



Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation

CSAVR National News Brief

March 22, 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.

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NATIONAL NEWS

We continue to work to keep track of all the latest news coming from the White House and federal Departments. It is an ever-changing situation. We appreciate you continuing to share information with us and helping us sort the rumor from the truth.

The Senate by a 54-46 vote passed a [continuing resolution \[congress.gov\]](https://www.congress.gov) (CR) last Friday that will fund the federal government until September 30, narrowly avoiding a government shutdown. President Donald Trump signed the legislation into law on Saturday.

The CR funds the government at fiscal year (FY) 2024 levels, with a few exceptions. Specifically, [at FY 2024 levels \[nasfaa.org\]](https://nasfaa.org), the Department of Education (ED) was appropriated \$79.1 billion for its programs, with federal student aid programs receiving \$24.6 billion.

The new 99-page CR cuts ED's funding in two places:

- \$202 million in higher education earmarks funded through the Fund for Improvement in Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE) account, and,
- \$88 million in K-12 earmarks under the Innovation and Improvement account. Earmarks are funds designated by Congress for a specific recipient or project to be used in certain jurisdictions.

This past Thursday the President signed the [Executive Order to dismantle the Department of Education \[whitehouse.gov\]](https://www.whitehouse.gov). It is not long on detail so will be interesting to see the next steps. We will continue to diligently follow this as it develops.

FYI, CSAVR staff have been asked if the administration of the Rehabilitation Act is assigned to another federal Department such as DOL or HHS, does that mandate that the program at the state level must then reside in the comparable state agency? No, it does not. Where states house the program is up to the states.

As part of the Administration's cost cutting efforts, starting at the end of this month, many [Social Security \[washingtonpost.com\]](https://www.washingtonpost.com) recipients will no longer be able to verify their identity over the phone. They'll need to go online or in person to a Social Security field office, yet dozens of field offices are closing and thousands of jobs have been cut. The change applies to both new and existing recipients who want to change their direct deposit information.

AARP and other organizations have raised concerns that the changes will make it harder for older people and people with disabilities to access their Social Security checks. In response SSA recently required nearly all agency employees, including frontline employees in all offices throughout the country, to work in the office five days a week, in hopes that there will be enough staff available to support the stronger in-person identity proofing requirement.

In other news:

Layoffs by US employers grew 245 percent to 172,017 last month, the highest level since July 2020, when the economy was in the grips of the Covid -19 pandemic. The number was fueled by the federal government laying off about 62,530 workers in the first two months of this year.

Reuters

Goldman Sachs drastically cut its growth forecast for the US GDP in 2025 from 2.4% to 1.7% citing “considerably more adverse “ trade assumptions. Other banks, including Morgan Stanley and JPMorgan chase, also lowered their GDP projections. *Semafor*

2025 CSAVR SPRING CONFERENCE

It is almost time for us to gather for the CSAVR Spring Conference and related events on April 4 to 9. And take that last time ride on the Bethesda Hyatt escalators.

Registration is at 325. Don't worry if you have not registered yet, there is still time until April 1, 2025.

Go to the CSAVR website for all the latest information about the conference and related events.

CSAVR MONTHLY MEMBERSHIP CALLS

There will not be an April Monthly Membership Call due the scheduled date being so close to our conference. The next call will be on Wednesday, May 7th from 2 to 3 pm ET.

TIP OF THE EDITION

NM -B is doing something a little different to generate additional program income. They have a contract funded with 100% state dollars with their state Legal Aid agency to whom they refer consumers who have been improperly denied SSI or SSDI, or who have overpayments related to their work activities.

Reportedly, it encourages more consumers to engage in work knowing that they will be supported if they have an overpayment and ultimately gets more persons on SSI and SSDI (or at least get them on with an earlier onset date). Eventually, the agency is able to assist many or most of them to return to work and get off SSI and SSDI thereby generating additional program income. Also, the agency spends less money on those consumers who now have Medicaid or Medicare, and the consumers have a more stable platform from which to seek and obtain employment.

Thanks Greg Trapp at NM-B for sharing!

VR-ROI GRANT PROJECT NEWS

The GW Center for Rehabilitation Counseling, Research and Education (GW CRCRE) has been spearheading grant work around VR ROI. SVRAs, economists, CSAVR, and others have been involved in the work which has resulted in a book presenting the

latest advances in models and data for evaluating the efficacy of vocational rehabilitation (VR) services provided to individuals with disabilities.

For the first time, the VR-ROI (return on investment) model is used to simultaneously compare short- and long-term labor market outcomes across multiple state agencies and four distinct disability groups. For each disability group, the book provides information about the return on investment, as measured by the rate of return, for VR services. By offering this broad and in-depth evaluation in concert with intuitive explanations of the model and the estimation methodology, the book helps to bridge the gap between research and practice and to equip stakeholders with data-driven insights to enhance vocational rehabilitation programs for individuals with disabilities.

