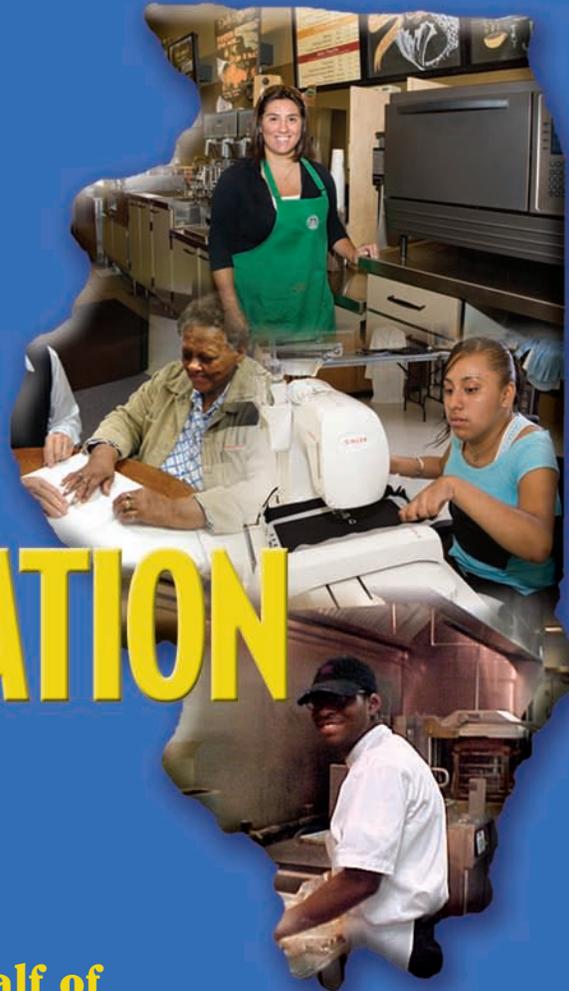




2004 - 2007 Annual Report

STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

**providing leadership on behalf of
individuals with disabilities and guidance to
vocational rehabilitation programs**





A Message from the Director:

On behalf of the Illinois Department of Human Services' Division of Rehabilitation Services, I would like to congratulate the State Rehabilitation Council on their continued achievements. The Council has been rebuilding over the past few years and has been instrumental in assisting the agency in the areas of customer choice, working with the VR rules committee, and hiring impartial hearing officers.

The members of the Council continue to support the Division's World Class Customer Service activities and have helped the Department improve its service delivery system. With their guidance, the Division will continue to seek new strategies to enhance the lives of citizens with disabilities in Illinois.

I congratulate the Council on their continued commitment to improving VR programs and services and look forward to building on our partnership in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert Kilbury".

Robert Kilbury, Rh.D.
Director
Division of Rehabilitation Services



A Message from the SRC Chair:

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) was established in 1992 by the Rehabilitation Act to provide leadership and guidance to the state's vocational rehabilitation (VR) program.

Members of the SRC represent a broad array of individuals with disabilities, advocacy organizations, the business sector, education, and community rehabilitation programs. Through their representation, members work in partnership with the Department of Human Services' Division of Rehabilitation Services (DHS/DRS) to shape the VR process in a manner that enables individuals with disabilities to achieve their goals of gainful employment and self-sufficiency.

The SRC is proud of their achievements and pleased to submit this Annual Report which highlights accomplishments and activities during fiscal years 2004, 2005, 2006, and 2007. During this time the Council has added seven (7) new members participated in the selection of Impartial Hearing Officers, assisted with the development of the State VR plan, helped conduct public forums, and updated the customer satisfaction survey instrument.

Members of the SRC look forward to the coming year and would like to thank the Rehabilitation Services Administration, DHS/DRS, the Illinois General Assembly, and the Governor for their continued assistance and support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Edward J. Bannister".

Edward Bannister
Chairperson, 2007

Purpose

The Council is organized to carry out duties established by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, the Illinois Disabled Persons Rehabilitation Act, Section 5-550 of the Civil Administrative Code, and other state and federal regulations. The Council shall meet a minimum of four times per year for the purpose of advising the Secretary of the Department of Human Services and the Associate Director of the Division of Rehabilitation Services in matters concerning individuals with disabilities, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and the provision of vocational rehabilitation services.

Powers and Duties

The SRC has a responsibility to help the agency determine what consumers need, influence the agency's priorities based on this understanding and, to help evaluate the agency's performance in meeting these needs. Specifically, the SRC participates in four key area's:

- Consumer Needs Assessment
- Strategic Planning
- Customer Satisfaction
- Program Evaluation

Executive Committee

The Executive Committee consists of the five (5) elected officers and shall be responsible for ensuring the Council acts in accordance with federal and state mandates. The Committee shall also be responsible for submitting candidates for appointment to the Council and, to the best of its ability, maintain a list of potential candidates to fill vacancies.

Operations Committee

The Operations Committee is responsible for developing an overall management plan for the Council. With the assistance of other Committees, the Operations Committee shall identify the Council's goals and priorities for the year and shall identify the appropriate level of resources needed to accomplish the Council's tasks. The Committee shall also be responsible for reviewing the ByLaws and submitting revisions to the Council.

