

Minutes from CRP Advisory Committee Meeting

May 18, 2026

In Attendance:

DORS Staff: Dr. Erikk Bonner, Patrick Peto, Beth Lash, Darlene Peregoy, William Georg, Wanda Peele, Randy Diehl, Tamla McDowell-Omodho, Toni March, Jessica Markum, Catherine Drake, and Dr. Katherine Jones (MSRC)

Individuals representing DORS CRPs attended this virtual meeting. All CRPs and CAS providers were invited.

Introduction (Tamla McDowell-Omodho)

Patrick Peto (Program Manager- Quality Assurance, Policy & Planning)

Patrick discussed policy updates with assistance from William.

- On March 24th there was an update on Section 1300 which clarified approval processes of new CRP's along with more clarification of the expectations of providers who participate in the Employment Works Program (EWP) through Maryland Works.
- We are hoping to release a new CRP survey that takes less than 5 minutes on the DORS website explaining informed choices, federal regulations, and identifying a couple of data points that we would like to share with our individuals who are involved with services.
- We have quite a bit of information available on the DORS public website for our services and links assisting our CRPs about our services.

Statistics

- Statistics wise, this past Friday the reporting for Quarter 3 was submitted a year ago we served 14,338 participants (those that were found eligible and completed their individualized plan for employment) as of this past Friday we served 15,154 participants which reflects an increase of 816 individuals from just a year ago.
- We have seen an increase in referrals for services as well as increase in the eligibility number and the number of plans.
- A year ago, the number of participants under the age of 25 was 5,966 and as of present we are at 6,059, reflecting an increase of around 93 people.

Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS)

- The number of participants receiving Pre-ETS increased from 7,133 to 7,403, reflecting an increase of almost 300 individuals from a year ago.
- There was a slight decrease in Job Exploration Counseling of around 100 services, fewer than the previous year for Work-Based Learning Experiences of around 60 individuals.
- Counseling on Post Secondary Education Enrollment Opportunities saw an increase of 12 individuals, along with Workplace Readiness Training which saw an increase of 117 individuals and Instruction to Self-Advocacy saw a big increase this year of 176 individuals.

VR Employment Services

- There has been an increase of around 400 individuals within job search assistance (pre-planning, resume development, job searching, etc.) along with an increase of about 148 individuals in job placement assistance from a year ago.
- There was an increase of around 300 individuals receiving short-term job coaching from this time last year.
- Job coaching for supported employment services also saw an increase of around 150 individuals.
- Our benefits counseling also saw an increase of around 29 individuals compared to over a year ago.

Outcomes

- A year ago, we had 194 individuals that were successfully exited in Competitive Integrated Employment. This year we are down by around 20 individuals over last year to 177 individuals.
- A year ago, we had 362 individuals that were still employed six months after leaving us a year ago, this most recent quarter we are at 336.
- A year ago, there were about 370 individuals that were still employed after 12 months after receiving services and this year we are around 340.

Beth Lash (Director, Office of Field Services):

I just want to convey to our CRP community how invested I am in increasing our supported employment, to our youth, in particular. So, with our Supported Employment Youth Grant funding grant through the Rehabilitation Services Administration, we have a separate grant for supported employment, and specifically for, youth under the age of 25. This is separate funding and has minimum spending requirements. I will just invite any of you who want more information, or if you're confused or just new, or need more of an understanding about the services we offer, to reach out to me (Beth.Lash@maryland.gov), Tamla McDowell-Omodho (tamla.mcdowell-omodho@maryland.gov), Kate Drake (Catherine.Drake@maryland.gov), Bill Georg (William.Georg@maryland.gov) or Jessica Markum (Jessica.Markum@maryland.gov).

