

# **2024 Annual Report**

## **Maryland State Department of Education**

### **Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS)**

#### **DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE**

It is my privilege to share this year's Annual Report for the Maryland State Department of Education's Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS). In 2024, DORS celebrated 95 years of partnering with people with disabilities, assisting them with becoming employed and living independently. I am proud to have joined DORS as its Director during its 95th year and I am deeply committed to serving and supporting our services across the state.

It is both an honor and a privilege to embrace this opportunity to make a meaningful impact on students and adults with disabilities. I look forward to fostering strong partnerships with internal and external stakeholders to drive meaningful changes and advance our shared mission.

As we reflect on our progress, I remain committed to listening, learning, and building, ensuring that DORS continues to provide the highest level of support for individuals with disabilities in achieving their employment and independent living goals.

Over the past year, we have deepened our partnerships, expanded opportunities, and strengthened our commitment to innovation. Through meaningful engagement with our stakeholders, including individuals we serve, families, staff, and community partners, we have gained valuable insights that inform our work and drive continuous improvement.

We have also worked diligently to learn from our experiences, analyzing data, identifying obstacles, and implementing solutions that

enhance our programs and services. Whether through expanding pre-employment transition services, streamlining processes, or leveraging technology, we remain focused on building a stronger, more inclusive future for all Marylanders with disabilities.

As we look ahead, I am excited about the opportunities before us. Together, we will continue to listen to those we serve, learn from our successes and challenges, and build on a system that is responsive, equitable, and impactful.

Thank you to our dedicated staff, partners, and community members for your unwavering commitment to our mission. I look forward to another year of progress and collaboration.

Dr. Erik D. Bonner  
Assistant State Superintendent, DORS

## **Former DORS consumer Ray was a guest speaker at a recent WTC graduation ceremony and at the 2024 Maryland Rehabilitation Conference.**

Talking about his DORS experience, he said: "I think I have to pay it forward. DORS was there for me when I needed [help], so I am happy to share my story."

Ray experienced a stroke, went through a lot of physical and occupational therapy, and then the hospital recommended DORS, but "it took a couple of years to be emotionally ready, and then I contacted DORS."

"I took employment classes, interest classes, learned interview techniques... what [the classes did] was that I could look at myself as differently-abled, and I came to look at myself in a new way... helped me integrate the new me, to figure out what I could do... after my stroke."

Ray had been a lobbyist on Capitol Hill, "so everything I did was based around my ability to talk and be persuasive. When I didn't have access to that, I thought I couldn't do anything.

I was in a panic: 'Oh my gosh, I won't be able to work.' But experience, putting yourself out there, it all began to work."

Ray now works as a Mobility Manager for Jerry's Mobility Vehicles and Services. " My [own disability] experiences really changed how I work with clients and their families. [I tell people] ... don't give up hope... 'Keep on swimming,' as Dory says in Finding Nemo. DORS will help you move forward."

## **THE NUMBERS**

### **FEDERAL FISCAL YEAR 2024/PROGRAM YEAR 2023**

(JULY 1, 2023 TO JUNE 30, 2024)

#### **Source of Funds**

Total: \$139,965,391

- Federal Matching Funds: \$71,588,965
- Federal Non-Matching Funds: \$48,203,911
- State Funds: \$17,132,403
- Special Funds: \$3,040,112

#### **Expenditure of Funds**

Total: \$139,965,391

- Disability Determination Services: \$40,661,683
- Case Services, Direct (cost for salaries, equipment, etc.): \$35,133,772
- Case Services, Purchased (cost of services purchased for consumers): \$27,813,151

- Administration: \$13,745,185
- Pre-Employment Transition Services: \$10,573,953
- Workforce & Technology Center: \$9,523,388
- Business Enterprise Program for the Blind: \$2,514,259

## **Top Employment Categories**

Number Rehabilitated:

