

Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor



New York State
Office of Children & Family Services
Commission for the Blind
Capital View Office Park
South Building, Room 201
52 Washington Street
Rensselaer, NY 12144-2796
www.visionloss.ny.gov

Roberto Velez
Acting Commissioner

December 30, 2014

Dear Friends:

As we enter 2015, the New York State Office of Children and Family Services' Commission for the Blind (NYSCB) is pleased to celebrate another outstanding year of successful collaboration between NYSCB and our State Rehabilitation Council (SRC). This SRC Annual Report for 2013-2014 highlights our productivity last year. I remain a proud member of our distinguished Council and count this service among the most important of tasks as NYSCB Associate Commissioner.

During the past Federal Fiscal Year, NYSCB's administration of Vocational Rehabilitation yielded a nearly 6 percent increase in successful remunerative employment outcomes and, once again, full compliance with all federal Standards and Indicators. Support from our Council was critical to our success in 2013-2014.

My deep gratitude to the leadership and all members on the Council under whose guidance we continue to provide high quality meaningful vision rehabilitation services.

We look forward to 2015 as we strive to make it an even better one than 2014.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brian S. Daniels".

Brian S. Daniels
Associate Commissioner
New York State Office of Children & Family Services
Commission for the Blind

December 30, 2014

The Honorable Andrew Cuomo
State of New York
Executive Chamber
State Capitol
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Cuomo:

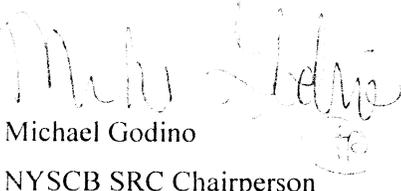
As Chairperson of the New York State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) for the New York State Commission for the Blind (NYSCB) from October 2013 through September 2014, I am pleased to present for your consideration the FY2013-14 State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) Annual Report.

Each year, the SRC produces this report to inform federal and state officials and the public about its work and accomplishments. This report highlights the SRC's activities for FY2013-14 and the goals for FY2014-15.

The SRC works in partnership with all of the key stakeholders responding to the needs of New Yorkers who are blind and/or visually impaired. While the SRC as a whole has a well-defined purpose, our influence does not come merely from legal or regulatory mandates. Instead, our influence comes from the completion of our key work. Each member serves as the voice of the constituencies which he/she represents, and with that voice, each represents the voice of many.

Should you have any questions or require additional information, please feel free to contact me at any time.

Respectfully submitted,



Michael Godino
NYSCB SRC Chairperson

cc: Edward Anthony, Deputy Commissioner, Rehabilitation Services Administration
David Miller, State Liaison, Rehabilitation Services Administration
Tracy Breslin, SRC Coordinator/Liaison, NYSCB

December 30, 2014

Mr. Edward Anthony, Deputy Commissioner
Rehabilitation Services Administration
US Department of Education
Mary E. Switzer Building
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Deputy Commissioner Anthony:

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Respectfully submitted,



Michael Godino
NYSCB SRC Chairperson

cc: David Miller, State Liaison, Rehabilitation Services Administration
Tracy Breslin, SRC Coordinator/Liaison, NYSCB

State Rehabilitation Council

To The

New York State

Commission for the Blind

Annual Report

FY2013-2014

Introduction

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) for the New York State Office of Children and Family Services' New York State Commission for the Blind (NYSCB) is pleased to issue its Annual Report for the Fiscal Year 2013-2014 to Governor Andrew Cuomo and Deputy Commissioner Edward Anthony of the Rehabilitation Services Administration. This report includes an overview of the Council's activities during FY2013-2014 and outlines the SRC's plans for the upcoming year FY2014-2015.

