**Arkansas State Rehabilitation Council**

**Quarterly Meeting Minutes**

**Conference Call/In-Person**

**September 19th, 2024**

**Attendees:**

**State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) Members Present:** Jonathan Taylor, Chair; Joseph Baxter; Bradley Ledgerwood; Courtney Leach; Jennifer Carlin; Ted Scallion; Wednesday Kramer; Addie Edwards.

**State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) Members Absent:** Keisha Pilot, Co-Chair; Alex Scott; Tom Masseau; Leah Garvin; Kobe Roy; Chris Balos; Kelly Sharp; Carol McDearmon.

**Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS), Division of Workforce Services (DWS) Staff:** Nathan Winter, ARS Deputy Commissioner; Carl Daughtery; Chip McAfee; Cynthia Gleghorn; Fred Harris (Gretchen Newton); Judy Smith; Amy Lamb.

**Call to Order:** Arkansas State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) Chair, Jonathan Taylor, called the meeting conducted both in person and teleconference to order at 9:31 a.m. Following rollcall, a quorum was declared.

**Approval of Minutes:** At the request of Chair Taylor, council members reviewed the minutes of the June 20th, 2024, meeting. A motion to approve the minutes as presented was made, seconded, and then carried.

**Comments From ARS Commissioner: Joseph Baxter:** (Prior to the meeting a PowerPoint presentation was sent to council members for review.) Commissioner Baxter began his comments with a warm welcome to old and new Council members by thanking them for being able to attend. He then proceeded to explain the ARS organizational structure to the Council as of August 2023. Using a chart, the Council was able to understand the different departments, shared services, points of contacts, and connections that all make up ARS. Commissioner Baxter continued his comments with another presentation explaining the Department of Commerce reorganization or “Reorg”. Reorg is a new process that has a lot of old entities, as well as new entities, working under the Department of Commerce. The reasoning stems from the idea that if the department/agencies are brought together they can be consolidated to gain efficiencies and create better outcomes. Additionally, with workforce partners consolidated under Commerce, it creates additional opportunities to operate more closely. Commissioner Bater next discussed the vocational rehabilitation grant, the agency’s primary funding source, that ARS receives from the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA). Through monitoring and various reports, RSA ensures that ARS is meeting its federal requirements for the grant with maintaining an active SRC being one of those requirements. The Commissioner concluded his presentation by reporting all needed positions could be advertised and filled. Much discussion followed.

**Comments from SRC Chair: Jonathan Taylor:** Chair Taylor begin by first asking for a point of personal privilege. He then proceeded to give a brief history of his past and present occupations. He communicated his experience working as a TJ Max manager and of him being provided the opportunity to work with the Promise Grant participants with Promise being a grant program designed as an experiment to see if young people could join the workforce and lose their dependence on SSI. He indicated that the first few summers of the program were met with disappointments; however, by the 3rd summer he had experienced success with the young people he worked with and of the knowledge he gained working with participants. He reported on his experiences working with ARS and him eventually being asked to become a member of the SRC. He reported that being an SRC member had offered many opportunities for him including the opportunity to join other boards related to the employment of people with disabilities. He reported on being given the opportunity to become Executive Director of Arkansas Governor’s Council on Developmental Disabilities where he works today. He concluded his comments by stating the objective of the SRC is to provide counsel and advice to ARS. That the SRC is not a governing board, but a partner of ARS.

**Freedom of Information Act & Roberts Rules of Order: Cindy Uhrynowycz:** (Prior to the meeting a PowerPoint presentation was sent to council members for review.) Ms. Uhrynowycz opened her comments by first providing a brief introduction of herself. She reported having worked as an attorney since 1984 with her gaining a lot of experience within state government. Ms. Uhrynowycz next provided the Council information about Roberts Rules of Order. She related that the SRC bylaws state under Article 3, Section 6, that SRC business shall be conducted by parliamentary procedure, using the Roberts Rules of Order as a guide. She provided the Council an overview of Robert Rules of Order and how they are used to conduct an orderly meeting by making sure that everyone has a voice and can be heard in an orderly manner. Ms. Uhrynowycz next informed the Council that since it receives federal and state funding it a subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) as it applies to public records and meetings. She explained that public records are documents that constitute a record of the performance or lack of performance of official functions such as minutes, agendas, or attachments. She communicated that public meetings, both formal or informal, special or regular, of the governing bodies of boards, bureaus, commissions, or organizations the state of Arkansas supports, wholly or in part, by public funds are subject to FOIA. If it covers the ground of public records or meetings then an Arkansas citizen can ask for an FOIA request from the SRC. With no further comments Cindy Uhrynowycz concluded her update.

