

Summary of Input and Recommendations of the State Rehabilitation Council, Response of the Designated State Unit, and Explanations for Rejection of Input or Recommendations

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) has had a successful year working with the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS). Members of the SRC participated with the high school mentoring program. The BRS leadership either attended or had representation at all of the SRC meetings. This presence enabled SRC members to develop better relationships with BRS staff and to gain a better understanding of the programs and the problems in implementation.

One of the best learning opportunities this year was the public meeting. The SRC Chair, one council member, and one SRC volunteer attended the public meeting along with key staff from BRS. They were able to hear the consumer comments as well as the BRS response to each one. This opportunity gave the SRC representatives more insight into the process of how services are provided.

In 2003-2004, the SRC worked with BRS to help develop the questions that were used on the consumer survey conducted that year. This same survey was conducted again earlier this year. The same questions were asked so that we may compare our current performance to that of 2003-2004. We will also be able to measure ourselves against two other states in this region (Maine and Vermont). The Council awaits the results of this new survey in the beginning quarter of 2006-2007 to learn what changes in consumer satisfaction have occurred and what recommendations may be in order for the future.

The SRC also published an annual report highlighting its achievements, the collaborations with BRS and the successes of the vocational rehabilitation and supported employment programs.

Based on participation with the public meeting, results of the consumer satisfaction survey conducted in 2003-2004 and better knowledge of the process of serving consumers, the SRC submits two recommendations for BRS to consider.

Recommendation: BRS should do everything necessary to remove the current moratorium on high-tech (DigiDrive) vehicle modifications. A Request for Proposals (RFP) should be initiated to establish a group of vendors needed to do the requisite training for this equipment so future consumers are not deprived of this technology.

Reply: BRS clearly supports the Aevit "J" Joystick Driving System. The issue has never been the VR program's support of this system. It has been an issue that the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) is not willing to provide the training by their Handicapped Driver's Training Unit. Per the Connecticut General Statutes (Sec. 14-11b), "There shall be within the Department of Motor Vehicles a unit for the purpose of evaluating and training handicapped persons in the operation of motor vehicles."

Most recently we received a letter from DMV stating they did not have trained personnel to provide this specific training on this high tech system.

On June 9, 2006, I drafted a letter for the Commissioner of Social Services to send to the Commissioner of the Department of Motor Vehicles that will address this issue and propose a possible solution for his consideration. I would be willing to send one or two of his staff to be trained in Louisiana on the system in question. BRS would underwrite this expense as it will be cost effective for us in the long run in order for DMV to meet its obligation and BRS consumers will then be licensed. BRS does not want to purchase this equipment if we do not have someone qualified to train and license consumers in how to use them. This option will solve both issues.

We will give you an update as soon as we hear from DMV.

Recommendation: The high school student-mentoring program is being re-initiated. Care needs to be taken that it succeeds as a pilot for other such programs throughout the state to facilitate transition to work, which is currently a high priority of the agency.

Reply: BRS is so pleased that New Haven has begun a young adult mentoring program. Last year BRS and the State Department of Education and Board of Education for the Blind entered into an agreement and funded this mentoring pilot. Much to our disappointment and for many reasons the mentoring program did not work out. This year we agreed again to support this initiative and have made some programmatic and personnel changes. It is now our hope that this pilot will be an example for the rest of the state. It should begin at the start of the school year.