Policy/Legislative Committee

The Policy/Legislative Committee is responsible for monitoring legislation that will have an impact on individuals with disabilities and on the operations of the Division of Rehabilitation Services. This shall include matters that affect and concern the Division's budget. The Committee will make recommendations to the full Council with regard to positions on legislation and on the Division's budget.

The Committee is also responsible for reviewing proposed changes to administrative rules and preparing a response to such changes on behalf of the Council.

Stakeholders Committee

The Stakeholders Committee is responsible for developing new and innovative ways to increase stakeholder and Division staff participation in the VR process and in the activities of the Council.

State Plan Committee

The State Plan Committee is responsible for reviewing the State Plan and amendments that are submitted by the Division to RSA. The Committee is also responsible for identifying the Council's goals and priorities for inclusion in the State Plan. In addition to these activities, the Committee will be responsible for participating in community forums as defined by federal regulations to discuss the Plan. The Committee will present the Plan to the full Council for final review and approval.

SRC Membership

Members FY 04

Henrietta Battle
Myra Christian
Mary Clark
Dave Dailey
Annette Grove
Pam Heavens
Chris Koch/Deb Heckenkamp
Marbella Marsh
Cathy Meadows
Jeanne Naglewski
Greg Polman
John Trach
Christopher Ware

Officers

Ron Malik, Chair
Edward Bannister, Vice-Chair
Mary Rogers, Fiscal Officer
Debbie Grant, Secretary
Brian Johnson, Member-at-Large

Members FY 05

Tony Arellano
Henrietta Battle
Myra Christian
Mary Clark
Dave Dailey
Pam Heavens
Chris Koch/Deb Heckenkamp
Marbella Marsh
Cathy Meadows
Jeanne Naglewski
Greg Polman
John Trach
Christopher Ware

Officers

Ron Malik, Chair
Edward Bannister, Vice-Chair
Mary Rogers, Fiscal Officer
Debbie Grant, Secretary
Brian Johnson, Member-at-Large

Members FY 06

Tony Arellano
Henrietta Battle
Bill Bogdan
Myra Christian
Dave Dailey
Joyce Grangent
Annette Grove
Pam Heavens
Chris Koch/Sue Walter
Marbella Marsh
Greg Polman
Kristin Sensor
John Trach
James Wilkerson

Officers

Edward Bannister, Chair
Christopher Ware, Vice-Chair
Mary Rogers, Fiscal Officer
Cathy Meadows, Secretary
Brian Johnson, Member-at-Large

Members FY 07

Tony Arellano
Henrietta Battle
Bill Bogdan
Myra Christian
Dave Dailey
Joyce Grangent
Annette Grove
Pam Heavens
Chris Koch/Sue Walter
Marbella Marsh
Greg Polman
Kristin Sensor
John Trach
Thomas Upton
James Wilkerson

Officers

Edward Bannister, Chair
Christopher Ware, Vice-Chair
Mary Rogers, Fiscal Officer
Cathy Meadows, Secretary
Brian Johnson, Member-at-Large

SRC Activities - FY 04

- To help orientate new members the council worked with the Division of Rehabilitation's Staff Development Section and participated in Team Building exercises.
- Held a legislative breakfast. Elected officials discussed the legislative process, the State's budget, transportation and other key issues.
- Partnered with the Illinois Department of Human Services and distributed information at the State Fair.
- Prepared letters addressing the Governor's hiring freeze for state agencies. They stressed the policy had a negative impact on filling key positions, on state government and on people with disabilities.
- Prepared letters addressing infrastructure costs for the One-Stop employment agencies.
- Worked with the Division of Rehabilitation's Staff Development Section to develop a sensitivity training for new employees.
- The council voted customer choice as their number 1 priority issue and made a recommendation to the Customer Choice System Committee that clients need to be fully informed of their rights, services that can be provided, and what providers are available. The recommendation included that this information be given to all clients in writing.

SRC Activities - FY 05

- Participated with RSA in providing information on SRC's involvement with policy development and training issues.
- Developed a letter for council member's employers indicating that they were appointed by the Governor and highlighting the members involvement. This is believed to be an effective way to express the virtues of allowing employees to participate on the council without having to use their vacation or personal time.
- Working closely with the Governor's Office on Boards & Commissions to expedite appointments to the council.
- Identified a need to revise their brochure.

- Discussed developing a new member orientation the night before the scheduled quarterly meetings that would address the overall purview of the council, members role, overview of DRS and programs, and establish a mentor system.
- Working to encourage advocacy groups and agencies that aren't mandated participants to attend quarterly meetings.
- Reviewed orientation material for new members.
- The council expressed opposition to the 6 week moratorium on new customer intake.
- Reviewed the appeals process with CAP and hiring of impartial hearing officers.
- Reviewed the status of hiring bilingual staff.
- Worked with RSA and RRCEP to identify and prioritize content for the Region V Forum.
- Created a home page on the internet with a direct link from the DHS website.
- Developed a legislative platform and delivered it to members of the state legislature.