The State Rehabilitation Council is an advisory body mandated by Section 105 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. The nature and scope of the Council's deliberations and recommendations include NYSCB policies, procedures, and operations as they may affect consumers or applicants for agency services statewide. Additionally, the SRC assists in the development of federally required State plans and annual updates to those plans. Much of the Council's business has been conducted in committees via conference calls which focus on the NYSCB priority areas of workforce development, quality assurance, policy, procedure and planning as well as SRC membership. The SRC holds its meetings once each calendar quarter.

The Council is comprised of members representing consumers who are blind, consumers who are deaf-blind, parents, educators, the Client Assistance Program, Section 121 Native American Rehabilitation Programs, the State Educational Agency, business, industry and labor, consumer advocacy groups, the New York State Workforce Investment Board, and the New York State Independent Living Council. Ex-Officio members represent Adult Career and Continuing Education Services-Vocational Rehabilitation (ACCES-VR) and various representatives from NYSCB who provide information and assistance as requested by the Council. Meetings are open to the public and always include a public comment segment during which individuals are invited to provide input or bring issues of concern to the Council's attention.

Functions of the State Rehabilitation Council (as stated in Section 105 of the Rehabilitation Act)

The Council shall, after consulting with the State Workforce Investment Board —

1. Review, analyze, and advise the designated State unit regarding the performance of the responsibilities of the unit under this title, particularly responsibilities related to:
 - a. eligibility (including order of selection)
 - b. the extent, scope, and effectiveness of services provided; and
 - c. functions performed by State agencies that affect or that potentially affect the ability of individuals with disabilities in achieving employment outcomes under this title;
2. In partnership with the designated State unit
 - a. develop, agree to, and review State goals and priorities in accordance with section 101(a)(15)(C); and
 - b. evaluate the effectiveness of the vocational rehabilitation program and submit reports of progress to the Commissioner in accordance with section 101(a)(15)(E);
3. Advise the designated State agency and the designated State unit regarding activities authorized to be carried out under this title, and assist in the preparation of the State plan and amendments to the plan, applications, reports, needs assessments, and evaluations required by this title:
 - a. To the extent feasible, conduct a review and analysis of the effectiveness of, and consumer satisfaction with the functions performed by the designated State agency
 - b. vocational rehabilitation services provided by State agencies and other public and private entities responsible for providing vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities under this Act; and
 - c. employment outcomes achieved by eligible individuals receiving services under this title, including the availability of health and other employment benefits in connection with such employment outcomes;
4. Prepare and submit an annual report to the Governor and the Commissioner on the status of vocational rehabilitation programs operated within the State, and make the report available to the public;
5. To avoid duplication of efforts and enhance the number of individuals served, coordinate activities with the activities of other Councils within the State, including the Statewide Independent Living Council established under section 705, the advisory panel established under section 612(a)(21) of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (as amended by section 101 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997; Public Law 105-17, the State Developmental Disabilities Council described in section 124 of the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act (42 U.S.C. 6024), the State mental health planning Council established under section 1914 (a) of the Public Health Service Act (42 U.S.C. 300x-4(a)), and the State workforce investment board;
6. Provide for coordination and the establishment of working relationships between the designated State agency and the Statewide Independent Living Council and centers for independent living

within the state; and

7. Perform such other functions consistent with the purpose of this title, as the State Rehabilitation Council determines to be appropriate, that are comparable to the other functions performed by the Council.

Meeting Highlights and Activities for FY2013-2014

Listed below are meeting highlights and activities for FY2013-2014 (including participation in the development of the 2015 State Plan, recommendations, public forums, communication with NYSCB Executive Board, as well as presentations) that the SRC participated in throughout the year.

The fiscal year began with the first quarterly meeting on November 20, 2013. The Chair and Vice Chair welcomed the members back for FY2013-2014.