We've held both staff and provider training within the last month, to give emphasis to supported employment and youth programming. The grant will provide what's called youth extended services. Extended funding to youth who do not have funding in place such as individuals who do not have DDA funding, or it has not kicked in yet or they do not have BHA funding in place or do not have a natural support system in place but are currently working and need extended support. In these cases, DORS will be able to bridge the gap in funding by paying a monthly rate to vendors. Not all vendors have signed up to be a service provider in this regard and are free to contact the same cadre of people I mentioned.

The job development funds, they do not come out of this grant, just to be clear. Individuals must have employment to have support through this grant, either through job coaching or the extended funding that I mentioned.

Regarding some feedback we have got about delays with our authorizations due to a more conservative spending process, where our regional office was reviewing all authorizations, reviewing and issuing all authorizations: Supervisors are now able to issue authorizations directly and they have a monthly budget they are working to adhere to. If you are having difficulty receiving your authorizations on time, please contact your regional offices to make sure that they're aware of any difficulties you're experiencing.

Pre-Employment Transition services are still a priority for DORS and are currently business as usual. We have minimum spending requirements with that category. Because of the current budget environment, we're not able to keep authorizations open for extended periods of time. If we're not able to start services, say, within 30 or sometimes 60 days, we often need to cancel that authorization because we cannot keep those funds tied up for extended periods of time because we need to have a clear expectation of what money is being spent during our budget year.

Bill George (Community Resources & Administration Division of Rehabilitation Services):

First, I'd like to share that Tony March, who was our Director for the Office for Blindness & Vision Services, was recently promoted to DORS Senior Executive Director, so we're very excited for her in her new role. Also like to share that, we also have several departures here at DORS this spring including a couple of our key players that are retiring in the months of May and June. So those upcoming retirements are Elliot Schoen, our Assistant Attorney General; Randy Diehl, Director of Information Services; Kim Schultz, DORS Communications Director. And finally, Darlene Peregoy, our Director for Administration and Financial Services, will be retiring at the end of June. We thank Elliot, Randy, Kim, and Darlene for their service and support over your time with us, and you will be missed.

Just a reminder for all our providers, that we do place updates and information on our Community Partners page on the DORS public website. We also send periodic blasts through GovDelivery which for many of you here, that's probably how you got the invitation for today. But we also post some information to the CRP site. Training information will also be posted there, including some of the slides from Supported Employment. We have an invoicing slide deck that we're getting ready to share, and it's just a great place to check periodically, for informational updates.

Another important update for all our providers, is just a reminder that the digital accessibility requirements that were originally slated to take effect April of this year, have now been postponed to April 26th of next year (2027). We encourage all providers to keep making sure that your websites, documents or anything that you share with consumers are compliant with those accessibility requirements.

A reminder for our providers who participate in the Employment Works Program, EWP. As mentioned earlier, some of these EWP requirements were recently clarified, in that Section 1300 policy update. So, we just want to remind EWP providers to remain in good standing with DORS. Our expectation is that approximately 10% of your total business is for job development and coaching. Or if job development and job coaching are what you're specifically focusing on, we generally are looking for a minimum of two referrals a month. And again, Tamla, Kate, and I are willing to work with you, and like Beth said, if you find that you're having issues with getting referrals or authorization, just reach out to us.

Another important reminder for all providers is to periodically check your cooperative agreements for any upcoming expiration or renewal dates. Also, when our specialists, Kate or Tamla, reach out to you, regarding either a site visit or getting documents signed to update your agreement, please try to get back with them as quickly as possible, just so that there's no delay with getting your agreement forms up to date.

Please let me, Kate, or Tamla, know whenever you have any leadership or physical address changes, particularly for billing/payments, so we can update our contacts. For an address change, we will need a new W-9 with the new address, a letter on letterhead and a blank invoice, that shows that new address.

