

Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS)
State Rehabilitation Council Executive Committee
November 13, 2025
Approved Meeting Minutes

Members Present: Chris Martin, Gayl Brunk, Nick Zweerink, and Frederick Foard.

Members Absent: None.

Others Present: Ryan Haywood, SRC; Lillian Garland, SRC; Lee Talley, SRC; Catherine Harrison, DARS; Meghan Cox, DARS; Lisa Robertson, DARS; Becky Gibbs, DARS; Barbara Burkett, DARS; Julie Jacobs, DARS; Matt Luther, DARS; Becky Alwood, DARS; Kathy Hayfield, DARS; Dale Batten, DARS; Brandy Schantz, SRC; Heidi Lawyer, SRC; Cara Kaufman, DARS.

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 9:30 a.m.

Introduction of Members: Martin called the meeting to order. All members and others present introduced themselves.

Approval of meeting agenda: No changes. Agenda approved by unanimous consensus.

Approval of September meeting minutes: No changes. Minutes approved by unanimous consensus.

Matters of Public Comment: There were no public comments received.

Discussion: Cox provided an update on current membership and previewed business meeting items, including changes to 2026 meeting dates/locations on which Council will need to vote.

Meeting Adjourned: 9:35 a.m.

Meeting Handouts:

1. Proposed Meeting Agenda
2. Draft Executive Committee Meeting Minutes from August 11, 2025

**Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS)
State Rehabilitation Council Quarterly Meeting
November 13, 2025
Approved Meeting Minutes**

Members Present: Commissioner Kathy Hayfield, Yohance Goodrich, Brandy Schantz, Nick Zweerink, Ryan Haywood, Lillian Garland, Travis Staton, Heidi Lawyer, Becky Alwood, Gayl Brunk, Christopher Martin, Lee Talley, Patricia Morgan, and Frederick Foard.

Members Absent: Marco Callender, Beth Klein, and Ryan Mauzy.

Others Present: Dale Batten, DARS; Catherine Harrison, DARS; Julie Jacobs, DARS; Alison Shaner, WWRC; Cara Kaufman, DARS; Barbara Burkett, DARS; Wil Barber, DARS; Lisa Robertson, DARS; Meghan Cox, DARS; Betsy Civilette, DARS; Becky Gibbs, DARS; Matt Luther, DARS.

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 9:45 a.m.

Introduction of Members: Martin called the meeting to order. All members and others present introduced themselves.

Approval of meeting agenda: Amended agenda presented to add discussion of FRS strategic rebranding item previously discussed in August 11 meeting. Motion to approve presented by Foard, seconded by Talley, and passed by voice vote.

Matters of Public Comment: There were no public comments received.

Chairperson's Report: The Chair reviewed the November 12 SRC Annual Retreat and November 13 Executive Committee meeting.

Due to a room scheduling conflict, DARS staff proposed moving the March SRC meeting from March 4 to March 3. Motion to approve moving the meeting presented by Haywood, seconded by Talley, and passed by voice vote.

Council members had requested that DARS staff arrange for a 2026 SRC meeting to be hosted at Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center in Fishersville, VA. WWRC staff has offered to host the Council in August. Motion to approve holding the August SRC meeting at WWRC presented by Brunk, seconded by Haywood, and passed by voice vote.

Development of 2025 SRC Recommendations

SRC Chair Chris Martin curated a discussion of 2025 SRC Recommendations with assistance from DARS staff. In particular, the Council continued to consider its recommendations from 2024 (and the agency responses thereto) and performance data derived from the presentation on VR Program Performance for FFY 2025.

Motion to approve the final SRC recommendations for the 2025 Annual Report presented by Talley, seconded by Haywood, and passed by voice vote.

Final 2025 SRC Recommendations

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) supports DARS in its commitment, in partnership with program participants and their informed choice, to provide services that prepare individuals with disabilities through career pathways to enter the workforce in sustainable jobs with livable wages that decrease poverty, improve their economic quality of life and independence, and reduce their reliance on public benefits. The following SRC recommendations will help further these shared goals.

1. DARS shall continue to provide updates on WIOA performance measures, including the goals and targets established for these measures and DARS' progress towards those goals. DARS should provide detailed analysis of available data to the council related to outcomes, occupations, and data with the expectation that the median hourly wage increases to \$16.00 per hour (\$17.50 per hour in the Northern district) to best align with increases in the minimum wage and the current economy, with the ultimate goal of a living wage of \$20.00 per hour for individuals who are not students with disabilities.

The Council requests that DARS provide a detailed analysis on data related to employment outcomes as broken down by occupation and industry sector at the first meeting of 2026.

