



**NORTHWEST REGIONAL
WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD**
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DISABILITY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, November 4th, 2021, at 12:00 PM

VIA Zoom

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/85764231840?pwd=Qlp0cHRsRmJ5T2tpUGFJSkt6UHVoQT09>

Meeting ID: 857 6423 1840

Passcode: 247841

Participants: Chairman Joe Vrabely, Heather Pelletier, James Amis, Anna Goncalves, Cindy Rafael

Participating: J. Vrabely, C. Rafael, H. Pelletier, M. Voghel, W. Coleman, J. Amis, L. Perregaux, A. Goncalves

Meeting Commenced at 12:01pm

1. Approval of Disability Committee Meeting Minutes from August 10th, 2021

A motion to approve was made by J. Amis and seconded by M. Voghel. Motion approved.

2. Update by Bureau of Rehabilitation Services Regional Director, Cindy Rafael

C. Rafael updated the committee on some future implications of staffing changes at the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS). BRS is open for business, and the staff is fifty percent in the office and fifty percent remote. Their AJC liaison is still connected to Danbury, Torrington, and in Waterbury they have Carmen Ocasio. Carmen will be retiring as of April 1st, 2022, and C. Rafael anticipates a lot of statewide retirements within the next 6 months in general. C. Rafael will be working with Carmen and the Waterbury office to start succession planning and think about who has an interest and passion in collaborating with the American Job Centers and can take over for Carmen when she leaves.



NORTHWEST REGIONAL WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD

FIRST JOB | NEXT JOB | BEST JOB

C. Rafael also advised the committee that BRS' employment consultant, Reina Hall, who is very new to the organization and replaced Susan Burton upon her retirement, is out on maternity leave. C. Rafael was attempting to connect Reina Hall with the NRWIB's business services unit for collaboration and partnership and will reconnect with her upon her return.

C. Rafael also mentioned to the committee that BRS is doing a statewide initiative for outreach. With the impact of Covid, there aren't a lot of people coming through the doors, and as an organization, they are really trying to reach youth and adults with disabilities to let them know they're open for services, and just trying to do as much outreach and collaboration as possible.

J. Vrabely asked C. Rafael how they are doing the outreach. C. Rafael responded that BRS has a priority workgroup statewide with consultants in Hartford, they are trying to do marketing outreach, and they are trying to look at their internal existing partnerships to reconnect and reestablish. They are also looking at creating future partnerships and then doing outreach marketing as basic as cold calling to social media blasts and even outreach events. BRS also has level-up counselors that are embedded in the schools. C. Rafael vouched that BRS has really tried all sorts of methods of outreach, but they have a specific workgroup that is strategizing around roll-out and what the organization can do internally to reconnect and reestablish future partnerships by doing outreach marketing.

3. Ticket to Work Update

Ms. Amis explained that we have this authorized Social Security Ticket to Work program, and we are up to 35 participants. We do all we can to recruit, but it's often not that easy, because Social Security does not give us the names of potential participants to contact, but one thing we have done is do what's called an AD HOC report with data on CT hires. And we can extract the names and social security numbers of all people who have registered with the job centers who have indicated they have a disability. Then we go to the Social Security Portal and see which of those receive SSI or SSDI, then we determine who has a ticket available. In other words, for those who have not already assigned their ticket to vocational rehabilitation. Then we contact them and so forth. It's quite a process. However, Social Security has recently changed its nationwide vendor that runs the program, it was run by Maximus Incorporated. And now it's run by another corporation and that has caused a few issues, for one thing, we are not able to go forward with a massive Robot text program to reach a prospect. Furthermore, it appears to be causing delays in payments from Social Security to us. So anyway, that's nothing we have control over. But let it be known, we recruit to the best of our ability and Co



**NORTHWEST REGIONAL
WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD**
FIRST JOB | NEXT JOB | BEST JOB

enroll suitable participants in WIOA. And have specialized case management services for those who are in Ticket to Work and have assigned their tickets to us. It's kind of a complicated process, but we are currently at 35.

Chairman Vrabely asked if there is anything currently being worked on. Specifically, that's different from the last time the committee spoke on the topic.

Mr. Amis went on to say that we also have a program called Home Works, which is for homeless persons and it is in Waterbury. We provide housing and job development services. And you might think, oh, homeless persons, many of them have mental illness situations and whatnot, one would think many of them would draw SSI. In fact, they don't! only one does, and that's a testimony, not so much to their health and well-being but to the fact that homeless people have trouble applying for SSI. They don't have computer loggers. They barely have an address. Sometimes, this is a key point. Sometimes people with the most severe disabilities, if there are mental disabilities, I don't believe they have a disability. What could be done in this case is a big question. That's why Mr Amis mentioned project SOAR, which used to actively assist homeless persons, and help them apply for the major benefits that are offered out there. When the public comes to the Job Center, and they register, they're asked to indicate whether they have a disability or not. You know some will say, some won't. Many people have considerable hesitation about stating that they have a disability because some employers really do discriminate. And on the other hand, no employer must hire someone who's not qualified, simple as that.