As discussed in FY2012 and again in FY2013, the first order of business confronting the Council was the timeliness of new member appointments. The Chair reported that although several members were appointed for FY 2013-14, the Council is still waiting for the appointment of: (1) two representatives for business industry and labor; (2) a replacement for the current representative of the American Council of the Blind of New York; (3) a replacement for the representative of persons with multiple disabilities; (4) a representative for the Community Rehabilitation Provider; (5) a representative for the State Workforce Investment Board; and (6) a representative for the State Educational Agency/IDEA. Two of these representatives have initiated the appointments process and it is anticipated that their appointments will be approved by the March 2015 meeting. NYSCB SRC finds itself with a deficit of six representatives as it enters FY2014-2015.

******NYSCB is working under a state plan assurance for full SRC compliance******

Meeting Highlights, SRC Business:

The NYS SRC under NYSCB conducts its Council business at four (4) quarterly meetings each year. At each of these meetings, the Council follows an agenda created and proposed by the Executive Committee. A standard agenda consists of introductions, a report from the Chair, a report from the Associate Commissioner, presentations, public comment, committee meetings and reports, Council business and action items. Following is a brief synopsis of the SRC business for each of the four (4) quarterly meetings for FY2013-2014.

Meeting highlights for November 20 and 21, 2013

At the first quarterly meeting, the Council discussed the upcoming NYSCB State Plan for 2015, the state of employment for people who are blind in New York, and the FY2012-2013 annual report and operations of the Council.

Prior to the meeting, the Chair distributed the draft NYSCB SRC annual report for FY2012-2013 to each of the committee chairs and requested they bring back recommendations at the first meeting for FY2013-2014. At the meeting, the Council read through the report and made several recommended changes to the draft which was accepted by the body. Following the acceptance of the changes, the Council moved and adopted the FY2013-2014 annual report.

Meeting highlights for March 20 and 21, 2014

State Plan

At the March meeting, the SRC conducted one of its critical activities as an advisory body to NYSCB. After the NYSCB State Plan was prepared and distributed throughout New York state, the SRC had the opportunity to review, add final comments and suggestions.

As the plan was presented, the members shared their observations on how the plan should be altered to better include communities they represent throughout the state. Some of the more significant recommendations made by the SRC for the 2015 State Plan were:

Attachment 4.8(b) (1) Cooperative Agreements with Agencies Not Carrying Out Activities under the Statewide Workforce Investment System

The SRC and NYSCB should develop policy to insure employment postings are distributed to and received by NYSCB consumers. This is in response to college students not receiving job postings from the NYSCB counselors.

NYSCB must do more to assist private agencies to become Work Incentives Improvement Act (WIIA) ticket employment networks and work with them in the Partnership-Plus program. The private agencies throughout the state are working hard to assist people in their efforts to go to back to work. The NYSCB should be assisting the private agencies in their efforts to access the WIIA funding.

NYSCB must go further to assist people who are deaf-blind by making funds available to provide SSP services for people seeking employment.

Attachment 4.10 Comprehensive System of Personnel Development

NYSCB should mandate that counseling staff attend the consumer organizations' conferences as a means of better understanding the consumer's point of view as well as having an opportunity to see and better understand the newest in assistive technology.

Attachment 4.11(c)(1) State Goals and Priorities

"Work to implement more comprehensive integrated services to individuals with multiple disabilities including blindness receiving services in non-blind service provider agencies." This recommendation was made after considering the observation that certain agencies serving consumers with multiple disabilities fail to provide training and services that are targeted to the consumer's blindness or visual impairment.

Attachment 4.11(d) State's Strategies and Use of Title I Funds for Innovation and Expansion Activities

In Goal (2) add number (12) "Work with the private agencies to develop Work Incentives Improvement Act (WIIA) ticket to work programs further enhancing and increasing the partnership plus programs throughout the state."

In Goal (3) number (4) add "hosting tables at consumer organization conferences" to read, "Create public awareness of NYSCB services by participating in health fairs, street fairs, hosting tables at consumer organization conferences and other community events."

In Goal (4) add number (6) "Invest in the creation of a subsections of outreach within each regional office responsible for promoting the NYSCB to community employers."

