NEVADA STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL (N.S.R.C.)
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, September 01, 2026, at 1:00 pm

PHYSICAL MEETING LOCATIONS:

Vocational Rehabilitation
1325 Corporate Boulevard, Reno, NV 89502
&
Vocational Rehabilitation
3016 W. Charleston Blvd., Suite 200, Las Vegas, NV 89102

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:

Jack Mayes (Chair)

Drazen Elez, VR Administrator (Non-Voting)

Edward Estipona

David Nuestro

Jennifer Kane

Obioma Officer

Rebecca Rogers

Sandra Sinicrope

Robin Kincaid

Becky Jayakumar

Chuck Neuwohner

Ashley De Loera (Non-Voting)

Mary Brabant

COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT:

Dawn Lyons

STAFF:

Stephanie Itkin Goodman, Deputy Attorney General

Brett Martinez, VR Deputy Administrator of Operations

Mechelle Merrill, VR Deputy Administrator of Programs

Sheena Childers, VR Bureau Chief II

Cyndy Cendagorta, Chief of Office of Disability Employment Policy

Theresa Jones, District Manager

Rachel Fraser, Rehabilitation Counselor III

Wendell Myers, Rehabilitation Counselor III

Jenny Richter, N.S.R.C Liaison

Edward Green, Administrative Assistant III

Uriah Carter, Administrative Assistant II

Marla Robinson

GUESTS/PUBLIC:

Christine Callesen, American Sign Language (ASL) Interpreter

Ava Smith, ASL Interpreter

Kate Osti, Executive Director of NDALC

Teresa Morros, Brain Nevada

Julie Irish, DP Video Productions

Alison Cyr, Market Decisions Research

Davis Thorton, Market Decisions Research

Charles Fox

Shauna Griggley

Bella Peterson

Davis Thorton

Doralee Martinez

Julie Steinbaugh

Laura Fussell

Eli Westphalen

Steven Cohen

DRAFT

1. CALL TO ORDER, QUORUM CONFIRMATION, AND AGENDA POSTING VERIFICATION

Jack Mayes, N.S.R.C. Chair, called the meeting to order at 1:06 pm. Jenny Richter Livia, N.S.R.C. Liaison, conducted roll call. Dawn Lyons, NSRC Council Member, was unable to attend and is excused.

N.S.R.C. Liaison Richter determined a quorum was present and verified that the posting was completed on time in accordance with open meeting law. Mrs. Richter also established that the Deputy Attorney General, Stephanie Itkin, was in attendance as well as Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Staff.

2. FIRST PUBLIC COMMENT

Chair Mayes opened the floor for public comment, stating the time limitations to each comment due to time constraints. Legal notice was read, and the meeting phone number was provided.

Doralee “Dora” Martinez expressed concern that the meeting agenda and supporting materials were not accessible from the outset. She stated that she had advocated for approximately one week to receive accessible materials but did not receive them until the afternoon before the meeting, leaving insufficient time for review. Mrs. Martinez emphasized that accessibility should be incorporated into the preparation of all agendas and meeting materials, particularly because Vocational Rehabilitation serves people with disabilities. Chair Mayes thanked her and stated that the matter would be followed up on.

Robin Kincaid, NSRC Council Member, raised concern about the next meeting being scheduled for November 10, the day before a midweek holiday. She asked the Council to reconsider the date to avoid possible attendance or quorum issues. Chair Mayes acknowledged the concern and noted it for future consideration.

Steven Cohen raised several concerns. He discussed the difficulty returning clients may experience when assigned to a new counselor, particularly when they have already established rapport with a previous counselor or when a potential language barrier exists. Mr. Cohen stated that his previous counselor was ultimately reassigned to him but asked the Council to consider the broader issue. He also encouraged the Council to designate an authorized representative for the upcoming legislative session, noting the approaching legislative prefiling deadline. Finally, he expressed concern about the substantial decline in figures presented in the staff report and requested clarification regarding whether the data were reported by calendar year or fiscal year.