SRC Activities - FY 06

- Several members attended the Region V Forum held in Chicago.
- Members attended the CCDI Annual Disability Rights Conference. This years event also included a Technology Expo.
- Council committees were reformed and goals for each were established.
- Had representation at the DHS information booth distributing information at the State Fair.
- Four new members have been appointed to the council.
- Members participated in the Disability Pride Parade in Chicago.
- Council chair attended the CSAVR Fall Conference in San Diego.
- Council member attended the RSA monitoring conference in Washington, DC.
- The council decided to go to a two-day meeting and chose Friday and Saturday. The meetings will be held in different locations around the state and input from customers will be sought.
- Reviewed resumes and made recommendations for eight impartial hearing officers.

- Council chair attended the CSAVR Conference in San Francisco and reported that the SRC's are interested in holding their own national conference.
- Developed a legislative platform and distributed it to the legislators.
- Mary Davis, RSA Program Specialist, joined the quarterly meeting via conference call and discussed the roles and responsibilities of SRC in the wake of the recent closings of regional offices.
- A member was appointed to the Hearing Officer Selection Committee.
- Council chair participated in the SRC national call-in meeting.
- A council member attended the CSAVR Conference in Washington, DC.
- Members met with Director Kilbury and discussed the need to restore funding for the Evaluation and Development Center at SIU-Carbondale.

SRC Activities - FY 07

- Worked with DHS to select several new impartial hearing officers.
- Members met with other stakeholders and representatives from RSA to discuss the role of SRC's in relation to the elimination of regional offices and the reorganization of RSA.
- Provided outreach at ADA celebrations, 3rd Annual Disability Pride Parade, Illinois State Fair and participate in the national SRC call in meetings sponsored by RSA.
- Assist DRS in needs assessment activities providing input on customer satisfaction surveys and attending public hearings.
- Wrote letters to members of congress addressing the re-authorization of WIA; inclusion of the consumer price index (CPI) and additional funding for transition services.
- Met with members of the Illinois general assembly and discussed key priorities.

2004 Legislative Priorities

Appropriate Level of State Match

In order to secure federal vocational rehabilitation funding, the State Of Illinois must provide the Department of Human Services with the appropriate level of state matching funds. Given the shortage of General Revenue Funds, the Council urges the General Assembly to adequately fund the vocational rehabilitation program so that sufficient Federal funding can be allocated to the state.

Home Services Program

The State Rehabilitation Council recognizes the importance of full inclusion and quality of life for all citizens with disabilities in the State of Illinois. Whereas, Home Services is the fastest growing program offered through the Division of Rehabilitation Services and is instrumental in appropriate service delivery for all other programs provided by the Division, appropriate funding levels that reflect the ongoing increase in service must be maintained. Without maintenance or appropriate funding levels, loss of vocational placements, appropriate transition programming, and services to individuals with disabling conditions will be negatively impacted. The net savings to the State of Illinois by appropriate funding levels within Home Services will be substantial in that it will avoid loss of services that will lead to unnecessary institutionalization.

Newsline Service for Persons Who are Visually Impaired

The Council is encouraged by the Newsline service that is available to all persons who are visually impaired who are unable to read the newspaper. Through this service, persons can access more than 96 newspapers, several of which are in Illinois, and two leading magazines: the New Yorker and the Economist. Since the service is accessed through a touch tone phone, it is available 7 days a week, 24 hours a day. The majority of the program is funded through a Federal grant, however, State funding is also required. Currently, this expense is funded through the budget of the Illinois State Library. The Council strongly urges continuation of this

service. It represents independent literacy to the thousands of Illinois citizens unable to read the newspaper. \$40,000 is needed to maintain this important program and a telecommunications surcharge is recommended as a way to generate funds.

Consolidation of Vocational and Waiver Programs

Currently, vocational services are provided by various Divisions within the Department of Human Services. Supported Employment is a program that is reimbursable by Medicaid through a Medicaid waiver. However, General Revenue Funds for long term supported employment provided by the Division of Rehabilitation Services is not part of the Medicaid waiver program. Because the Division of Rehabilitation Services provides services to persons with all types of disabilities, it is recommended by the Council that all vocational waiver programs be administered by the Division of Rehabilitation Services. This would provide for less confusion to the consumer and allow for the State of Illinois' vocational programs to capture more federal funding.

In addition to consolidating all vocational programs within the Department of Human Services, it is also recommended that the Division of Rehabilitation Services be made the lead agency for students in vocational programs. Currently, schools are provided funds through the Illinois State Board of Education for vocational programs for students with disabilities. Because the schools are the lead agency, there are many students that are lost in the transition. If the Division of Rehabilitation Services were the lead agency, there would be an automatic transfer to adult service provision and again, it would allow for the capture of more Federal funding.

2005 Legislative Priorities

Senate Bill 1324 (Senator Crotty) - Support Creates the Community First Act to assist the state in its efforts to implement the Supreme Court's decision in *Olmstead v. L.C.*, 527 U.S. 581 (1999).

