



Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation

CSAVR National News Brief

January 26, 2025

CSAVR *National News Brief* is a regular series covering legislative activity, media stories, research initiatives, webinars, reports, conferences, and national advocacy activities of interest to member state VR agencies.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Our thoughts are with all those in California who have lost so much from the wildfires and others of you who have suffered record low temperatures, epic snowfall, power and water outages, travel delays etc. Let's all hope Mother Nature will give us all a break soon.

SPECIAL REQUEST: *As we approach the spring conference in Bethesda, I'm thrilled to relay that we have reached an agreement with the VR Workforce Studio podcast to lead our opening session. They will be featuring some amazing VR success stories, and they would also like to showcase and reference you during the session. If you have a great VR success story that can be showcased in a brief video, please contact Rick Sizemore at rick.sizemore@dars.virginia.gov for more information (this information is repeated in the conference discussion below).*

HIGHLIGHTS:

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WINTER EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (EC) MEETING AND SPRING 2025 CONFERENCE

On January 6 and 7, the EC met with staff in New Orleans. It was cold but we did dodge that surprise winter blast that blew through shortly after our departure. Our thanks to Melissa Bayham LA-C director and staff for hosting us.

Two major topics discussed at this meeting were the upcoming **2025 Spring Conference** the second week in April at the Bethesda Hyatt, and our recent engagement with the **Ridge Policy Group** for public affairs services. I would like to note some key things for you that came out of those very productive conversations.

Spring 2025 CSAVR Conference

Theme: *Building on Our Success – Beyond the Buzz*

Concurrent Session Tracks:

- *Track #1 – Building on our Successes: Policy and process streamlining*
 - *Track #2 – Building on Our Successes: Fiscal controls and management*
 - *Track #3 – Building on Our Successes: Personnel development, recruiting and retention*
- Change in structure

- Adding new director orientation (new directors only) on Friday/Saturday before conference.
 - No Leadership Forum this Spring meeting – but may return in the Fall.
- Directors/Legislative Leads/Communications Leads Meeting Sunday AM.
- Directors/Senior Staff business meeting Sunday PM.
 - No Directors Forum per se – reconfigured for this Spring to permit time for needed legislative and communications discussions and the required business meeting.
- Conference day starts at 9a Mon/Tues/Wed morning and ends by 4p Mon/Tues.
- Each AM are general sessions. Monday and Tuesday PM are concurrent sessions.
- Regional Meetings Monday afternoon.
- Draft agenda and a Call for Proposal (CFP) will be announced by first week of February.
 - All will be posted to the CSAVR website and registration launched at the same time.
 - Only State VR agencies may respond to the CFP; however, we encourage proposals that include partnerships with community, service, business and technical assistance providers.
- As the above schedule suggests, once again we are not planning for a CSAVR sponsored Hill Day.
 - If you are considering making Hill visits independently , we would ask you inform Tonia Ferguson as we are developing talking points to help amplify our messaging of the VR value proposition.
 - There are a few targeted visits that our colleagues at Ridge Policy Group may be organizing. Those opportunities will be presented to and planned with the directors of the State with Members of Congress identified.

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Ridge Policy Group (RPG)

The Ridge Policy Group is a bipartisan, full-service government affairs and issue management group with offices in both Washington, D.C. and Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Since 1982, when Tom Ridge was first elected to the United States Congress, through his years as Governor of Pennsylvania, to his service as the Nation's first Homeland Security Director, Secretary Ridge and team has developed unmatched experience at the state and federal levels, overseeing every aspect of government programs, policies, and budgets. RPG offers an exceptional and distinctive bipartisan understanding of how government works at every level.

CSAVR has contracted with RPG to access and build on relationships with Members and staff, track legislation and policy and to further our communications strategy to promote the value proposition of the vocational rehabilitation program.

RPG will be joining us for the Sunday morning Directors Meeting. That session is being developed with a focus on gaining insight into the new Administration, key legislative priorities, and strategies to communicate the VR value proposition with Members of Congress. We encourage you to consider bringing your key legislative liaison and communications manager to this session.

NATIONAL NEWS

January is National Mentoring Month, a time to honor the impactful role mentors play in shaping development and guiding individuals toward success. Mentorship provides transformative influence on the career paths of youth, students, job seekers, and workers, fostering growth and driving positive change. Great time to still honor your mentors who inspire, empower, and create opportunities for excellence for your customers and in our communities.