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Obioma Officer, NSRC Council Member, announced an upcoming statewide engagement conference scheduled for November 13 -14 and invited attendees to register and participate. She indicated that registration and conference information would be shared in the meeting chat.

Chair Mayes requested that the information also be provided to Jenny Richter so it could be distributed to individuals who were not present.

After confirming that there were no additional public comments, Chair Mayes proceeded to Agenda Item 3.

3. NSRC MEMBERSHIP UPDATES

Chair Jack Mayes moved to Agenda Item 3 and invited the Council's three new members to introduce themselves. He directed attendees to the council composition and new-member statements included behind Tab 3 of the meeting packet.

Becky Jayakumar, NSRC Council member, introduced herself as an associate professor at Roseman University, where her teaching incorporates bioethics and disability education. She is also a certified rehabilitation counselor, although she does not currently practice in that field. Council Member Jayakumar noted that she has a background in disability studies and brings lived experience as a person with low vision. She expressed her appreciation for the opportunity to join the Council.

Chuck Neuwohner, NSRC Council member, introduced himself as a native Las Vegas resident who has worked with Opportunity Village for approximately 12 years. He has a professional background in healthcare and education and currently supports teams engaged in job development and job-placement activities. Council member Neuwohner also discussed his community service, including membership on the Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada's Transportation Access Advisory Committee and leadership work with provider teams through the Nevada Association of Providers. He stated that it was an honor and a pleasure to join the Council. Chair Mayes welcomed him and recognized the Council's longstanding partnership with Opportunity Village.

American Sign Language Translator Christine Callesen, spoke for Council Member Obioma Officer, who introduced herself as the Director of the Nevada Commission for Persons Who Are Deaf and Hard of Hearing and identified herself as a hard-of-hearing individual. While still speaking through an American Sign Language interpreter, she highlighted her leadership experience throughout Nevada and the diverse perspective she brings to the Council's discussions and group dynamics. Council Member Obioma Officer expressed an interest in strengthening resources, advocacy, communication access, leadership opportunities, and local systems serving people throughout the state.

Mrs. Richter confirmed that all new members listed for introduction had been recognized and displayed the Council's current composition. Chair Mayes congratulated the administration for its progress in filling Council positions, noting that maintaining a full membership had historically been challenging. He stated that only two positions appeared to remain vacant and that one was reportedly in the process of being filled. No formal action was taken, and the Council proceeded to Agenda Item 4.

4. VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SUCCESS STORIES

The floor was opened to Mechelle Merrill, Deputy Administrator of Programs, who introduced two Vocational Rehabilitation counselors and their clients to share participant success stories.

The first presentation was led by Wendell Myers, Rehabilitation Counselor III, who introduced Eli Westphalen, a Project SEARCH participant at MountainView Hospital. Mr. Myers explained that staff observed Mr. Westphalen progress throughout the school year and were pleased when the hospital offered him permanent employment.

Mr. Westphalen credited his teacher and counselor, Mr. Cooper of Arbor View High School, as well as his mentor, Ms. Julie, with helping him enter the program and become comfortable with the experience. Although he initially felt uncertain about joining Project SEARCH, their guidance and encouragement helped him adjust and succeed. He now works in the hospital's operating room supply department, where he prepares supplies for patient procedures and responds to requests for additional items. Mr. Westphalen emphasized the importance of accuracy, speed, teamwork, and placing patients first, particularly because mistakes in a hospital setting can have serious consequences. He also discussed managing workplace stress by taking a brief break or shifting his attention to another task, such as preparing a new case, returning supplies, or checking expiration dates. Mr. Westphalen expressed pride in his work and thanked the council and staff for advocating for people with disabilities and helping them succeed.