The Olmstead decision requires states to provide individuals with disabilities with the opportunities and resources to transition from restrictive residential institutions to least restrictive community settings. Senate Bill 1324 provides that individuals who are in institutional settings may use funds that would be expended on them to pay for reintegration into the community and for community services. The measure also requires the Departments of Human Services, Aging, and Public Health to provide information to eligible individuals about these services and to prepare an annual report on the number of individuals who applied for services, who transitioned from an institutional setting to the community, and who avoided institutional placement.

Senate Bill 101 (Senator del Valle) - Support
Creates the Assistive Technology Warranty Act. A manufacturer or assistive technology device lessor who sells or leases an assistive technology device to a consumer, must furnish the consumer with an express warranty that warrants the device is free of any nonconformity. If the device does not conform, a reasonable attempt must be made to repair the device, replace it, or refund the consumer. Allows the consumer to recover any damages caused by a violation of the Act.

House Bill 1316 (Representative McCarthy) - Support
Amends the Illinois Vehicle Code. Increases the fines for the unauthorized use of parking spaces reserved for persons with disabilities. Also provides that any person who knowingly transfers a disability license plate, parking decal, or device for the purpose of exercising the privileges of an authorized holder is guilty of a Class A misdemeanor and shall be fined not less than \$500 for a first offense and not less than \$1,000 for a second or subsequent offense.

House Bill 438 (Representative Holbrook) - Support
House Bill 781 (Representative McGuire) - Support
Both measures raise the asset limit for the Department of Human Services' Home Services Program. House Bill 438 raises the asset limit from \$10,000 to \$20,000. House Bill 781 incrementally

raises the asset limit for the Home Services Program and the Department on Aging's Community Care Program. Both measures would enable more individuals with disabilities to become eligible for services. The Department of Human Services estimates the impact will be less than \$1 million on the Home Services Program.

Funding of the Chicago Transit Authority - Support
The transit authority receives a certain percent of their operating funds from farebox tolls. In the Chicago Transit Authority's (CTA) case, that percentage is 50%. CTA utilizes farebox recovery for fixed route bus service and ADA transit service.

CTA charges ADA transit customers \$1.75 per ride, but their overall cost for providing the ride is \$26. Comparatively, they may charge \$1.75 per ride for a fixed bus route, but their overall cost for that ride is \$3.00 (these are estimated figures). Given this difference, the CTA cannot recoup enough from farebox recovery for the ADA transit service. To meet their obligations to the 50% requirement, they must make up the difference by recouping approximately 70-80% farebox recovery from their fixed route service. CTA has been supportive of past measures to waive the farebox recovery requirement for the ADA transit services. CTA believes this will enable them to have more flexibility with their operating funds.

If CTA cannot obtain sufficient funding for their services, they are proposing an increase from \$1.75 per ride to \$3.50 (\$7.00 round trip) for the ADA transit services. This increase will devastate many individuals with disabilities who are on SSI/SSDI and who have fixed incomes. The majority of these individuals do not have other means of transportation and are dependent upon the transit system. The Council is supportive of measures that provide CTA with more flexibility with their operating funds or with measures that provide additional funding to CTA.

2006 Legislative Priorities

Budget Request FY 2007 - Support
The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) supports the DHS/DRS Budget Request for FY 2007 with the

addition of sufficient funding to maintain nine (9) incumbent positions at the State operated schools which are compromised by the budget level as presented.

Senate Bill 2330 (Senator Jacobs) - Support
The measure was recommended by the Illinois Committee of Blind Vendors to provide greater priority to blind vendors under the Randolph-Sheppard Act for all vending and cafeteria operations in state facilities and federal facilities located in the state.

Senate Bill 2292 (Senator Demuzio) - Support
Creates the Interpreter for the Deaf Licensure Act. Requires licensure for all interpreters through the Illinois Deaf and Hard of Hearing Commission.

House Bill 5343 (Representative Watson) - Support
Amends the Disabled Persons Rehabilitation Act to provide the DRS residential schools with the authority to maintain and deposit funds into locally held accounts that pertain to student compensation and student travel. These accounts will enable the schools to pay students for chore-like activities they perform on campus and to pay for transportation, meals, and lodging costs for students, coaches, and activity sponsors when they are traveling for school related activities.

House Bill 5268 (Representative Hamos) - Support
Senate Bill 2290 (Senator Martinez) - Support
Companion bills that create the Comprehensive Housing Planning Act. Codifies Executive Order #18 from 2003 that required the Illinois Housing Development Authority to research and develop a plan to provide for affordable and accessible housing for low income individuals, low income seniors, and low income individuals with disabilities.

Senate Bill 2230 (Senator Munoz) - Support
Provides that the maximum fine and late penalty for any one violation of a parking, standing, and compliance ordinance remains at \$250, unless the violation is parking an unauthorized vehicle in a space reserved for a vehicle with registration plates or decals issued to a person with disabilities or a disabled veteran.

House Bill 4223 (Representative Mathias) - Support
with sufficient funding to cover the increased financial impact on the DHS budget.