- 169 Transportation and Material
- 162 Building & Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance
- 136 Food Preparation and Serving Related
- 132 Office and Administrative Support
- 101 Sales and Related
- 50 Personal Care and Service
- 32 Production
- 35 Education, Training, and Library
- 32 Healthcare Support
- 24 Community & Social Service
- 21 Installation, Maintenance, and Repair
- 20 Computer and Mathematical
- 17 Management
- 16 Healthcare Practitioners and Technical
- 16 Protective Service
- 15 Business and Financial Operations
- 9 Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media
- 7 Construction and Extraction
- 6 Life, Physical, and Social Science
- 5 Architecture & Engineering
- 3 Farming, Fishing, and Forestry
- 1 Legal

Total 1,009

## **Services to Youth with Disabilities**

- 51.8% of DORS consumers were young people between the ages of 14 and 24.
- 7,698 were current high school and college students who DORS helped prepare to move from school into employment, higher education or career training through Student Employment Services.
- 4,594 current students participated in Pre-Employment Transition Services.
- 8,460 potentially eligible for Student Employment Services, served.

## **OFFICE FOR BLINDNESS & VISION SERVICES**

The Office for Blindness & Vision Services (OBVS) served 1,323 blind job seekers in the VR employment program and 1,167 seniors in the Independent Living Older Blind (ILOB) program. Additionally, in 2024 OBVS:

- Expanded the Business Enterprise Program for the Blind (BEP) by developing a vending route option for BEP vendors, primarily in federal buildings but also in other locations in Maryland. BEP developed a training curriculum to support the vending program, training individuals who are blind on how to earn income from the operation of vending machines. This training was launched in October 2024 and 23 blind facility managers have completed the training.
- Partnered with the Maryland Accessible Telecommunications (MAT) Program (part of the Department of Disabilities) to enhance services provided by ILOB. MAT provided a Train-the-Trainer program for individuals, many of whom were blind, to learn to provide initial training on communication devices such as iPhone

and iPad. The participants now provide device training for blind and low vision consumers through a fee-for-service agreement. This collaboration greatly expands the number of trainers in Maryland, thus maximizing the resources of both MAT and OBVS.

- Reinvigorated DORS Deaf/Blind services by creating:
  - A Deaf/Blind Workgroup.
  - Regional Deaf/Blind Advisory Committees to discuss local needs and resources.
  - A Deaf/Blind resource guide to provide consumers and community partners with relevant deaf/blind resources.
  - A needs assessment to help DORS staff identify the needs of Deaf/Blind consumers and their barriers to employment.
- Continued the DORS-Maryland Public Television (MPT) partnership by working with MPT and DORS' Communications & Accessibility office to create a video about OBVS. The video is available on the DORS YouTube channel in English, as well as five other languages, and an audio described version of the video is in production. Many thanks to Brian Haas (Vendor Coordinator) and Christina Nixon (OBVS Rehabilitation Teacher) for their remarkable work on the OBVS video!

Photo of Brian Haas and Christina Nixon posing at the MPT news desk.

Photo of the Deaf/Blind Advisory Committee, L - R: Lisa Sudmann-Stannard, Carrie Quigley, Alexander Quaynor, Dr. Leo Yates, and Kyesha West.

## **DISABILITY DETERMINATION SERVICES (DDS)**

During 2024, the DDS team remained focused on providing quality customer services to Maryland citizens who have filed a claim for

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI).

## **2024 DDS Accomplishments:**

- Mentored and trained 59 new disability claims examiners, building stability in the DDS claims adjudication process.
- Processed 44,414 claims, clearing 40% more initial claims and 12.2% more reconsideration claims than the prior year.
- Maintained a high standard of case quality and accuracy with an accuracy rate of 95.8% – well above the target level for all workload categories – and achieved 100% accuracy on initial claims three separate months in 2024.
- Continued to partner with the Office of the Inspector General to prevent fraud in the Social Security Administration's Title II and Title XVI programs. These Cooperative Investigations resulted in savings to SSA's disability program of \$239,649 and savings to the State of \$399,340.
- Continued to partner with the Maryland Department of Health, Behavioral Health Administration in the SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR) Initiative.
- Completed SSA's annual Onsite Security Control & Audit Review (OSCAR) with zero negative findings.