In Goal (4) add number (7) "Invest in the provision of qualified SSPs to deaf-blind jobseekers throughout the state."

The input to the NYSCB state plan was acknowledged accepted and appreciated by the NYSCB staff working on the plan.

Meeting highlights for June 18 and 19, 2014

Committee work for FY2013-2014

The June meeting concentrated on the work of the committees. As a Council, the committees often met via teleconference supported by NYSCB as well as meeting in person at the SRC's quarterly gatherings, thus providing the forum to conduct business outside of and in conjunction with quarterly meetings. Some of the work of the SRC's committees is shown in the brief highlights of the discussion below.

Quality Assurance Committee

- Review questions for the Consumer Satisfaction Survey.
- Review the survey that will be going out to professionals who serve consumers.
- Based on data available, ask some clarifying questions and take a look at the draft report as a committee.

Policy Committee

- Consider the confidentiality procedures for vendors to keep consumer information private.
- Review policies and procedures so that NYSCB can monitor consumer involvement in their vocational rehabilitation process.
- Address questions such as, "Do consumers get copies of service reports upon completion?"
- Review the Consumer Satisfaction Survey to understand broad policy implications.

Workforce Development Committee

- Discuss and research all Employment Initiatives and components.

Membership Committee

- Continue to discuss strategies and find recruits for various seats.

September 19 and 20, 2014

At the September meeting, a plan to promote inclusion of NYSCB in transition discussions/trainings with agencies, school districts OPWDD, OMH and any other entities that the SRC recommends was an important topic of discussion. One of the SRC members reported that there are four transition committees throughout the state that meet quarterly sponsored by ACCES-VR.

Elections

Elections were suspended and postponed until the November meeting. It was decided that elections should be the first order of business in November as it will be the first meeting of FY 2014-2015.

Goals for FY2014-2015

Below are several goals the SRC plans to work on during the next year in addition to its mandated requirements:

Policy, Procedures, & Planning Committee

Goal 1: Work to implement confidentiality procedures for vendors, in order to protect consumer's privacy.

Goal 2: Continue to review Assistive Technology guidelines and policy.

Membership Committee

Goal 3: Continue the active recruitment of qualified candidates.

Quality Assurance Committee

Goal 4: Incorporate services that are available to consumers into the State Plan.

Goal 5: Add employability skills: interviews, resumes to IPE's.

Goal 6: Work with NYSCB to put together a Consumer Satisfaction Survey and conduct an analysis of the data.

Workforce Development Committee

Goal 7: Closely work with NYSCB to develop a plan for individuals impacted by sheltered workshop closures to be sure they are presented appropriate work opportunities.

Goal 8: Develop workforce opportunities by creating and maintaining relationships throughout NYSCB district offices and agencies for the blind in New York State.

Goal 9: Develop a three-year plan for increasing workforce opportunities.

Presentations by the Associate Commissioner Brian S. Daniels:

The following reports were provided by Associate Commissioner Daniels during the SRC meetings:

November 2013

- NYSCB will be fully compliant with RSA having passed all standards and indicators.
- NYSCB had a 5% increase in employment outcomes.
- New York City Industries for the Blind in New York City has merged with Alphapointe NYC. It was relayed from the CEO that no one currently working and who is legally blind will lose their job.
- NYSCB received 15 waivers to hire new staff.

March 2014

- Met with various advocates and stakeholders in Buffalo.
- Buffalo District Office had its centennial celebration at the Buffalo Public Library. NYSCB donated dozens of large print books.
- Associate Commissioner visited the Parent Network of Western New York.
- Reported on the constitution of the SRC and the barriers to full constitution of the SRC. The process of appointments is a very long and difficult process.
- Meeting was scheduled with the Appointments office to discuss SRC appointments. NYSCB has an assurance in the state plan that the SRC will be fully compliant. It is anticipated that the SRC will have more members by the June and September meetings.
- Members are encouraged to look for candidates for the SRC.
- Associate Commissioner and staff from the NYSCB administration met with staff from Disability Rights New York.
- Vacancies: there are 7 openings around the state (Syracuse District Office, Western NY Business Enterprise Program, Central Office, and the New York City District Office).