Calls for phased-in Medicaid rate increases for providers of skilled nursing visits, physical therapy visits, occupational therapy visits, and speech therapy visits. On July 1, 2006, the rate will increase to \$70 per visit and on July 1, 2007, the rate will increase to \$80 per visit.

House Bill 4404 (Representative Flider) - Support
with sufficient funding to cover the increased financial impact on the DHS budget.

Amends the Illinois Act on Aging to provide an additional \$1.33 per hour to chore/housekeeping and homemaker service vendors who offer health insurance to all qualifying employees. Qualified employees must provide over 100 hours of service per month for 3 consecutive months. After 2007, funding for this purpose will be adjusted to match increases in the medical component of the Consumer Price Index.

2007 Legislative Priorities

Improved Access Technology for State employees and customers of the Division of Rehabilitation Services – In order to be competitive in today's workplace, computer skills, knowledge of commonly used software and access to compatible hardware devices is essential. Persons with disabilities, however, are often faced with systems that are not compatible with the access devices designed to address their specific needs. The State Rehabilitation Council urges your support of legislation, which would level the playing field for State employees and customers with disabilities who depend on current technology to obtain and retain employment. The State Rehabilitation Council urges your support of **SB 511** (Senator Cullerton).

Priority for Blind Vendors in State Facilities – The Vending Program operated through the Division of Rehabilitation Services, Bureau of Blind Services provides an excellent opportunity for enterprising

blind businessmen and women throughout the State. Modeled after the Federal legislation (Randolph Sheppard), this program offers trained and experienced “vendors” the opportunity to bid on food and commodities facilities in State buildings. While “preference” is currently given to blind vendors, the growth of the program has been impeded as large, private commercial vendors acquire more contracts. The State Rehabilitation Council urges your support of **SB 130** (Senator Jacobs).

Expanded State Support for Public Transportation

– In order for persons with disabilities to engage in typical life experiences including going to work, shopping, keeping medical appointments and visiting friends, a strong public transportation system is a necessity. However, in many parts of our state, public transportation is either limited to core geographic areas and hours or it does not exist. The State Rehabilitation Council commends the support which resulted in increased Amtrak routes in and out of Chicago beginning last fall, and urges your support of additional legislation that would expand and strengthen other forms of public transportation through grants and other funding incentives.

Adequate Funding for Books and Materials used at the Illinois School for the Visually Impaired (ISVI), the Illinois School for the Deaf (ISD) and ICRE/Roosevelt

– In order to be competitive in the world of work, Illinois children with disabilities must be provided with adequate education. Currently, however, books and materials are relegated to the “equipment” line of the budget which is often used for other essential purposes. As a result, textbooks are seriously out of date. For example, the social studies book used at ISVI does not even report the death of Martin Luther King, Jr. The State Rehabilitation Council urges the Department of Human Services, Division of Rehabilitation Services to ensure that adequate funding is secured by creating a separate line item for educational resources, which will result in maintaining textbooks, which are current and adequate. The State Rehabilitation Council

encourages your review of this situation and urges your support.

Cost of Doing Business Increase for Provider Organizations

– The Division of Rehabilitation Services fulfills its responsibility to provide training and employment for Illinois citizens with disabilities in a number of ways. While some services are provided directly by staff of the division, many services, which result in successful employment outcomes, are provided through contracts with private vendors. These community partners are a vital extension of State services, without which outcomes would be diminished and Federal funding would be compromised. While salaries offered to State employees have increased, rates offered to provider organizations have not kept pace with inflation and increased contract demands. This has put tremendous strain on relatively small budgets, already stressed by the delinquency of State payments. The State Rehabilitation Council urges your support of a Cost of Doing Business increase and expedited payments for these vital community partners.

Olmstead Implementation Act – the act will affirm the right of individuals with disabilities of all ages to receive financial support for long-term care services in the community setting of their choice. This will allow money to follow the person instead of the person following the money to a place they do not want to live in order to receive services. The State Rehabilitation Council urges your support of **SB 470** (Senator M. Maggie Crotty).

FY 2004 State VR Plan - Attachment 4.2(c)
Input of the State Rehabilitation Council

DRS staff meet regularly with the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) to present information, to discuss current issues, and to receive feedback on the performance of the VR program. DRS also has reviewed the SRC 2002 Annual Report in order to present the following section on SRC input. The following is a set of responses to SRC comments which reflect updated information since the last DRS response.

SRC Comment: SRC members are concerned that the state's Early Retirement Initiative will have a negative impact on customer services. What steps have been taken to make sure that services to customers will not be adversely affected by this initiative?

DRS Response: DRS prepared for the impact of the Early Retirement Initiative through several means. First, DRS worked with DHS Personnel and the Department of Central Management Services to streamline the hiring process. In the last two fiscal years, DRS has hired over 90 vocational rehabilitation counselors to fill vacancies. DRS has also engaged in extensive outreach activities to identify counselors with specific skills, such as those who are fluent in Spanish or sign language. DRS continues to develop its relationships with university programs that train rehabilitation counselors. In 2003 there are 15 graduate student interns who are working for DRS as they near completion of their degree requirements. The interns are paid and make a commitment to work for DRS for two years after they receive their degrees.