Photo of: Most recent graduating class of new disability examiners at Maryland DDS. One of our many groups of promising disability examiners who have joined us in the past two years. From left to right: DDS Director Dayle Smith, Maiya Johnson, Sam Ellison, Claire Mutheru, Nicole Brown, Chiugo Chimah, Savannah Hutsell, Rachel Rohde, Brian Casciero, Dominique Speed, Alexis Hernandez,

Careatha Burton, Deanna Sheperson, Markeeta Martin, DORS  
Director Dr. Erikk Bonner.

## **CLIENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (CAP) HELPS!**

CAP is a federally funded program that provides information, advice, and advocacy to Marylanders with disabilities who are applying for or receiving services through DORS or one of Maryland's Centers for Independent Living (CILs).

CAP works to first resolve issues DORS and CIL consumers may have by using the resources within CAP, before escalating the issue when necessary. These resources include providing the consumer with information about the public vocational rehabilitation program, independent living services, and the Americans with Disabilities Act, referral to community resources, and support for the consumer's self-advocacy.

In 2024, CAP provided information for 662 inquiries, and worked on an additional 111 more complex cases.

CAP also increased its outreach efforts to the disability community, provided additional training to DORS staff and VR students, and launched monthly "Chat with CAP" sessions.

## **OFFICE OF FIELD SERVICES (OFS) 2024 HIGHLIGHTS**

### **Implemented Adult Learning Experiences (ALE)**

An ALE is a DORS-funded paid work experience where DORS and the job seeker partner with a community service provider and a local employer to provide a short-term (up to 12 weeks) work-based learning experience.



ALEs are for adults with disabilities who have little to no work experience and provide exposure to workplace situations, tasks, and expectations that will help them find future success in employment situations.

## **Maryland Pathways to Partnership Initiative (MPPI) – RSA Disability Innovation Fund (DIF) Grant**

The Disability Innovation Fund Grant was awarded to DORS by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (part of the U.S. Department of Education) back in October 2023. This is a five-year grant aimed at increasing collaboration and partnerships between the public VR program, local education agencies, centers for independent living, and advocates to prepare individuals with disabilities aged 10 to 21 and their families for a smooth transition from school to their chosen career.

In October 2024, the resulting Maryland Pathways to Partnership Initiative (MPPI) completed its Planning year, and kicked off the Pilot year with much excitement.

DORS' MPPI partners are: MSDE Division of Early Intervention & Special Education Services, Maryland Department of Disabilities, University of Maryland Center for Transition & Career Innovation, Parents' Place of Maryland, Caroline County Public Schools, Charles County Public Schools, Washington County Public Schools, Bay Area Center for Independent Living, Resources for Independent Living, Southern Maryland Center for Independence Now, and Abt Associates, Inc.

## **Howard Community College Earn Grant**

This project is in partnership with the Maryland Department of Labor to offer a nationally certified training course for Certified Logistics Associate and Certified Logistics Technician. Certificates in these

fields qualify job seekers for positions in warehouses, distribution centers, and factories that require materials handling skills. DORS consumers can get this program tuition-free. It is open to individuals with all disabilities, but there is a special focus on individuals with autism.

### **Simpler Laptop Acquisition for Students**

DORS' Office of Field Services and Workforce & Technology Services worked together to streamline the process for purchasing, configuring, and distributing laptops for DORS consumers who are college students.

### **Standardized Pre-ETS Fees and Services**

DORS established a standard fee structure for community providers who provide Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS). This change will help ensure consistent service provision and learning outcomes for students with disabilities, and consistent costs for DORS.

The four services included under Standardized Pre-ETS are:

- Job Exploration Counseling
- Counseling on Post-Secondary Education
- Work-Readiness Training
- Instruction in Self-Advocacy

Each service has nationally recognized Pre-ETS Learning Objectives which students are expected to achieve upon completion of the service. Additionally, each service has a set cost and a set number of instruction hours.