To continue answering Mr. Vrabely's question Mr. Amis added that there haven't been significant changes. One situation to report is the fact that the pandemic has caused it to be a little more difficult to gain access to services at the Job Center. For instance, if you're coming in the front door, it's very likely you will be asked to go to a computer, go to info at our web.org for instance, and then it's sort of a clearing house you'll be assigned to the right person, but it's not as simple as we used to have orientation and personal orientation here twice a week. One orientation for adult low-income persons and one for people on unemployment. And right now, we don't have in-person orientation. So, we do not know how BRS deals with, in-person services for people who walk in the door.

3. Home Works Update



NORTHWEST REGIONAL WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD

FIRST JOB | NEXT JOB | BEST JOB

Mr. Amis said that Ms. Fonseca who is not on the call is familiar with the program of Home Works. To sum it up it is a program in which the board provides temporary housing to homeless persons, and at the same time helps them get a job sometimes or simply direct placement. For others. The program involves job training, followed by job placement. So, nothing complicated there. We have a contract with United Way of Greater Waterbury that can fund the cost of housing. But It does not fund the coordinator's salary and other features. Soon we will be receiving funding from the city of Waterbury and that will enable us to expand the program and cover salaries.

Mr. Chairman Vrabely asked when we anticipate additional monies coming in.

Mr. Amis answered that he believes it will happen in January. And we also got an extension of the United Way funding which is good.

Mr. Vrabely asked if we can keep tabs on that in the next meeting, to bring the committee up to speed on the funding piece of the above-mentioned.

Mr. Amis said that he will for sure.

5. Collaboration with the Department of Aging and Disability Services Update

Mr. Amis said that there have been no significant changes in that feature. We have what's called a Partnership Plus agreement with BRS. And in that agreement, if we have a Ticket to Work customer who has suddenly obtained BRS services we turn the ticket over to BRS. And likewise, when BRS closes out a case, they don't have to get the ticket to us. But often, the customer is informed that even though they no longer have a ticket to work with BRS, they can be in the program with the board. And the only problem with that is that the BRS as far as I know, and Cindy could correct the info that typically a case does not close out until 90 days after the person/consumer has obtained full-time employment. And so anyway, there's quite a delay because of that.

Pertaining to the above Ms. Rafael added that in terms of collaboration, she has not been part of the meetings, but we obviously collaborated over the summer with our summer work-based learning experiences. We placed 28 of our students and worksites over the summer. She added that all workforce boards including the Northwest board do talk about the school year rollout of summer work-based programs and what the next summer will look like, and kind of learn from this past experience and make adjustments



**NORTHWEST REGIONAL
WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD**
FIRST JOB | NEXT JOB | BEST JOB

moving forward. Our level of counselors that are in the schools are currently looking at their caseload to identify the students that want to continue in the school year with another work-based opportunity.

6. Other Business

Mr. Vrabely said that on last item 6, there are two items A and B, and asked if anybody had anything on that.

a. Access to remote services for WIOA Adult and Dislocated Orientation

Mr. Amis said that there have been changes since the last meeting, the pandemic lingers on and on, and so are our adaptations to it, it has been polished and improved a little, but it's still a difficulty. People with disabilities most likely do not have a smartphone or a computer and internet connection. They do not have the skills to maneuver in that way. Mr. Amis also shared that when he was working on the Disability Employment Initiative, as a coordinator a few years ago, with that grant, he would often sit with the customer side by side, in the job centers Career Center for the public can use the computers, sit with them, and laboriously fill out employment applications online, which I don't know if you've ever done that, even for Walmart or Home Depot. He added that the systems that save corporations, time, and money, are the very systems that make it difficult for a person with disabilities often to apply for a job.

Mr. Chairman is concerned that there got to be people with disabilities out there that want a job. They just don't know how to do it. And we must find a way to reach them as we know there are companies looking to hire people and they are not finding candidates.

b. Indicating disability when registering with CTHires

Mr. Vrabely asked to let the minutes reflect the frustration felt and that the committee is spinning its wheels, and that there's a need for employment, and we don't know how to reach these people in need of jobs.

Ms. Rafael explained that we do have ways to reach them and let them know we're available to help place them. However, it's the work readiness that is the culprit, it's getting them the skills that they need to be able to enter the workforce. Previously, we were doing in-person work readiness training and then the pandemic hit. But even with



**NORTHWEST REGIONAL
WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD**

FIRST JOB | NEXT JOB | BEST JOB

that, she said that she was apprehensive because we don't have enough bodies coming into the system.

Ms. Goncalves informed the committee that she knows that Ms. Awwad has to do these meetings quarterly and that this will probably be the last one of the year. She promised to double-check with her and send out a Doodle poll for the next meeting. And that she would send Agendeverbody the minutes which will reflect their concerns to Kathy and Mike.

Chairman made sure to mention that the minutes should reflect that he would like to meet with staff before the next committee meeting is scheduled.

7. Adjournment

The meeting ended at 12:27 pm

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