June 2014

- Appointments to SRC have been slowly progressing.
- NYSCB is currently passing all RSA Standards and Indicators.
- Announcement of a re-organization in Long Island region operations.
- NYSCB's employment numbers are increasing at a steady pace.

September 2014

- Welcomed new members to the Council.
- Provided an update on the upcoming town meetings that will be held at the state conventions of the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) and the American Council of the Blind (ACB). Town meetings will focus on:
 - Improving employment outcomes for out of school youth,
 - Working with employers to develop a workforce for the future,
 - Enhancing vocational training opportunities,
 - Improving Randolph-Sheppard expansion/programming.

- After learning that the high school equivalency test in New York State (called Test Assessing Secondary Completion, or TASC) is not accessible to test takers who are visually impaired, the Associate Commissioner requested a meeting with representatives from the New York State Education Department.
- The Associate Commissioner will meet with Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority in October to discuss opportunities for the Business Enterprise Program.
- Acknowledged the recent enactment of the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and suggested that updates be a standing agenda item for future SRC meetings.
- Discussed existing critical personnel vacancies soon to be filled and informed the Council of plans to review the Commission's existing organizational chart and forthcoming relocation of NYSCB staff on Long Island.
- Discussed the Governor's "Employment First" initiative and shared the related press release and Executive Order.
- Acknowledged the NYS Preferred-Source Program activities.
- Informed the group of NYSCB consumer outcomes. NYSCB expects to exceed the number of individuals successfully closed for 2013-2014.

Other Presentations

November 2013

Understanding Potential Impact of Federal and State Initiatives: Mary Ann van Alstyne, Associate Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor

- Reviewed draft "Report and Recommendations of Olmsted Cabinet" as it provides a framework for New York State to serve people with disabilities in the most integrated setting. Some highlights of the report were:
 - Person-Centered intake process (Front Door)
 - Needs assessments
 - New options for community housing
 - Money Follows the Person
 - Aligning with Center for Management services
 - Developing curriculum of self-direction
 - Trying to increase integrated employment by placing 700 new people in competitive employment
 - No new admissions into Sheltered Employment Workshops
- The Office of Mental Hygiene's plans include.
 - Health and Recovery Plans (HARP)
 - Seeking approval to provide mental health outpatient services outside of Mental Health facilities
 - Transforming their hospitals into regional centers of excellence
 - Transforming long stay facilities into community programs for non-forensic patients
 - Developing supported housing
 - Moving from any kind of sheltered employment into integrated employment situations

- New York State Rehabilitation Association (NYSRA)
 - Assisting sheltered workshops in the development of conversion plans.

The Olmsted draft also proposed improvements in other areas including: nursing homes, assessments, employment, transportation, children services, people who have been convicted of a crime, etc.

Strategic Planning Regarding Membership and Outreach of the SRC: Aaron Baier, SRC Vice Chair

It was put forth that the SRC recruitment would serve best the interest of NYSCB if there were not mandated positions from Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) for the council as they do not necessarily lead to the loyalty of members. At times, it becomes difficult to find someone who meets the diversity, experience and expertise requirements for a mandated position. Filling the seat just to have a quota filled is not what the Council needs. The SRC should:

- Find recruits that fulfill needs and gaps
- Executive Committee should be the Recruitment Committee

Overview of Self Employment: Sharon Flom, Associate Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor

- The Self-Employment Policy is available on the NYSCB website
- The Self-Employment process has numerous steps including assessments
- The Self-Employment policy includes a list of preliminary questions
- NYSCB uses a Self-Employment Inventory as an assessment tool
- If all agree on a self-employment goal, a business plan is developed
- The Syracuse and New York City areas have independent programs
- Small Business Development Centers are also available
- The self-employment committee reviews the plan and provides feedback to the consumer.

