

Maryland State Department of Education
Division of Rehabilitation Services
2023 ANNUAL REPORT

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Jody Boone, Acting Assistant State Superintendent/Senior Executive Director

The year 2023 was a year full of changes, including some significant ones for the Maryland State Department of Education's Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS).

First, Scott Dennis, former DORS Director/Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) Assistant State Superintendent, retired after 33 years of service. Scott "wore many hats" during his tenure at DORS. He began in October 1990 as a Staff Specialist with the Maryland Business Enterprise Program for the Blind (BEP), then worked with Disability Determination Services (DDS) for eight years before being promoted to Senior Program Manager of Administration and Financial Services in DORS' Central Office, where he served for 18 years. As DORS Director from 2018 to 2024, Scott led DORS through many challenges, including implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), a fast-changing workforce, and a global pandemic that altered the way services are delivered. The ways in which Scott impacted DORS staff, partners, and Marylanders with disabilities are innumerable, and greatly appreciated!

Second, DORS created a Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Unit (DHHU) as part of its Office of Field Service's Region 1 (Western Maryland). This unit is made up of Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf (RCDs), who work from DORS offices throughout the state, and a Supervisor located in Frederick. Being all a part of one region, the staff in the DHHU receive consistent support, training,

and leadership while still serving consumers in their local areas statewide.

Third, in October, Tom Liniak became the Director of Community-Based & Workforce Services at the DORS Workforce & Technology Center (WTC). Tom brings professional experience as an attorney, businessman, disability program leader, and the parent of a child with autism to his position as the WTC's new leader. Under his leadership, WTC is working to expand its virtual services and to deliver its in-person programs throughout Maryland.

Lastly, DORS received a \$9.9 million Disability Innovation Fund Grant from the federal Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA). The grant funds were received in 2023 and will be allocated to local school districts and Maryland's Centers for Independent Living over the next five years as part of the Maryland Pathways to Partnership Initiative (MPPI). Other MPPI partners include the University of Maryland Center for Transition and Career Innovation, Parents' Place of Maryland, Maryland Department of Disabilities, Independence Now, MSDE Department of Early Intervention and Special Education Services (DEI/SES), and Abt Associates, Inc. The goal of the federal grant is to serve underserved children and youth, ages 10 to 21, and to improve their experience moving from school to employment, career training, or post-secondary education by providing valuable education, resources, and work-based learning experiences.

As DORS moves into 2024, we also celebrate our other accomplishments from the past year, such as:

- Reducing the waitlist
- No longer requiring financial contributions from consumers
- Streamlining DORS post-secondary education and vocational training policies
- Hiring promising new staff.

We look forward to the ever-changing future of public vocational rehabilitation, honor those who have provided leadership and expertise over the years, and give thanks to all DORS staff for their steadfast dedication and commitment to serve individuals with disabilities throughout Maryland!

THE NUMBERS: FEDERAL FISCAL YEAR 2023/ PROGRAM YEAR 2022

(July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2023)

Source of Funds

- Special Funds: \$1,970,819
- Federal Non-Matching Funds: \$42,042,251
- Federal Matching Funds: \$44,849,876
- State Funds: \$15,706,549

Total: \$104,569,495

Expenditure of Funds

- Pre-Employment Transition Services: \$10,716,299
- Business Enterprise Program for the Blind: \$2,448,105
- Administration: \$10,310,889
- Workforce & Technology Center: \$8,476,233
- Case Services, Purchased (cost of services purchased for consumers): \$10,676,230
- Case Services, Direct (cost for salaries, equipment, etc.): \$27,214,804
- Disability Determination Services: \$34,726,935

Total: \$104,569,495

Top Employment Categories

- Office and Administrative Support: 237
- Food Preparation and Serving Related: 155
- Building & Grounds Cleaning/Maintenance: 128
- Sales and Related: 103
- Personal Care and Service: 48
- Transportation and Material Moving: 44
- Production: 40
- Healthcare Support: 27
- Computer and Mathematical: 25
- Business and Financial Operations: 24
- Community and Social Service: 24
- Education, Training, and Library: 23
- Arts/Design/Entertainment/Media/Sports: 19
- Management: 19
- Protective Service: 18
- RSA Special Occupations and Misc.: 18
- Installation, Maintenance, and Repair: 14
- Healthcare Practitioners and Technical: 13
- Life, Physical, and Social Science: 5
- Architecture and Engineering: 4
- Construction and Extraction: 3
- Farming, Fishing, and Forestry: 2
- Legal: 1

Total: 994

Services to Students with Disabilities & Youth with Disabilities

54.6% of DORS consumers during PY22 were Youth with Disabilities (consumers between ages of 14 and 24).

During PY2022, DORS:

- Prepared 6,795 Students with Disabilities to move from high school to employment, higher education, or career training through Student Employment Services.
- Provided Pre-Employment Transition Services to 3,710 Students with Disabilities.
- Served 6,710 Pre-ETS students, who are potentially eligible for Student Employment Services.

WTC TIMELINE

1964 – Due to the need in Maryland for a comprehensive vocational rehabilitation center, then Governor J. Millard Tawes appointed a study group to assess this need.