DRS also is in the second year of its Leadership Academy program. This program is designed to prepare DRS staff for leadership positions in the agency. Staff receive training in leadership skills, communication, team building and other aspects of leadership roles in a state agency. Many of the supervisors who retired from DRS were replaced by DRS counselors who participated in the Leadership Academy and who were therefore well-prepared to assume their new role.

SRC Comment: SRC members as well as other disability advocates continue to have concerns about the accessibility of One Stop workforce centers. Specifically, concerns have been raised about the use of assistive technology in the One Stop centers, as well as the use of the Work Keys assessment system by One Stops.

DRS Response: As Illinois continues to develop its One Stop workforce center system, DRS is working with other partners to improve the accessibility of the One Stops for people with disabilities. A significant step was obtaining two grants from the U.S. Department of Labor which were used to purchase assistive technology equipment for all One Stop centers in the state. In the last year, DRS staff, including staff from the Rehabilitation Technology Unit, have worked to prepare the One Stop locations and to install the equipment and software on site. While the process took longer than anticipated, we now have functional equipment available to One Stop users with disabilities.

DRS also used federal grant funds to set up a series of training events on disability awareness for One Stop center staff. These training events were developed and conducted in association with representatives of Illinois' independent living center network. The training was well received and will help improve the service environment at One Stop centers.

The Work Keys assessment system was developed by ACT and is being marketed to state workforce systems across the country. While there are many positive aspects to this system, it is perceived as inaccessible to individuals who are deaf. Deaf advocates contend that the Work Keys system will not produce fair scores for individuals who use American Sign Language as their primary means of communication. The current system of using videotaped sign language instructions for the test is not seen as an adequate accommodation. DRS is working with ACT to test the Work Keys system with students at the Illinois School for the Deaf. It is hoped that this test will enable a meaningful comparison of Work Keys scores with student grades and with other test results.

SRC Comment: SRC members are concerned that the Social Security Administration's Ticket to Work program seems to have gotten off to a slow start. What progress is Illinois making in implementing the Ticket program?

DRS Response: DRS believes that the Ticket to Work program is going very well in Illinois. Out of around 9,000 customers in the vocational rehabilitation program who received a Ticket, over 3,300 have assigned their ticket to DRS. This is the largest number of tickets assigned to any state VR agency in the country. In contrast, only about 300 tickets have been assigned to the 50 or more Employment Networks doing business in Illinois. DRS maintains a Ticket to Work unit in Springfield that answers calls from customers and makes referrals to DRS field offices. DRS has provided training on Ticket issues to counselors and coordinators, and provides regular updates on the Ticket program using the First Page intranet system.

SRC Comment: SRC wants to move forward with establishing a formal structure for the Council, with staff, an Executive Director and offices. SRC members want to know the level of support they can expect from DRS.

DRS Response: DRS continues to work with SRC members regarding the implementation of an organizational structure. DRS has provided office space in the Springfield central office for use by SRC members. DRS is working with the DHS personnel unit to develop a job description for a full-time staff position who would be responsible for working with the Council. The current state budget situation and limitations on hiring have made progress on this issue somewhat slow. Discussions will continue in the next year regarding staffing needs and available resources.

SRC Comment: SRC members feel that the Internet is a powerful tool for providing information to people with disabilities, but the it is not used to its maximum effect in Illinois. In addition to establishing its own Internet site, the Council would like to see information about DRS services be made more readily available to people with disabilities.

DRS Response: DRS believes that information on services should be made available to the public through the most effective means. DRS has provided support to the Council in the establishment and ongoing operation of their Internet site. It is hoped that this site will continue to develop and become a major source of information about state services for people with disabilities. DRS does not have its own Internet site. Information about DRS is featured as a section on the DHS Internet site. While it is expected that this policy will continue to be in effect, DRS is interested in receiving feedback on how the information that is available can be made more accessible to people with disabilities. Therefore, we will continue to work with the Council on this issue.

SRC Comment: The Illinois system for transition of young people with disabilities from school to work is currently being evaluated by DRS. What steps are being taken to change this system?

DRS Response: DRS has been working on a transition project for the last 12 months. The purpose of the project was to collect data from students, parents, school personnel, community service providers, DRS staff and other stakeholders to evaluate the current state of the transition system and to make recommendations for future DRS efforts related to transition. SCR members were involved at several points in the information gathering and planning process. DRS has developed two strategic goals related to transition, and is in the process of developing an implementation plan. We hope to significantly increase the number of students with disabilities served by the VR program in the next three years, as well as to significantly increase the number of students who are employed when they leave school. DRS expects to continue to make use of the local office planning strategy developed as part of the World Class Customer Services initiative. DRS office teams are encouraged to work with schools and other community resources to develop new methods of reaching out to young people and providing services that enable them to enter the workforce soon after leaving school.

SRC Comment: SRC members have expressed concerns about how people with mental illness are being served by DRS. Two particular areas of concern were identified: services to individuals with mental illness who also have significant problems with alcohol and drug abuse; as well as services to individuals with mental illness who are homeless.

