel asks for identification.</p> <p>-Dec. 1<sup>st</sup> is the annual report date for the division of rehab</p> <p>-Dec. 31<sup>st</sup> is the due date for the SRC portion to the RSA.</p> <p>-asked SILC to be involved and include highlights/success stories for the annual report.</p> <p>Ms. Tsao asked for the deadline for submission - Ms. Lewis noted that she would like for everything to be submitted by the first week of November.</p> <p>Public Comment:</p> <p>There was none.</p>	
<p><b>4:00 pm</b></p>	<p>Adjournment</p> <p>The meeting adjourned at 1:45 PM.</p>	