Going forward, DORS will be looking to review the participation rate for each of these services and identify geographical service area gaps that need to be filled.

## **DORS WORKFORCE & TECHNOLOGY SERVICES**

During 2024, Workforce & Technology Services continued to work towards the goal of expanding its services to job seekers with disabilities, whether in the community, at the Workforce & Technology Center (WTC) in Baltimore, or virtually.

### **Expansion of community-based training programs included:**

- Holding a year-round CVS Retail Training Program with Prince George's Community College (PGCC) in Laurel. Of the students who participated in the first two courses, more than half found jobs.
- Finalizing plans for the first CVS Retail Training Program with Salisbury's Wor-Wic Community College, scheduled for March 2025.
- Launching an Autism Job Club pilot program in Columbia, combining employment services and autism services with employment readiness and soft skills training.
- Working with PGCC and Montgomery College to launch additional employment training and dual pathway programs in 2025.

### **Existing WTC-based services were improved by:**

- Increasing Food Services class capacity by 25%.
- Being selected by the National Restaurant Association Educational Foundation as the first and only State VR agency to be a primary partner in their Restaurant Readiness Program. This provides WTC with a national curriculum and a network of State Restaurant Association members who will partner to host training sites (beginning in 2025) and primary hiring pathways.

- Adding CommuniCare Nursing Centers as an internship/train-to-hire site for WTC Food Service students. CommuniCare has already hired a graduate of the program.
- Adding Sodexo-Morgan State as a new internship/train-to-hire partner for WTC Food Service students. This partnership offers potential hiring opportunities at additional Sodexo locations.
- Adding the Y of Central Maryland as an employer partner and internship site. The Y has already hired a graduate of WTC's Childcare program.

Work Readiness programs give job seekers with disabilities the opportunity to learn the skills they need to be successful in career training programs and job development.

#### **Work Readiness improvement in 2024 included:**

- Increasing class capacity by 20%.
- Developing a Functional Independence for Employment component, focusing on executive functioning, cognitive skills, and education and training in physical endurance and body mechanics.
- Implementing a basic financial literacy component.

#### **WTC met its goal of expanding and enhancing rehabilitation technology and other services:**

- Autism Services served 25% more consumers in 2024 than the year prior.
- Assistive Technology staff configured non-adapted computers and trained their users statewide for the first time.

- Autism Driver's Education hired and trained an additional driving instructor. This will double the number of classes that can be offered. In 2025, it will allow WTC to launch behind-the-wheel instruction in the community statewide.

Four photos of students stocking shelves and pricing items in a CVS store: DORS WTC continued to expand its career training opportunities into Maryland communities. Two sessions of the CVS Retail Training were held at Prince Georges Community College in Laurel.

## **Maryland State Department of Education, Division of Rehabilitation Services**

- Wes Moore, Governor
- Joshua L. Michael, Ph.D., President, Maryland State Board of Education
- Carey M. Wright, Ed.D., State Superintendent of Schools, Maryland State Department of Education
- Erikk Bonner, Ed.D., Assistant State Superintendent, Division of Rehabilitation Services, Maryland State Department of Education

### **DORS Headquarters and Workforce & Technology Services are located at:**

2301 Argonne Drive, Baltimore, Maryland 21218-1696

Phone: 410-554-9442

Video Phone: 410-405-7054

dors@maryland.gov

### **DORS Field and Office for Blindness & Vision Services**

DORS counselors are located in more than 20 field offices throughout Maryland.

To find the nearest one, contact DORS headquarters or visit [dors.maryland.gov](http://dors.maryland.gov).

## **Disability Determination Services**

P.O. Box 1810, Cockeysville, MD 21030-1810 • Phone: 410-308-4500  
Toll-free: 1-800-492-4283 • [md.dd.timonium.dds@ssa.gov](mailto:md.dd.timonium.dds@ssa.gov)

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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 2024, the total amount of grant funds awarded was \$51,885,242.

The remaining 21.3% of the costs (\$15,395,878) were funded by State appropriations.