March 2014

Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations in the Employment & Disability Institute: Arun Karpur- Research Faculty

The Council was presented with an in-depth look of the NYSCB from the perspective of its database compilations and direct interviews with the commission counselors.

State Plan Amendments & discussion/approve comments to State Plan: Mike Rose, Senior Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor

In preparation for the SRC review of the State Plan,

- There are eleven attachments.
- The State Plan will go to the Budget and Legal offices at OCFS for preliminary review.
- OCFS internal clearance in mid-May followed by, final clearance by the Commissioner of OCFS & Public Information Office (PIO).
- The Plan then enters final submission to the RSA system no later than July 1, 2014.

June 2014

NYS Client Assistance Program (CAP/P&A): Erica Molina, CAP Director, Disability Rights New York

The SRC received an explanation and overview of Client Assistance Program and the Protection & Advocacy (CAP/P&A) network within New York State. The Council learned the CAP/P&A is a federally mandated system and exists in each state and territory. Through several federal grants, P&A's protect the rights of persons with disabilities through legally based advocacy.

NYS Department of Education: Mark Leinung, Director of Adult Education Program and Policy, Office of Adult Career and Continuing Education Services

Testing should be aligned with Common CORE procedures;

There are 269 test centers that provide the GED/TASC test;

Clientele are at a disadvantage because not all own a computer;

Accommodations will be available in large print, braille and audio.

New standards require that students must pass each of the 5 subtests to pass, with a total score of 500.

Potential Outreach Strategies: Susan Loeb, NYSCB Statewide Manager of Public Engagement and Community Building

It was suggested that there needs to be more public knowledge about what NYSCB is and the services available. Placing brochures in libraries, schools, and offices of elected officials were just some ideas presented. Ideas as to how to distribute the info were also mentioned to the SRC. Suggestions included piggybacking on other outreach efforts, i.e. PTA meetings, conferences, Parent Centers, information in places such as: beauty shops or places where people gather and talk, and using LinkedIn and other social networking sites.

September 2014

New York State Commission for the Blind: Shirley Rose, NYSCB

The SRC had new members attending this meeting. Information was provided to the Council on how to present their forms and receipts for reimbursement of expenses when attending SRC meetings.

Planned Goals and Activities for FY2014-2015:

The SRC is scheduled to meet quarterly in FY2014-2015. In addition, the Executive Committee and each of the four standing Committees will meet via conference call throughout the year.

The four standing committees will be: Membership, Policy, Procedure and Planning, Quality Assurance, and Workforce Development. The new Chair will appoint the chairs and members of each committee and will give each its charge.

The Council will participate with NYSCB in developing the State Plan for Federal Fiscal Year 2016-17. The participation will include information gathering from its members' respective constituencies. The 2016 State Plan will incorporate information obtained at the public forums held at the ACB and NFB state conventions.

The SRC will re-examine its current by-laws to determine whether any amendments or restructuring may be appropriate.

The SRC will continue the orientation and new member training in the future at one of the quarterly meetings based on the timeliness of appointment each Fiscal Year hereafter.

In addition, the SRC will work to strengthen connections with other SRC's outside New York State, as well as with the National Coalition of SRC's and the National Council of State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies.

Further, the SRC will work with NYSCB to develop one or more mentoring programs, as well as other mechanisms to bring New Yorkers who are blind together so that they may learn from and support each other.

Finally, the SRC will work with NYSCB to bring about implementation of the various recommendations made by the Committees and Council as a whole. Many of the recommendations of the committees overlap with each other as well as with those of the NYSCB Executive Board. Communication and brainstorming among the members of all of these bodies will further refine their recommendations, and thereby result in an across the board improvement in services and opportunities for New Yorkers who are blind or have low vision.