**Corrective Action Plan (CAP) Update: Joseph Baxter, Nathan Winter:** Commissioner Baxter began the update by informing the council that the CAP update has a report side (past) and a corrective action plan (present). He acknowledged that Nathan Winter had assumed a lead role with respect to he CAP. Nathan Winter communicated that ARS works with RSA when responding to findings determined during monitoring visits where RSA looks at ARS both programmatically and fiscally. RSA monitored ARS in FY 2021 and again in FY 2023 with findings in both years including a specific conditions finding in FY2021. The finds are addressed in a Corrective Action Plan (CAP). The FY 2021 CAP revolved around four findings including the untimely development of IPEs (individualize plan of employments), lack of internal controls, rates of payment, and contract development and, as of now, the FY 21 CAP is now completely resolved. Mr. Winter next discussed the specific conditions CAP. This CAP is largely fiscal in nature and deals with policies and procedures that demonstrate tracking obligations and expenditure of funds. It also dealt with how ARS is reporting those expenditures to a specific funding source. Recently, the RSA provided feedback on the special conditions CAP after receiving tracking spreadsheets with a portion of the specific conditions CAP being resolved. Presently, two Federal reports that deal with findings, are currently being worked on. This will require forensic accounting from 2018 to present to fix these those findings with ARS planning to contract with a forensic accountant to address the issue. Mr. Winter concluded his update with a report on the FY 2023 CAP. The FY 2023 CAP has five findings that largely deal with programmatic issues including how applicants are dealt with; the development of comprehensive IPEs; the reporting of measurable skill gains, policies and procedures; and internal control monitoring. Feedback given by the RSA about FY 2023 CAP has been received but has not been broken down and digested. Much discussion soon followed.

**CSNA Update: Robert Trevino:** Mr. Trevino provided the council a brief update regarding the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA). He informed the Council of the federal requirement for ARS and the Council to complete the CSNA every 3 years with its purpose being to assess the vocational needs of Arkansans with disabilities and to be used as an integral component when ARS completes its State Plan. Mr. Trevino informed the Council that the next CSNA is scheduled to be completed during 2024-25 fiscal years and that the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville has been selected to conduct the assessment pending Legislative Council review.

**Agency Updates:**

Field Services: Carl Daughtery: (Prior to the meeting a PowerPoint presentation was sent to council members for review.) Mr. Daughtery began his update with salutations and a brief introduction of himself. He then briefed the Council on his new “VR Now initiative” which aims to improve Field Services in three ways including providing rapid services, improving the workforce participation rate, and promoting a positive culture amongst staff and those they serve. He indicated that these improvements are really taking effect in areas where offices are fully staffed, such as Fayetteville or Conway. Mr. Daughtery next provided the top priority items the Field program is currently working on. These include the RSA monitoring response, the new Case Management System, updating policies and procedures in conjunction with PPD&E, and providing comprehensive training to Field staff with the aid of the new training system called Yes LMS. He concluded his presentation by providing a list of upcoming events the Field will be involved in.

Arkansas Career Development Center (ACDC): Cynthia Gleghorn: (Prior to the meeting a PowerPoint presentation was sent to council members for review.) Ms. Gleghorn began her update with a quick tutorial of how ACDC provides training and support to the Field program. She informed the council of the hiring of two new instructors for future trainings with one having extensive teaching experience including the areas of food and beverage as well as digital media and technology courses and the other instructor having specialized training and experience in veterinary science.

Access & Accommodations: Amy Lamb: (Prior to the meeting a PowerPoint presentation was sent to council members for review.) Ms. Lamb provided the Council and overview of Access & Accommodations including psychological services, AT@Work, Increasing Capabilities Access Network (ICAN), Assistive Technology (AT), Telecommunication Access Program (TAP), the Alternative Financing Program (AFP), and Stay-at-Work/Return-to-Work (SAW/RTW). She highlighted the AT@Work program serving 152 clients this past quarter with twenty-five employers; ICAN providing information and assistance this past quarter to 350 individuals which resulted in taxpayer savings through its loan and reutilization programs totaling $1,317,147 dollars; TAP having an increasing number of online applications; the AFP year-to date-having provided loans totaling $420,253 dollars; and the SAW/RTW program having 11 new referrals the quarter from a variety of businesses including banks, schools, universities, the Department of Correction and libraries.

Business Engagement: Fred Harris: (Prior to the meeting a PowerPoint presentation was sent to council members for review.) Fred Harris provided the Business Engagement update standing in for Gretchen Newton. Mr. Harris provided Council members an explanation of how Business Engagement fosters relationships between businesses, VR agencies, and clients to support the employment of clients with disability and the needs of businesses. He reported that between the months of June, July, and August, Business Engagement was able to make 575 business contacts with year-to-date contacts totaling 2,089. This can be compared to a yearly total of 2,002 in 2023. Fred concluded his presentation by informing the Council of upcoming events Business Engagement will be involved including the National Disability Employment Awareness Month kick off, a Business Inclusion Summit in Fayetteville, and various proclamations, trainings, job shadowing, and jobs fairs.

**Election of Officers: Jonathan Taylor:** Chair Taylor informed the Council of the need to elect new officers. He informed members that the Council has two officers which include the Chair and Co-Chair each serving one-year terms. He reported that both he as Chair and Kesha Pilot as Co-Chair would no longer be part of the Council effective February 1, 2025, and that for that reason and others, the election of new officers was necessary for this SRC meeting. Chair Taylor detailed the roles, commitments, and responsibilities of what the SRC Chair would be performing. Following discussion, Frank Hellmer agreed to serve as Chair of the SRC without any opposition. After additional discussion, Courtney Leach agreed to serve as Co-Chair without opposition. Much discussion followed.

**Announcements Jonathan Taylor:** Chair Taylor informed the Council that the next SRC meeting would be on December 19th, 2024. He insured members that while the meeting may be close to Christmas efforts would be made to make sure it would be a short one. He reported that a Governor’s Proclamation celebrating Disability Employment Awareness Month would be read at the state Capitol on the second floor, at 10 o'clock, on Tuesday October 1st. He concluded announcements by outlining October events such as the APSE Conference, NCSRC in Seatle, and the Business Inclusion Submit.

**Adjournment:** With no further business to conduct the SRC adjourned at 12:24 p.m.