

TITLE IV-VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (VR) PROGRAM

-General quarterly updates since the October 2022 GWDB Meeting:

The Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Bureau of Services to the Blind and Visually Impaired as combined, has had a busy Q4 2022. Q4 2022 saw the completion of the 18 months long Legislative Council Bureau (LCB) audit of the program. With only 8 findings, and most of them already recognized and addressed prior to the receipt of the report of findings, the program feels well positioned in its response.

Another long-term effort was the re-write of the VR Participant Services Manual and development of a separate staff Desk Guide. This was two years in the making and was done to make the Services Manual easier for clients to understand and utilize while separating out procedures and processes germane to internal VR staff.

In January of 2022 VR had a soft-launch of its new www.VRNEVADA.org website. This website is a stand-alone site for all information regarding the VR, Blind Services, Older Blind and Transition programs. When fully completed the website will be in 5 languages (English, Spanish, Tagalog, Korean & Chinese) with a link to real-time ASL interpretation assistance. The site is fully ADA-compatible and adds many new features to improve the user experience and cater to the needs of people with disabilities while adding transparency and accountability. Part of that transparency is the posting of the VR Strategic Priorities on VRNevada for the 2nd year. VR also launched a new branding campaign including intensive social media and search-engine placement to enhance the usability, visibility and responsiveness of VR programs.

VR emerged from the pandemic better positioned in 2022. In December the program reported that it served 2523 new program participants, 451 more than the prior year. Wages were also at an all-time high of \$15.79 on average. In January 2023 the program reached a new low of 16% vacancy rate, as compared to the program high of 25% during pandemic. Additionally, one of the most significant measures of transition student success is the achievement of academic Measurable Skills Gains (MSG). The Program closed PY 2022 at a 42.5% MSG rate, when the goal was 16%.

In December 2022 the Nevada State Rehabilitation Council (NSRC) produced it's 2022 Annual Report. This is an annual report on the VR Program and is shared with the Rehabilitation Services Administration, the Governor, the Nevada Legislature and other VR agencies across the country. The report utilized the same branding/style guide as VRNevada and provides a year over year snapshot of Program performance.

In November, VR took a step as a model employer by installing a "Loop System" in the main conference room at our primary Las Vegas office located at 3016 West Charleston. A Loop System facilitates improved communication for those who utilize hearing aids by using Bluetooth technology to send all sound shared via the loop system directly to the hearing aid wearer, eliminating background noise and interference and improving the auditory experience for those utilizing the technology in the room. As VR has several staff who are hard of hearing or deaf, this is an important step in better meeting staff and public accommodation needs.

In December 2022 VR was able to partner with the Elko County School District to provide PAES Labs (Practical Assessment Exploration System) to schools in Jackpot and Wells. PAES Labs assess a student's

competitive work potential and interest level, while simultaneously exploring various jobs, using real tools, and developing proper work behaviors in a variety of work areas. PAES Labs are a feeder to CTE programs and give students with disabilities a meaningful and engaging way to have hands on experiences and decide what their potential vocational interests are and where they have aptitude. VR is working to put PAES Labs in middle and high schools across the state.

Another meaningful collaboration is with the Nevada Department of Education, Office of Inclusive Education. VR and the NDOE/OIE collaborated to re-write the State Level Education Agreement (SEA) which defines the relationship between VR and NDOE/OIE and serves as a model and example for Local Education Agreements (LEA) that VR has with every school district with a high school in Nevada. The new agreement is more concise, clear and comprehensive, and is already getting traction as an example agreement for other states.

Lastly, DETR had a change in leadership in Q4. Governor Lombardo appointed Chris Sewell as the new DETR Director after the departure of Elisa Cafferata. Chris had been the DETR Deputy Director for 1.5 years and has deep knowledge of DETR programs. Chris then appointed Josh Marhevka (DETR CFO) to the new DETR Deputy of Operations and Troy Jordan, prior DETR Legal Counsel, to the position of DETR Director of Programs. VR looks forward to working with our new leadership team.