For the sports fans, we must congratulate our colleagues in Ohio including John on The Ohio State Buckeyes winning the national college football championship (Psst...John wrote that sentence). I am on enroute to Kansas City as this is being written with high hopes that my Chiefs are as successful as the Buckeyes (yes, Steve wrote this sentence)! Of course, to our Buffalo Bills fans, no slight intended. We'll all be friends Monday morning 😊. And best of luck to all the Commanders and Eagles fans, too!

President Trump and the administration is off, and running having started his term with a number of Executive Orders. CSAVR staff and other Beltway partners are digging deeper into how those pertinent to our work may impact the public VR Program. We are also in close contact with our colleagues at the Ridge Policy Group to do our best to stay up to date on all news important to our community.

The [Department of Transportation \(DOT\) \[click-654309.icptrack.com\]](#) announced a [final rule on ensuring safe accommodations for air travelers with disabilities \[click-654309.icptrack.com\]](#). The new rule, effective January 16th, requires that airlines meet more rigorous standards for accommodating passengers with disabilities, especially those who use wheelchairs and sets new standards for assistance and notifications, mandates hands-on training for airline employees and contractors who physically assist passengers with disabilities or handle wheelchairs, and specifies actions that airlines must take to protect passengers when a wheelchair is damaged or delayed during a trip. Travelers can learn more about their protections when they fly at [FlightRights.gov \[click-654309.icptrack.com\]](#) and may file an airline complaint with the [Department of Transportation \[click-654309.icptrack.com\]](#).

College enrollment is rebounding and surpassing pre-pandemic levels. Undergraduate and graduate headcount was [up 4.5% in fall 2024 \[washingtonpost.com\]](#). Also more parents and educators are calling for “phone-free schools” – at least [eight states have restrictions \[washingtonpost.com\]](#). The CEO of [one social media platform agrees \[washingtonpost.com\]](#).

Other news stories of possible interest to you:

Broderick, Timmy. “[Why Medicaid Cuts Could Be a ‘Crisis’ for People with Disabilities \[links.news.mathematica-mpr.com\]](#).” STAT.

Diament, Michelle. “[Already Battered Providers Say More Cuts Could Be Coming \[links.news.mathematica-mpr.com\]](#).” Disability Scoop.

Diament, Michelle. “[Congress Authorizes Nearly \\$2 Billion for Autism \[links.news.mathematica-mpr.com\]](#).” Disability Scoop.

Heasley, Shaun. “[After Ending Subminimum Wage, States See Workforce Gains \[links.news.mathematica-mpr.com\]](#).” Disability Scoop.

Waddick, Karissa. “[Advocates Are Pushing to End Lower Wages for Disabled Workers. Some Families Are Opposed \[links.news.mathematica-mpr.com\]](#).” *USA Today*.

Finally, just something that might brighten your day, you may recall that the National Zoo received two pandas last fall from China. They are Bao Li and Qing Bao. They have had their debut at the National Zoo. This would be quite sight to see the next time you are in DC (well, as long as it doesn’t take you away from our spring meeting)!

DIRECTOR UPDATE

In case you may have missed some of the news in this regard, we thought it would be good to do a recap and update on final appointments. Erikk Bonner, who was at the 2024 Fall Conference, was named as the MD-C Director in September 2024, Kelly

Rogers has been named Director of FL-G, and Billy Taylor became the MS-C Director back in May of 2024. Sorry we did not catch that sooner, Billy.

I also want to note that Victor Duron has been named interim Director of CA-C and Kendra Karp was named NM-G interim Director.

Welcome and congratulations to all these folks.

TAC HAPPENINGS

VRTAC QE has announced their February webinar on 2/20/25. Title: *Using Emerging Technologies to Improve Supported Employment Service Delivery to Rural Youth and Adults with IDD*. This webinar explores the challenges of delivering supported and customized employment services in rural areas for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Participants will discover how emerging technologies like generative AI, virtual job coaching, and robotics can enhance service delivery and skill-building.

[Registration Link \[tacqe.com\]](https://tacqe.com)

VRTAC-QM Manager Minute: Unlocking Potential with Value-Based Purchasing: Join us for this enlightening episode of *VRTAC-QM Manager Minute*, where we explore the transformative power of Value-Based Purchasing (VBP), also known as Performance-Based Payment (PBP). In the studio, we have Chip Kenney, Co-Project Director of the VRTAC-QM, and Lisa Mills, a consultant and subject matter expert in VBP, sharing their expertise.