1967 – The Maryland General Assembly approved the construction of a VR Center.

1973 – On July 19, the 223,000 sq. ft. Maryland Rehabilitation Center (MRC) opened and included a three-story, 300-bed dormitory, several medical rehabilitation programs, recreation facilities, and 24 training programs.

1981 – Project ACE (Agency Cooperation in Employment), a computer programming course, began. By 1989 there were over 150 PCs in use at MRC.

1985 – MRC received its first accreditation by CARF (Commission on the Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities), an accreditation that continues to this day.

1993 – Due to the growth of rehabilitation technology, the State approved the construction of the 55,000 sq. ft. Technology & Community Living Services wing in 1993.

1995 – The Technology & Community Living Services wing was dedicated.

2001 – MRC's name was changed to the Workforce & Technology Center (WTC) to emphasize its role in assisting citizens with disabilities to become employed.

2013 – WTC created an Autism Services department, including Pathways, a program that supports students with autism spectrum disorders who are enrolled at Maryland community colleges.

2017 – WTC began the first of several partnerships with businesses and community colleges with the roll out of the Starbucks' Barista Retail Training.

2018 – The CVS Retail Training Program was started in January. This training program is a partnership between WTC, CVS, the Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC), and Prince George's Community College.

2020 – WTC began the Sephora Warehouse Associate training. This collaboration with Sephora's Aberdeen Distribution Center and CCBC began during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and resulted in dozens of graduates, most of whom became Sephora employees, or were hired to work at other warehouses.

2021 – During the new COVID-19 normal, WTC resumed full operations under strict safety protocols, offering in-person services, and for the first time, some programs were offered virtually, enabling service delivery throughout Maryland.

2022 – An outcome of the need for virtual services, Virtual College Autism Mentoring Program (VCAMP) began, offering virtual mentoring and support to students. It continues to be available to students attending in-state and out-of-state two- or four-year colleges.

2023 – WTC has had six directors: Mark Stancil, Niles Ellingson, Richard Conroy, Sue Schaffer, Jean Jackson, and Tom Liniak. Tom joined the Center in 2023 as the Director of Community-Based & Workforce Services. Under his leadership, WTC is working to expand in-person and virtual services throughout Maryland.

DEAF & HARD OF HEARING UNIT

The DORS Deaf & Hard of Hearing Unit (DHHU) was established in July 2023 to provide fully accessible support, communication, and specialized resources to Maryland job seekers who are Deaf or hard of hearing. Creating this dedicated unit enhances DORS' collaboration with businesses, third-party service providers, and Deaf and hard-of-hearing consumers, which in turn enhances service delivery to those consumers.

In the past, Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf (RCDs) reported to the Office of Field Services supervisor in the local DORS office in which they were located. However, because each office followed different procedures and had different resources available, this sometimes led to confusion and miscommunication about services available for Deaf and hard-of-hearing consumers. The new DHHU is one central unit that works directly with service providers, businesses, and consumers, providing consistent services statewide for Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals.

The DHHU has one supervisor, a statewide coordinator, eight RCDs, and three support staff. All DHHU staff are fluent in American Sign Language (ASL) and are knowledgeable about Deaf culture. The DHHU supervisor reports to DORS' Western Maryland Region director, and the main DHHU office was established in Frederick due to its large Deaf population and the proximity of the Maryland School for the Deaf. The RCDs are still located in DORS offices around the state, including Germantown, Westminster,

Lanham, Annapolis, Salisbury, and Towson/Baltimore, and work with consumers from all over Maryland.

The DHHU serves Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals by providing DORS VR employment services, which include:

- Vocational guidance & counseling
- Accommodations & assistive technology
- Job placement services
- Assistance with higher education
- Job coaching
- Self-advocacy training

In addition, the DHHU also provides services specific to Deaf and hard-of-hearing consumers, including:

- Rehabilitation Communication Specialists to assist with intake and planning, job development, job retention, and onsite communication support
- Services from specialized Vocational Interpreters
- ASL interpreting
- Benefits planning services in ASL
- Programs for Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals at DORS Workforce & Technology Center in northeast Baltimore
- Pre-Employment Transition Services at the Maryland School for the Deaf, including onsite communication support during work-based learning experiences
- Coordination of services for Deaf and hard-of-hearing consumers provided by third-party Community Rehabilitation Programs
- Psychological services in ASL
- Deaf Culture and Awareness training for businesses and third-party service providers

DHHU Supervisor, Staff, and Statewide Coordinator

- Dr. Ju-Lee A. Wolsey - Supervisor
- Noe Turcios - Statewide Coordinator
- Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf (RCDs):
 - Alison Axelrod
 - Cheyenne Sloan
 - Wendy Hill
 - Karen Love-Hanes
 - Mary Love Mahler
 - Cheryl Triantos
- Secretaries:
 - Monica Burdette - Secretary
 - Bharat Singh - Secretary

DORS-MPT VIDEO PROJECT

In January 2023, DORS staff began meeting with Maryland Public Television (MPT) representatives to explore the possibility of an interagency agreement to produce a series of videos about DORS services.