DRS Response: DRS has assigned its mental health services coordinator to work on these issues in partnership with other state and community agencies. The psychosocial rehabilitation committee of DRS VR counselors meets regularly to address issues related to mental health and rehabilitation. DRS staff have worked with staff from the DHS Division of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse to develop a vocational services strategy and establish linkages with local DRS offices. DRS also is working with DASA and the Division of Mental Health to develop training materials for counselors who serve customers facing these issues. DRS staff also have worked with the Corporation for Supportive Housing on a federal grant that will provide services to persons with mental illness who are or have been homeless. DRS participates with CSH staff and representatives of community agencies on an ongoing committee which focuses on service provision issues for individuals at risk of homelessness.

SRC Comment: SRC members are interested in the vocational model known as affirmative enterprise, and want to know if this type of program could be adopted or expanded in Illinois.

DRS Response: The affirmative enterprise concept was created as an alternative to traditional sheltered workshop services. In this model, people with disabilities are employed alongside individuals who do not have disabilities. DRS policy favors placing customers in competitive employment in integrated settings. DRS can support employment outcomes only to the extent that they meet criteria established in our rules. DRS rules define integrated as “a setting typically found in the community in which customers interact with non-disabled individuals other than individuals who are providing services to the customer; or with respect

to the employment outcome, integrated setting means a setting typically found in the community in which the customers interact with non-disabled individuals.” Therefore, any given employment setting would need to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis to determine if it met these criteria.

FY 2007 State VR Plan - Attachment 4.2(c)
Input of the State Rehabilitation Council

SRC Comment: SRC members are concerned to hear that DRS does not have a sufficient number of hearing officers able to hear appeals from customers. There is a concern that customers may have to wait unnecessarily for services due to delays in hearing appeals.

DRS Response: DRS shares the concern of the SRC about the availability of hearing officers, and we are taking steps to increase the number of trained hearing officers as quickly as possible. There are six hearing officers currently available. An RFP was circulated to individuals interested in becoming hearing officers. DRS anticipates that another seven hearing officers will be offered contracts in the next fiscal year. It should be pointed out that the greatest backlog in hearings is for individuals being served or seeking services from the DRS Home Services Program, rather than in the Vocational Rehabilitation Program. However, the limited number of hearing officers may have an impact on VR program cases if the new officers are not hired as quickly as anticipated. DRS appreciates the efforts of SRC members who participated in the process of reviewing potential hearing officers.

SRC Comment: SRC members are concerned that there may not be adequate funding for the VR program, and that this may result in another temporary shutdown of services.

DRS Response: DRS would like to stress that the six-week shutdown of intake of new cases in early 2005 was a unique event that is unlikely ever to be repeated. Since that time, several measures have been instituted to control spending and reduce costs. In addition, we have revised our rules on the

order of selection to allow for opening and closing specific categories of services during a fiscal year to provide greater flexibility in managing resources. The current federal budget (FY2006) provided a fairly small increase for Illinois, but the FY2007 budget will result in an increase of approximately \$5.5 million in VR funds. This is due to the application of the federal funding formula, which looks at population growth and state per capita income. In the most recent state budget DRS lost about a half million dollars in GRF matching funds, which may result in a small reduction in the number of persons served by the program.

SRC Comment: SRC members requested an update on the Ticket-to-Work program in Illinois, particularly in light of comments across the country that the program is not working as well as intended.

DRS Response: The major item of concern for DRS is that VR program customers assign their tickets to DRS so that we will have more Social Security reimbursement funds available to assist customers. In FY2006 61 percent of Ticket-eligible VR customers had assigned their Ticket to DRS, compared to 53 percent in FY2005, 33 percent in FY2004 and just 18 percent in FY2003. This increase represents the results of a significant effort to train staff and improve communication with field offices to enable DRS to capture more reimbursement funds. DRS only receives reimbursement funds when a customer is successfully employed and earning above the substantial gainful activity level for a set period of time. Therefore, our success in capturing funds is directly tied to the success of a customer in achieving greater self-sufficiency.

SRC Comment: Is the increase in Social Security reimbursement a result of increase case load or of the VR discouraging the private networks from handling the Ticket?

DRS Response: National data show that 95 percent of Ticket-eligible individuals who assign their Ticket did so to their state VR agency. In part this represents the success of efforts by VR agencies to capture Tickets, but also reflects the years of

experience that VR agencies have in working with individuals with significant disabilities. It is apparent that the financial incentives originally established by the Ticket-to-Work program have not resulted in a significant number of individuals expressing a preference to work with employment networks other than the VR agency. The Social Security Administration is continuing to review the Ticket program to provide a better incentive structure to private employment networks.

SRC Comment: SRC members suggested that DRS should be doing more in the way of outreach to people with disabilities to interest them in the VR program. It was proposed that centers for independent living would be an appropriate mechanism for pulling more people in to the VR program.

DRS Response: DRS believes that the most appropriate form of outreach would be to find ways to identify individuals receiving SSI or SSDI benefits and encourage them to participate in the VR program. DRS has held discussions with CIL representatives regarding new ways to reach out to these individuals, including posting VR staff at centers on a part-time basis.