VBP is more than just a financial model—it's a strategic shift designed to drive better outcomes for individuals with disabilities. By aligning provider incentives with measurable performance outcomes, State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies (SVRAs) can enhance the quality of services, improve consumer results, and optimize costs.

Tune in to hear Chip and Lisa discuss how SVRAs can harness the power of this approach to revolutionize service delivery and create a meaningful impact. Whether you're considering adopting VBP or seeking to refine your approach, this episode is packed with insights you won't want to miss!

[Value-Based Payment Methodologies to Advance Competitive Integrated Employment: A Mix of Inspiring Examples from Across the Country \[dol.gov\]](https://dol.gov)

[Listen Here \[managerminutevrtac-qw.libsyn.com\]](https://managerminutevrtac-qw.libsyn.com)

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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Much is still unknown here. President Trump's nominee for the Secretary of Education (DOE) Linda McMahon, former CEO of World Wrestling Entertainment and administrator of the Small Business Administration during President *Trump's* first term, is still awaiting a date for her confirmation hearing.

We have no word as to a potential nominee for the RSA Commissioner slot and what will happen with this position. Carol Dobak, current Deputy Commissioner of RSA, will serve as the interim Commissioner for the beginning of the Trump Administration.

DOE has announced the following team of senior-level political appointees who will support the implementation of President Trump's vision for the Department. They are:

Rachel Oglesby – Chief of Staff

Rachel Oglesby most recently served as America First Policy Institute's Chief State Action Officer & Director, Center for the American Worker.

Jonathan Pidluzny – Deputy Chief of Staff for Policy and Programs

Jonathan Pidluzny most recently served as Director of the Higher Education Reform Initiative at the America First Policy Institute.

Chase Forrester – Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations

Virginia "Chase" Forrester most recently served as the Chief Events Officer at America First Policy Institute, where she oversaw the planning and execution of 80+ high-profile events annually for AFPI's 22 policy centers, featuring former Cabinet Officials and other distinguished speakers.

Steve Warzoha – White House Liaison

Steve Warzoha joins the U.S. Department of Education after most recently serving on the Trump-Vance Transition Team.

Tom Wheeler – Principal Deputy General Counsel

Tom Wheeler's prior federal service includes as the Acting Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights at the U.S. Department of Justice, a Senior Advisor to the White House

Federal Commission on School Safety, and as a Senior Advisor/Counsel to the Secretary of Education.

Craig Trainor – Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy, Office for Civil Rights

Craig Trainor most recently served as Senior Special Counsel with the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on the Judiciary under Chairman Jim Jordan (R-OH).

Madi Biedermann – Deputy Assistant Secretary, Office of Communications and Outreach

Madi Biedermann most recently worked as the Chief Operating Officer at P2 Public Affairs.

Candice Jackson – Deputy General Counsel

Candice Jackson returns to the U.S. Department of Education to serve as Deputy General Counsel. Candice served in the first Trump Administration as Acting Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, and Deputy General Counsel, from 2017-2021.

Joshua Kleinfeld – Deputy General Counsel

Joshua Kleinfeld is the Allison & Dorothy Rouse Professor of Law and Director of the Boyden Gray Center for the Study of the Administrative State at George Mason University's Scalia School of Law.

Hannah Ruth Earl – Director, Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships

Hannah Ruth Earl is the former executive director of America's Future.

KEY DOE/RSA ANNOUNCEMENTS

On January 10, 2025, ED published a [notice of proposed rulemaking \(NPRM\)](#) [\[federalregister.gov\]](#) related to the Randolph-Sheppard Act (R-S Act) regulations.

On January 14, 2025, RSA published a [Notice Inviting Applications \(NIA\)](#) [\[federalregister.gov\]](#) for the *Older Individuals Who Are Blind (OIB) Training and Technical Assistance Center* (Assistance Listing Number 84.177Z) for FFY 2025. Applications are due by March 17, 2025

On January 16, 2025, RSA published [TAC 25-01: Allowable Use of Funds for Management Services for the Benefit of the Randolph-Sheppard Vending Facility Program](#) [\[rsa.ed.gov\]](#) providing guidance on the allowable use of VR program funds, both Federal funds and non-Federal matching funds, as well as Randolph-Sheppard Vending Facility Program (RSVFP) set-aside funds, for costs associated with management services and supervision.