I'd like to give a plug to all our providers for the upcoming Maryland Disabilities Forum Voter Rights Workshop that is going to be taking place throughout the summer. I would also like to give a plug for the upcoming Disability Employment Focus Group. The Maryland Department of Disabilities for Disability Employment

Advancement and Policy is doing this disability employment focus group next Thursday, May 28th from 9-11AM. We thank our partners at Maryland Works for hosting the event. They're also partnering with MAX, the Maryland Development Disabilities Council, and the Arc of Maryland. The event is hybrid, so you can choose to attend in person at the Maryland Works office in Columbia or attend virtually.

Jessica Markum (Staff Specialist, Transition):

As Beth mentioned, we very much value our Pre-ETS services, here at DORS, and we're very grateful for all of you who participate. There are lots of national companies that go to different states, advertising just to do Pre-ETS for the students with disabilities in their state and in Maryland, we've chosen not to access those. Our Pre-ETS services only come from our CRPs, our community colleges, our Centers for Independent Living or other specific disability-related organizations such as the National Association for the Deaf unless it is an educational entity, like a college or university.

As Patrick mentioned in his stats, the number of students that we're servicing just continues to go up. So, for anyone who may not currently be providing Pre-ETS services and may want to consider adding that to their fee schedule, we're always looking for more providers to work in the Pre-ETS realm.

As far as WBLE (Work-Based Learning Experience) is also a standardized service of its own, and there are three different parts to a WBLE service.

1. There's the development of work-based learning experience.
2. There's support while the student is participating
3. And then there's the stipend.

Not every WBLE provider chooses to have a stipend as part of their cooperative agreement. When reporting, if you are providing a stipend to a student for a work-based learning experience, you submit your invoice, you also need to submit pay stubs with the actual pay stubs showing the wages along with your invoice.

Currently, it does say in the cooperative agreements that if you're going to do a stipend for a student, that it includes paying workers' compensation insurance for that student. So, we are anticipating that those students are filling out tax forms, not 1099s as contractors but are identified as employees of the business.

That is current language and the current agreements, and I know that requires some clarification at times. So, we just wanted to give those gentle reminders as summer approaches, and we have many students who will be participating in WBLE.

Next is the Disability Innovation Fund Grant or DIF Grant. I'm the Project Director for that grant. We've called it the Maryland Pathways to Partnership Initiative. It is an almost \$10 million grant that's over 5 years and it will conclude in 2028. We are working in 3 counties, Caroline, Charles, and Washington counties. And, within those counties, it's a partnership of the LEAs, the Centers for Independent Living, Parents' Place of Maryland, DORS, MSDE, and we're providing services to youth. They don't necessarily have to be students but we're providing services to young people between the ages of 10 and 21. So we are working with very young ones and of the 500 students, or 500 individuals that we need to serve, the majority have to be between the ages of 10 and 13. So it's a whole new skill set, and we're learning lots of things.

Some of the exciting things that are coming out of it are some of our Centers for Independent Living who are associated with the DIF grant have chosen to become Pre-ETS providers. I guess they realized, well, if I can figure out something for a 10-year-old, I can certainly work with a 14- to 21-year-old, because Pre-ETS does still only start at 14 and I don't think we're going to be changing that to 10 years old anytime soon. But several

of our SILs have been considering those possibilities and have submitted to becoming Pre-ETS providers, so that's very exciting.

If you want more information about the MPPI, partnership, we will be doing a session. Christy Miller and I, who's a DORS Project Coordinator, will be doing a session at the Employment Conference in June, June 4th, at CCBC Dundalk. All are welcome to join.

Muttasim Fadl, M.Ed., CRC (OBVS Employment Services Specialist):

First, we are looking for CRPs to provide employment, job development, and job coaching to our consumers. If CRPs go through our training, you will receive an enhanced rate of 25% of the actual fee for job development. The actual job development fee is \$70 and when you complete the training to become certified you will receive an enhanced rate of \$88 for job development and coaching.