This book entitled *Evaluation of Vocational Rehabilitation Services Return on Investment (VR-ROI) Models and Results* is available through Springer Publishing and is based on the body of work of the VR-ROI grant projects the latest of which is currently housed at the GW Center for Rehabilitation Counseling, Research and Education (GW CRCRE). It is based on the body of work of the VR-ROI grant projects formerly housed at the University of Richmond and currently at the George Washington University Center for Rehabilitation Counseling, Research and Education (GW CRCRE).

RSA AND DOE

Leadership changes are happening. RSA Acting and Deputy Commissioner Carol Dobak, and Chief of the Vocational Rehabilitation Unit, Suzanne Mitchell, are retiring at the end of March. Their last day in the office is was Friday, March 21, 2025.

Chris Pope is stepping into the RSA Acting and Deputy Commissioner position. And Ed Vitelli will be covering the role of Chief of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program Unit.

Thank you, Carol and Suzanne, for your strong commitment and service to the public VR Program. We wish you both the very best in this next phase of your life journeys. Chris and Ed, we look forward to working with you in these new roles and will do our very best to support you.

The Office of General Council (OGC) at OSERS is gone. Over the years RSA worked closely with the OGC to ensure they provided the best advice and guidance from both programmatic and legal standpoints. We know that RSA staff will continue to do their best to answer questions and provide guidance and they will not have that extra support of the OGC. As John always reminds me, it is good to be on good terms with your lawyers AAG and/or in-house attorneys so if you do not have a relationship, now might be a good time to reach out and establish it.

DOE issued a correction notice for the Federal fiscal year (FFY) 2025 Independent Living Services for Older Individuals Who Are Blind Program—Independent Living

Services for Older Individuals Who Are Blind Training and Technical Assistance competition –Assistance Listing Number 84.177Z revising the selection criteria as described further in “Supplementary Information” and extending the deadline date for transmittal of applications to March 31, 2025.

DOE also updated the Notice Inviting Applications for Federal fiscal year 2025 for the American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services (AIVRS) Program—Assistance Listing Number 84.250R revising selection criteria, the application due date (April 7, 2025), and specifies requirements for resubmission.

GRANT AWARD NOTIFICATIONS (GANs)

Admittedly this topic is well above my pay grade, so the following is shared without a complete understanding of the full process. However, CSAVR had questions posed to us regarding the GAN this past week.

As best we understand, the purpose for to the GAN was to share an administrative change that Ed Vitelli would be replacing Suzanne Mitchell (see DOE AND RSA section above).

When reviewing your GAN, please pay close attention to Box 2, which indicates the type of change. If marked “Admin”, that indicates is an administrative change (e.g., adjustment to dates, or, as seen on this GAN, an update to the Department of Education representative). In this case that was from Suzanne to Ed.

The top of Page 2 to the GAN provides further details on the specific change. If you have further questions you may wish to contact Carol Pankow at the VRTAC QM.

TAC NEWS

VRTAC QE has announced their April webinar on 4/17/25. Title: Enhancing Digital Engagement in Vocational Rehabilitation: Three Evidence-Based Measures for Practice and Research. Presenters: Kanako Iwanaga, Dewi Anisa Qisti, Jia Rung Wu

About the Event:

This webinar will explore the impact of digital tools on service delivery, efficiency, and client engagement in state VR agencies. Participants will gain insights into the Digital Competency Profiler (DCP), Motivation to Use Digital Tools at Work Scale, and the Technology Adoption Propensity Index (TAPI), learning how to apply these tools to enhance training and rehabilitation workplaces.

[Register here \[tacqe.com\]](https://tacqe.com).

REPORTS, TRAINING, NEWSLETTERS AND CONFERENCE OPPORTUNITIES

The National Training Center for Transformational Rehabilitation Leadership issued its newsletter this past week. To read go to: WWW.NTCTRL.ORG [as488ncab.cc.rs6.net]

NENA has extended the deadline for conference submissions to **March 28, 2025!**

The University of Arkansas Currents has announced plans for its next LEAD VR cohort starting in May and running through September of 2025. The training offers participants the opportunity to explore the current and future face of VR leadership and address challenges to the future of the public VR Program, especially around streamlining the VR process, recruitment and retention, and increasing public awareness of VR. This program is a great fit for managers or first line supervisors wanting to improve their leadership skills and knowledge of the public VR program as well as the opportunity to brainstorm ideas and solutions with colleagues from VR agencies across the country and start to build those networks that are so important to us all as we grow in the profession and program. Cohorts are designed to foster cross-agency collaboration. Organizational specific cohorts may also be requested. The cost is \$2,800 per person. Participants will be responsible for travel costs associated with the face-to-face sessions.

Accommodations: The deadline for requesting accommodation is April 30, 2025.

[Register here \[uacurrents.org\]](http://uacurrents.org).

Registration deadline: May 1st, 2025