On January 17, 2025, ED published a [notice calling for comments on the proposed creation of a national VR TAC \[federalregister.gov\]](#) which would combine the current VRTAC QE and QM functions into one center. Comments are due on or before February 18, 2025.

There are many key Notices listed above, and whether you are a Blind, General or Combined agency I must call your attention to the Notice above seeking comment on one national VR TAC. The work of QM and QE has been so important, and a continued robust TAC is crucial. You as customers know better than anyone else what TA will be needed for your continued success in serving your dual customers and continuing to increase your staff skills as well as those of your partners.

CSAVR is working on preparing comments to submit. We would like to hear from you and from our committees in terms of their focus areas. What will be most important is for ED to hear directly from you and your partners and customers. Share this Notice with your staff, partners, and customers and prepare comments to submit on or before February 18th.

SOCIAL SECURITY NEWS

Changes to Social Security field office operations effective January 6, 2025. Read more: <https://www.ssa.gov/news/newsletter/> [\[nenaticket.org\]](#)

SSA has created a new resource for frequently accessed online services, check out the [Tip Sheet \[nenaticket.org\]](#) to learn more!

More than 30 Social Security forms can be signed electronically including the SSA 821 Work Activity Report Form.

Read more: [We're Making It Easier To Do Business With Us Electronically \[nenaticket.org\]](#)

Press Release: <https://www.ssa.gov/news/press/releases/2024/#2024-09-05> [\[nenaticket.org\]](#)

Social Security has introduced a new tool for ENs to use when conducting a Ticketholder intake discussion. The [Ticketholder Intake Guidance and Worksheet \[nenaticket.org\]](#) is a companion resource to the [Employment Network Guide to Working with Ticketholders \[nenaticket.org\]](#). This resource will help EN staff understand the purpose for conducting an intake discussion under the Ticket to Work (Ticket) Program and provides in-depth information.

NCSRC 2025 SPRING CONFERENCE

The National Coalition for State Rehabilitation Councils, (NCSRC), is preparing for their Spring Conference being held this year on April 5th and 6th, 2025 at the Hyatt Regency Bethesda Hotel. The NCSRC provides training, best practices, and networking for State Rehabilitation Councils, (SRC). The NCSRC is requesting presenters and proposals for their conference. If you are interested in learning more about this opportunity including submitting a proposal, please contact Pat Tomlinson at mandalay@comcast.net. Proposals must be submitted by February 21, 2025.

REPORTS, TRAINING, NEWSLETTERS AND CONFERENCE OPPORTUNITIES

The [Rehabilitation Research and Training Center \(RRTC\) on Employment for People Who are Blind or Have Low Vision \[click-654309.icptrack.com\]](#) published [resources for Spanish speakers who are blind or have low vision \[click-654309.icptrack.com\]](#). The resources include guides, factsheets, resource lists, and more, and provide critical information about employment and transportation.

Research from the NIDILRR-funded project [Technologies to Support Aging Among People with Long-Term Disabilities \(TechSAge\) \[click-654309.icptrack.com\]](#) is featured in an article, [Using technology to support the everyday activities of people aging with long-term disabilities \[click-654309.icptrack.com\]](#) (PDF), in Certified Senior Advisor Journal. The article spotlights three TechSAge projects that use commercially-available products to demonstrate the potential of technology to enhance social connection, wellness, safety, and activity performance among people aging with disability. The article is available free in full text

The [Model Systems Knowledge Translation Center \(MSKTC\) \[click-654309.icptrack.com\]](#) published a new infographic, [How to Age Successfully with Spinal Cord Injury \(SCI\) \[click-654309.icptrack.com\]](#). The infographic shares information on what to expect as a person ages with SCI. The factsheet provides strategies on how to age successfully with SCI and tips on creating social networks for healthy aging. The factsheet is available in English and Spanish.

Research from the NIDILRR-funded project [BeHEALTHY: Chronic Disease Management for Traumatic Brain Injury \(TBI\) \[click-654309.icptrack.com\]](#) is highlighted in a special communication, [Model of Care for Chronic Brain Injury \[click-654309.icptrack.com\]](#), in Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation. The article describes the development, structural features, and core components of the BeHEALTHY model, a person-centered approach to long-term support of persons with chronic TBI that recognizes the individual, along with their social support system, as the primary source of goals in care planning.