We are looking for CRPs statewide but especially to provide services to our consumers who are blind, deaf and/or low vision, especially in Region 6. If you are interested, please contact me (elmuttasim.fadl@maryland.gov) and I will send you the training and materials to complete the training. Once you have completed the training, let Tamla or Kate know and we will complete a new agreement or an addendum for the enhanced rate.

To receive the enhanced rate all staff providing employment services must be certified not just the organization. Once certified you must complete the annual training to maintain your enhancement certification. The new training materials will be sent out sometime in late June, early July.

Wanda Peele (Program Manager II - Business Relations Branch):

At this time the BSRs are reaching out to CRPs in their region to work with them getting consumers hired.

- BSRs, beyond training and resumes, also hold job clubs. The job clubs go through 12-week intense training covering resumes and applying for jobs. The job clubs have been very successful with helping consumers obtain and keep employment.
- The purpose of the BSRs is to go out and meet with business partners with assistance in hiring our consumers and we have been successful with that. Currently we are also conducting Pre-ETS training along with self-advocacy, job shadowing, and different things of that nature during the day in the coming summer months and evenings during the school year. An email will be sent out with the dates and times of training.
- The BSRs are doing a lot with OJT and internships. In the Eastern Shore, there have been a lot of people placed in internships within automotive and food service. Also, with Baltimore City with B&B Mobile, we've had three individuals who received internships.
- We are going to reinstate the Workforce Alliance which had CRPs and partners working together and having conversations that assisted our consumers. An email will be sent out via GovDelivery with times and dates.
- A job fair was scheduled in May for state agencies and individuals with disabilities but has been postponed for October 21st. The venue is still being established due to needing different modes of transportation so all can come out and attend.
- Also, a new BSR has been hired for Region 2 West, Jacqueline Reavis, she will cover Annapolis, Linthicum and the Southern Shore area.

Randy Diehl (MIS Director):

It has been brought to my attention that a vendor had created an application so that staff may send them reports but to do that, a request must be sent to Bill George (william.georg@maryland.gov) who will forward the requests to my replacement, Jeff Hendrickson. The request will have to be approved by both the Department of Information Technology (DoIT) and Maryland State Department of Education's (MSDE) Intake and Review Board, and will also require a data use and security agreement. Information such as what data is being collected, how the data is secured, and what is the retention schedule for the data.

The invoice and reports portal underwent changes after some confusion for some of the vendors. There was a change in the way vendors were listed but due to the hundreds of vendors from a scrolling menu but reversed to a split alphabetical listing. You will just click the first letter of your organization then select and if you do not see it listed, go to the very bottom where it says initial and click on that, name not listed and it will allow you to enter your name. This is for new vendors who are not in our system yet. You will have the option to download submitted information/reports/documents with a provided PDF download button at the bottom of the screen.

We are working really hard to re-engage with some of the providers who may have been out of touch so when you go to the page and your name is not listed, just like new providers, just drop to the bottom where it indicates your name is not listed and that will be able to place you back into the system.

Dr. Erik D. Bonner (Assistant State Superintendent):

Thank you DORS Team and liaisons for hosting this and the CRPs as well. It is great to see you all, providers and leaders. It's great to be in community with you all, as well. I do have a couple quick updates regarding what's going on in DORS land.

We are closing out the year in what has been a very busy legislative session that we've just finished closing out and I want to thank all of you for being able to come together.

I would like to speak about the customer service and CRP surveys. The big thing is making sure we are getting data, whether good, bad, or indifferent, and making sure we can act in the field and with you all. I want you all to know that we're just a phone call away and making sure that we work to address your needs and provide a high level of service support for you all.

Remember, you can change someone's day with a smile, and then you can enhance someone's day by treating people better than you want to be treated. Continue to treat people better than you want to be treated, and everything else will figure itself out. And then during times of uncertainty and adversity, remember to be kind. It costs nothing. It's free. Thank you all for giving me the opportunity to then join you all today, and I look forward to continuing the partnership with you.

Questions/Concerns from attendees:**End of Meeting**