2. The Council continues to be interested in wage and earnings trends as impacted by clients' access to other benefits and wants individuals who receive DARS services to be empowered to make an informed choice regarding their employment and understand their options. DARS should report on ongoing benefits counseling services and outreach at the second meeting of 2026, including process details, current data, and historical trends. The Council requests that DARS monitor and report the SSI/SSDI status of individuals at application status as compared to closure.

The Council requests that DARS continue to provide and increase parent-focused education and awareness activities, including information about benefits counseling for students with disabilities, in collaboration with partner agencies/organizations (including VDOE and PEATC) and report baseline information to the Council, as available.

3. In order to increase successful closures, DARS should systematically examine barriers to service delivery, paying particular attention to marginalized and underserved populations, including tribal populations, groups experiencing language barriers, rural communities with limited broadband and transportation access, and youth in transition. Targeted outreach should address language access through access to interpretation services and translated materials, technology and transportation support in underserved areas, and increased awareness among families and youth. These efforts, grounded in the CSNA findings, will drive progress toward representative customer demographics, geographic access, and responsive service delivery.

DARS should work to increase accuracy in reporting and directed delivery of services to clients who report a language other than English as their primary language with a goal of a 10% increase in services provided to this population.

DARS should work to establish an enhanced relationship with one Virginia-based tribe for the purpose of sharing information and improving access to VR services.

4. DARS should increase by 40% the number of VR services, including Pre-ETS, provided by Centers for Independent Living across the Commonwealth.
5. DARS will report on business development efforts including collaboration with ESOs, workforce development partners, and businesses that support the hiring of individuals with disabilities with an emphasis on the practices and procedures to onboard these partners at the third SRC meeting of 2026.
6. The Council requests quarterly updates on the winding down of the Pathways grant and efforts to integrate Pathways activities into the VR program.
7. The SRC would like DARS, including WWRC, to continue to expand virtual programs that deliver VR resources and education to those who can benefit from remote learning and services, while identifying and addressing access challenges (including technological literacy) that may prevent some Virginians from fully utilizing these options. The Council requests quarterly updates on the delivery of these services and the impact on credential and measurable skill gain measures.
8. DARS should serve more students with disabilities and the Council requests that DARS provides quarterly reports on efforts to serve this population, particularly students with disabilities.
 - a. DARS should continue to increase outreach to local education agencies, families, and students regarding the availability of and access to transition and Pre-ETS services. Increase collaboration between DARS, the Virginia Department of Education, other community partners including providers, and local education agencies.
 - b. DARS should identify and report on local education agencies in which Pre-ETS is under-utilized and conduct direct outreach in order to increase service availability and delivery. DARS Transition Services should report on any barriers to continued outreach and contemplated or implemented solutions.
 - c. Data on types of services utilized, geographic trends, and information on the frequency with which students who receive Pre-ETS services move on to VR services should be evaluated and reported to the SRC.

- d. DARS should continue to expand work-based learning experiences for transition age youth. DARS should increase by 25% the number of transition age youth participating in work-based learning experiences, with deliberate efforts to achieve increases that are geographically and occupationally diverse.
9. DARS should review and strengthen its internal data collection processes to improve the accuracy and completeness of information reported to the Council, particularly data on client barriers such as foster care involvement, homelessness, and juvenile justice history.

Ongoing 2025 SRC Annual Report Development

Betsy Civilette, Communications Director, presented a design mock-up of the 2025 Annual Report based on the subcommittee's prior recommendations and received feedback from the SRC on graphics and design. She also covered the success stories to be featured in the report and took the Council photo. Once drafted, the 2025 Annual Report will be provided to the subcommittee for additional feedback.

Motion to delegate to the Annual Report Subcommittee the authority to review and approve the final Annual Report presented by Talley, seconded by Schantz, and passed by voice vote.

2025 Fair Hearings Report

Cara Kaufman, DARS Fair Hearing Officer, provided a 2025 Fair Hearings Report.

During the 2025 program year, DARS received one request for case mediation, which did not result in case resolution. In addition, DARS received two requests for impartial hearing and carried over an existing impartial hearing case from the 2024 program year. The case carried over from the 2024 program year was resolved and closed during the 2025 program year. One hearing case from the 2025 program year was not resolved and is being carried over to the 2026 program year. The RSA-722 report was submitted to the Federal Department of Education on October 22, 2025. A copy of the RSA-722 report was shared with the Council as well as the redacted decision from the one hearing case that was resolved during the 2025 program year.

WIOA Combined State Plan Modification Update

Lisa Robertson, DARS Policy Analyst, gave an update on the Combined State Plan Modification and delivered a related presentation that is included with meeting materials. She covered various plan components and inputs and described the process for development and submission.