SRC Comment: SRC questioned the usefulness of the existing RSA standards and indicators as a means of evaluating the VR program, and suggested that new measures be studied that would be more relevant.

DRS Response: For nearly a decade RSA has utilized a set of seven indicators as a means of evaluating the effectiveness of a state's VR program. These indicators look at the success of the program in producing competitive employment outcomes for individuals with significant disabilities, as well as the relative wages of customers in each state. Another standard looks at the equitable provision of services to customers who are members of minority groups. RSA has discussed developing additional indicators, but no action has been taken to date on that front.

SRC Comment: In light of the closure of the RSA regional offices, including the office in Chicago,

SRC members were concerned about how the monitoring process would work and how the changes would affect Illinois.

DRS Response: While the changes in RSA structure were significant, so far the new monitoring team has been available and responsive and every indication is that the new staff will provide support and information in a timely fashion. There will be no official 107 review this year, although Illinois will receive an on-site visit from the new RSA monitors to discuss progress in making program improvements. The site visit will include a meeting with SRC members along with other stakeholders involved in the VR program.

SRC Comment: SRC members expressed a concern about caseload sizes in the VR program, and whether DRS staff were being as productive as possible.

DRS Response: DRS continues to monitor the productivity of staff in several ways, and has made increasing productivity a focus of the new goals for FY2007 and 2008. The overall caseload has reduced somewhat compared to recent years as a result of the emphasis on serving individuals with more significant disabilities. For example, the total number of persons served in FY2006 was 46,942, compared to 50,155 in FY2005 and 54,167 in FY2004. DRS believes that it is appropriate to target limited resources on a somewhat smaller population that has a greater level of need. It should be noted that some individual counselor districts were found in the last year to have caseload sizes below an acceptable level. VR program managers worked with field office supervisors to re-assign cases so that the total caseload was more equitably distributed among staff.

SRC Comment: The SRC has proposed hiring a full-time staff person to act as DRS liaison to the SRC.

DRS Response: While acknowledging that there are a number of duties to perform in coordinating with the SRC, at this time DRS does not support a full-time staff position. Current DRS priorities are for filling counselor positions and others that relate

directly to VR program customers. DRS has assigned a staff liaison to work with the SRC on a part-time basis.

SRC Comment: SRC members inquired about the DRS perception of the role of the SRC and the priorities of the SRC from the DRS point of view.

DRS Response: Director Kilbury related to SRC members that there are a number of activities he would be pleased to see the SRC pursue. In particular, he suggested that SRC members might focus on securing meetings with members of the Illinois congressional delegation, as well as meetings with members of the General Assembly to advocate for issues of concern to people with disabilities in Illinois. It is anticipated that one of the issues that might be raised with these elected representatives would be the need for increased funding for VR services. In addition, the SRC should continue to concentrate on helping DRS keep the best interests of people with disabilities in focus.

SRC Comment: Members of the SRC expressed concern about whether DRS is making appropriate use of facilities operated by the National Federation for the Blind.

DRS Response: This is an ongoing issue with some SRC members. Under the Rehabilitation Act, DRS has the right to give preference to in-state programs in developing service plans. Individuals who wish to attend other programs, including out-of-state programs, may do so based on their right to informed choice. However, DRS is not obligated to pay for services that exceed the cost of the in-state program. A central issue is whether the in-state program provides comparable services to the out-of-state program. Since this is a matter of judgment, there will inevitably be disagreement as to the comparability of two programs.

While the specific issue concerns services for individuals who are blind, the general issue applies to VR program customers across the board. All service plans are dealt with on an individual basis, and in some cases greater attention must be paid to the selection of a program and the informed choice process. DRS counselors are encouraged to work

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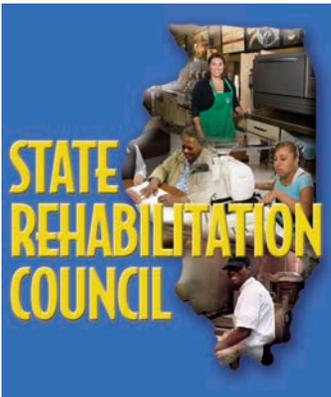
with customers and program managers to resolve such concerns on an informal basis. When an agreement cannot be reached, customers have the right to appeal any decision made by DRS.

SRC Comment: SRC members expressed an interest in working with the DRS administration to increase their involvement in the VR program.

DRS Response: DRS welcomes the opportunity to work more closely with SRC members on a number of issues. Among the topics suggested by the Council for greater involvement were: selection of impartial hearing officers; improved communication with DRS field staff; customer satisfaction surveys; educational efforts regarding the history of the VR program; and outreach to stakeholder groups.

SRC Comment: SRC members expressed an interest in working with DRS to develop linkages to stakeholder groups involved in working with people with disabilities.

DRS Response: DRS agrees that there will be a benefit to both the Council and DRS by developing linkages to stakeholder groups. DRS has relationships with many advocacy and provider organizations, and can share contact information with SRC members involved in the outreach activity.



State Rehabilitation Council

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