In part as a response to the recommendations from the 2022 HB660 Commission to Study DORS, which included a recommendation to find "Methods for improving... transparency of the Division of Rehabilitation Services' programs and services", especially around services for students, it was decided that the first two videos provide information about Pre-Employment Transition Services for students and Student Employment Services.

These two videos were completed during the summer of 2023 and published on the DORS YouTube Channel.

By the fall of 2023, the videos had also been subtitled in five additional languages.

The next video project created a general DORS Services video. This video provides an overview of how DORS partners with job seekers with disabilities to help them get a job or maintain employment. This video was completed in late 2023.

The DORS-MPT partnership will continue in 2024 with the next project being a video about DORS Office for Blindness & Vision Services.

DORS thanks all the DORS and MPT staff (too numerous to mention) who worked to make these videos a reality, especially "in-house talent" Lauren Hughes (Employment Specialist) and Michael Lumpkins (Rehabilitation Counselor) for their amazing work on the first three videos!

Watch the video here: https://youtu.be/YaJFWaAS_hA

DISABILITY DETERMINATION SERVICES (DDS)

Photo: 4 women and one man holding awards certificates. Left to right: Leslie Velasquez, Adam Hughes, Harman Kaur, Nina McHugh, Florence Muregi.

Despite staffing and workload challenges, the Maryland Disability Determination Services (DDS) team continued to find ways to serve the citizens of Maryland with disabilities! The DDS persisted and focused on providing quality service for each disabled citizen who may have filed a claim for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits.

During federal fiscal year 2023, the DDS team:

- Hired 73 new full-time employees, including 59 Claims Examiners, and several new clerical and medical staff.
- Adjudicated 40,498 SSI and SSDI claims.
- Maintained a quality rate of 95.5%.

- Continued their partnership with the Office of the Inspector General to prevent disability fraud in the Social Security Administration's (SSA) Title II and Title XVI programs. These Cooperative Investigations resulted in savings to SSA's disability programs of \$1,299,897 and savings of \$1,707,653 to non-SSA programs.
- Continued their participation in the SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR) project.
- Maryland DDS adjudicated 1,973 allowance decisions with a cumulative allowance rate of 86%.
- Maryland ranked third among the Top 10 "Rock Star States" in the country.
- DDS hosted the first Philadelphia Regional Administrator's Meeting in the spring of the year. All Philadelphia Regional State Administrators met face-to-face, in collaboration with the Regional Federal partners, for the first time since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

THE CLIENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (CAP)

The Client Assistance Program (CAP) is a federally funded program that provides information, advice, and advocacy to Marylanders with disabilities who are applying for or receiving services from Maryland's Centers for Independent Living (CILs) or the Maryland State Department of Education's Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS). In May 2023, CAP welcomed Marla Friedman as the new CAP Director. Marla comes to CAP with over 20 years of experience, working at Sinai Hospital in the vocational rehabilitation field, and holding several positions throughout the years. In November 2023,

Jhoselin Beltran Contreras joined the CAP team. Prior to joining CAP, Jhoselin served as the Assistant Ombudsman for Special

Education in Washington, D.C. As a native Spanish speaker, Jhoselin has helped to spread the word to many underserved and unserved individuals about the vocational rehabilitation services offered across Maryland.

In addition to the change in personnel, CAP has worked to update marketing materials and its overall look throughout the state. A new CAP logo, brochure, and video were created and the website was updated, helping to promote CAP. The CAP team has been involved with outreach to meet with DORS and CILs staff throughout the state. A monthly “Chat with CAP” meeting is scheduled so that DORS staff are able to interact with the CAP staff to review any questions that may arise. Along with these efforts, CAP has attended conferences to share information in the community about services and benefits available under the Act.

Photo: Headshots of the CAP team.

Left: CAP Director, Marla Friedman.

Right: CAP Specialist, Jhoselin Beltran Contreras. Quick Fun Fact: I speak Spanish! ¡Hablo español! Así que, si alguna vez tienes alguna pregunta, por favor, ven a hablar conmigo.

Maryland State Department of Education, Division of Rehabilitation Services

- Wes Moore, Governor
- Clarence C. Crawford, President, Maryland State Board of Education
- Carey M. Wright, Ed.D, Interim State Superintendent of Schools, Maryland State Department of Education
- Jody Boone, Senior Executive Director Planning, Operations, and Field Services/Acting Assistant State Superintendent, Division of Rehabilitation Services

DORS Headquarters and Workforce & Technology Services are located at:

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Phone: 410-554-9442

Video Phone: 410-405-7054

dors@maryland.gov

DORS Field and Office for Blindness & Vision Services counselors are located in over 20 field offices throughout Maryland. To find the nearest one, contact DORS headquarters or visit dors.maryland.gov.

Disability Determination Services

P.O. Box 1810, Cockeysville, MD 21030-1810

Phone: 410-308-4500 • Toll-free: 1-800-492-4283

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The Vocational Rehabilitation program receives 78.7% of its funding through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. For the Federal fiscal year 2023, the total amount of grant funds awarded was \$52,041,475. The remaining 21.3% of the costs (\$14,084,922) were funded by State appropriations.

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