Once complete, the 2026-2027 Virginia WIOA Combined State Plan Modification will be provided on the DARS website for review. Information for submitting public comments will also be included on the DARS website. The public comment will be sometime in January 2026.

Discussion of FRS Update on Strategic Framework and Redesign

Council member Foard led a discussion on the relationship between terminology and health outcomes. FRS Director Jacobs shared that the current strategic framework process involves consideration of branding of what is done in the field. Specifically, there are other activities under the VR programmatic umbrella that have their own branding (e.g., Pathways). The Council asked for an update at the June 2026 meeting on the strategic initiatives in FRS, particularly with regard to branding of services.

Consumer Satisfaction Survey

Wil Barber, DARS Research Analyst, provided a presentation on the 2025 Consumer Satisfaction Survey and discussed the 2025 Consumer Satisfaction Survey Report, both of which were provided to the Council and are included among meeting materials. In response to some of the survey results, the Council asked for an update on communication and frequency of contact data at the March meeting.

Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center Report

Alison Shaner, Director of Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center, delivered a presentation that included updates on the facility and its services. The presentation was distributed to Council members and is included among meeting materials.

Member Reports

- Gayl Brunk: In alignment with the current State Plan for Independent Living, Virginia CILs continue to provide their communities with education and training opportunities that are specific to the identified needs of their Planning Districts. Along with community education, the SPIL also prioritizes accessibility in all areas of emergency planning. Currently, the Council has representation on the VDEM Emergency Management Equity Workgroup and the DSS Accessible Sheltering Workgroup. The next quarterly meeting of the Equity Workgroup will be on November 17th. The Annual Program Performance Report for the Independent Living State Grant that funds the SILC will be submitted no later than the January 31 deadline established by the Administration for Community Living. The SILC has 3 new members: Ida Barksdale of Montpelier, Lauren Bryant of VA Beach, and David Minor of Madison. The next SILC meeting will take place on January 29th. This meeting takes place in conjunction with IL Day at the Virginia General Assembly on January 28th. That SILC meeting will be held at the new DARS office on Cox Rd.
- Ryan Haywood: The continued termination/dissolution of contracts, along with implemented and planned consolidations, continues to contribute to the volatile Federal market inside and outside Northern Virginia, which the impacts of the Government shutdown had amplified. Procurement activities have been mostly stalled since October 1st, so the reopening of the Government will allow employees and contractors to resume normal FY 26 launch activities through the remainder of this year. The industry anticipates above-average acquisition activity through the holiday season. The continued termination/dissolution of contracts, along with implemented and planned consolidations, continues to contribute to the volatile Federal market inside and outside Northern Virginia, which the impacts of the Government shutdown have amplified. Procurement activities have been mostly stalled since October 1st, so the reopening of the Government in the next several days will allow employees and contractors

to resume normal FY 26 launch activities through the remainder of this year. Most of us in the industry anticipate above-average acquisition activity through the holiday season

- Heidi Lawyer: October 1 marked the beginning of PEATC's new five-year grant cycle as Virginia's Parent Training and Information Center (PTI), funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), and as the RSA Parent Center on Transition for Region B1 (Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, and Florida). PEATC welcomed Molly Haskin as new Regional Specialist for Region 2 (Hampton Roads area). Under RSA grant, this year's training and resource priorities include competitive, integrated employment; effective communication; and the use of artificial intelligence (AI) to support youth in transition across school, employment, and independent living. PEATC's contract with the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) has been renewed, and fall training season is now in full swing with programs such as Transition University, IEP University, Building Strong Parent Advocates, and Early Childhood Academy. In addition, PEATC continues to offer a variety of in-person and virtual trainings on topics ranging from special education and SSI/Waivers to Turning 18 and transition planning. Through DARS contract for Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS), in support of EPIC, PEATC has scheduled Informed Choice trainings for parents, students, and DARS counselors for Spring 2026, and have completed accompanying resource documents on that topic. One of PEATC staff members presented PEATC's new Dispute Resolution resource document at the national CADRE conference. This publication has received national attention, and several states have requested permission to adapt it for their own use.

Matters of Public Comment: There were no public comments received. Having no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 2:21 p.m.

The next meeting will take place on March 3, 2026 at the Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services Central Office in Henrico.

Meeting Handouts:

1. Proposed Meeting Agenda
2. Draft Meeting Minutes from August 11, 2025 Meeting
3. 2025 Annual Report Design Mockup
4. Combined State Plan Update Presentation
5. Fair Hearing Report Documents
6. Consumer Satisfaction Report
7. Consumer Satisfaction Survey Presentation
8. WWRC Presentation