The NIDILRR-funded [Temple University Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Community Living and Participation of Individuals with Serious Mental Illnesses \[click-](#)

654309.icptrack.com seeks participants for a trial of an online peer facilitated process that supports individuals in creating a personalized system for recovering, sustaining, and/or improving their whole health and enhancing their lifestyle. Participants must be 18 or older, experience significant mental health challenges, and be currently enrolled in college in the US with at least two semesters left. To volunteer, [complete the screening questionnaire \[click-654309.icptrack.com\]](#). For additional information, contact takingaction@temple.edu.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

Anderson, Olwen, Vanette McLennan, Nicholas Buys, and Christine Randall. "[Injured Worker Participation in Assessment During the Acute Phase of Workers Compensation Rehabilitation: A Scoping Review. \[links.news.mathematica-mpr.com\]](#)" *Disability and Rehabilitation*, vol. 47, no. 1, 2024, pp. 69–79.

Barclay, L., G. Hilton, E. Fossey, J. Ponsford, M. Downing, P. Analytis, and P. Ross. "[Peer Mentor Contributions to an Early Intervention Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist Service Following Trauma: A Qualitative Study \[links.news.mathematica-mpr.com\]](#)." *Disability and Health Journal*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2025.

Berglund, Erik, Ingrid Anderzén, Magnus Helgesson, Per Lytsy, and Åsa Andersén. "[Work Participation After Receiving Multidisciplinary Treatment or Acceptance and Commitment Therapy Intervention for Return to Work: Long-Term Follow-Up of a Randomized Controlled Trial Among Sick-Listed Individuals with Mental Disorders and/or Chronic Pain \[links.news.mathematica-mpr.com\]](#)." *BMC Public Health*, no. 24, vol. 1, 2024.

Boland, Elizabeth A., Wayne W. Dagel, Jamie M. Emanuel, Kelly D. Roberts, and Kyle W. Beam. "[Building Relationships for Shared Cases Between State and Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation Programs \[links.news.mathematica-mpr.com\]](#)." *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 2024.

Hoffman, Denise, April Yanyuan Wu, and Paul O'Leary. "[Employment Outcomes for Social Security Disability Insurance Applicants Who Use Opioids \[links.news.mathematica-mpr.com\]](#)." *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*, 2024.

Jessiman-Perreault, Geneviève, Peter M. Smith, Aaron Thompson, and Monique A.M. Gignac. "[The Relationship Between Meeting Workplace Accommodation Needs and Job Disruptions Among Canadians Working with Disabilities: A Cross-Sectional Analysis \[links.news.mathematica-mpr.com\]](#)." *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, vol. 67, no. 1, 2025, e54–e60.

Lindsay, Sally, Janice Phonepraseuth, and Sarah Leo. "[Experiences and Factors Affecting Poverty Among Families Raising a Child with a Disability: A Scoping Review \[links.news.mathematica-mpr.com\]](#)." *Disability and Rehabilitation*, 2024.

Matheson, Leonard N., Joe L. Verna, and John M. Mayer. "[Work-Readiness Self Report Lift Capacity Test Short Form. \[links.news.mathematica-mpr.com\]](#)" *WORK: A Journal of Prevention, Assessment and Rehabilitation*, vol. 79, no. 4, 1829–1841, 2024.

Rabinovich, Lila, Doerte Junghaenel, and Tabasa Ozawa. "[Understanding Disability Benefits Decision-Making Among Adults with Self-Reported Work Disabilities: A Qualitative Study \[links.news.mathematica-mpr.com\]](#)." *Disability and Health Journal*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2025.

Roll, Stephen, Dan Ferris, Sam Bufe, and Olga Kondratjeva. "[Designing Savings Accounts to Promote Asset Building for Individuals with Disabilities: Experimental Evidence on ABLE Accounts \[links.news.mathematica-mpr.com\]](#)." *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*, 2024.

Tansey, Timothy N., Malachy Bishop, Emily A. Brinck, and Catherine A. Anderson. "[From Knowledge to Action: A Selection of Papers from the Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center for Quality Employment 2024 Symposium on Quality Employment \[links.news.mathematica-mpr.com\]](#)." *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 2024.

Wong, Jasin, Han Su, Angelika Kudla, Elizabeth G.S. Munsell, Nnaemezie Ezeife, Deborah Crown, Robert Trierweiler, et al. "[Facilitators and Barriers to Employment for People with Physical Disabilities: A Cross-Sectional Study \[links.news.mathematica-mpr.com\]](#)." *WORK: A Journal of Prevention, Assessment and Rehabilitation*, no. 79, vol. 4, 2024, pp. 1673–1684.