Following that Mrs. Merrill opened the floor to Rachel Fraser, Rehabilitation Counselor III, who introduced Charles Fox. Mrs. Fraser stated that Mr. Fox was the first participant for whom she developed an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) approximately two and a half years earlier. She described his significant progress and the support provided by Vocational Rehabilitation, including soft-skills training, external job development, job coaching, transportation assistance, and work clothing. Theresa Morros of BRAIN also assisted Mr. Fox with job development and coaching.

In May, Mr. Fox obtained full-time employment as an airline passenger assistant at the airport, earning approximately $13 per hour plus tips. He explained that he assists passengers who use wheelchairs by helping them travel between locations throughout the airport and noted that some returning passengers recognize him. Mrs. Fraser and Mrs. Morros commended Charles for his hard work and expressed pride in his accomplishments. His Vocational Rehabilitation case was expected to close successfully within several weeks.

Mrs. Merrill thanked Mr. Westphalen, Mr. Fox, Mr. Myers, and Mrs. Fraser, and the other individuals who supported the participants. Chair Mayes also congratulated both participants, noted that he had personally benefited from the types of services they provide, and encouraged them to continue their good work. The council then proceeded to Agenda Item 5.

5. APPROVAL OF MAY 5, 2026, MEETING MINUTES

Chair Mayes introduced Agenda Item 5, approval of the May 5, 2026 meeting minutes. He directed members to review the minutes provided behind Tab 5 of the meeting packet and invited them to identify any errors, necessary corrections, or misspellings of members' names. No corrections or changes were requested.

Council Member Estipona moved to approve the May 5, 2026, meeting minutes as presented, and Council Member Rogers seconded the motion.

Chair Mayes called for a voice vote. The motion carried without opposition, and the May 5, 2026, meeting minutes were approved as presented.

6. 2026 NSRC FIRST DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT

Chair Mayes introduced Agenda Item 6, the Nevada State Rehabilitation Council's first draft of the 2026 Annual Report, and invited Julie Irish, DP Video Productions, to present the proposed report. Mrs. Irish shared the draft and explained that it had undergone a significant reorganization following the planning team's previous discussion. Although several areas of the draft remained incomplete, placeholders identified the content and data that would be added as development continued. The redesign is intended to capture readers' attention immediately by moving required disclaimers and administrative information from the opening pages to the back of the report. She explained that the report would begin with a one-page executive summary highlighting the Council's accomplishments during 2026, notable changes in performance, and major successes. This would be followed by a concise key-metrics snapshot showing information such as the number of clients served, employment outcomes achieved, students served, and business engagements. The intent is to place the report's most significant results near the beginning, where they will be more visible and accessible to readers.

The next section would contain leadership messages from Chair Mayes and Mr. Elez. The Chair's letter would focus on the Council's future direction, strategic priorities, and expectations for the State Rehabilitation Council, while Mr. Elez's message would take a more data-driven approach. The report would continue to emphasize the partnership between the Council and Vocational Rehabilitation Nevada. A subsequent section would describe the Council's composition, roles, and responsibilities. Rather than listing each member's employer or affiliated organization beneath their name, the revised report would identify the specific role or constituency that each member represents in the Council.

The report would then present key performance information in a more consolidated format, followed by federal performance measures and supported-employment data. The supported-employment section would include a brief narrative explaining increases or declines in performance, planned improvements, and relevant partnerships. The services section would highlight the eight most frequently provided services. Instead of repeating extensive descriptions of each service, the revised section would focus on explaining notable trends. Content concerning students with disabilities and Pre-Employment Transition Services would retain its existing layout. The related program highlights would be condensed onto a single page and would include information on CRAVE Camp, Deaf Camp, the program's various day camps, PAYSE Labs, and a Keep Nevada trip. The report would also include sections on employer partnerships and partner initiatives involving individual companies. A new section would provide additional information about technology improvements, data modernization, accessibility initiatives, and enhancements to service delivery. Other planned content included recognition of an upcoming retirement, a feature on the new West Merrill building, and a possible legislative update from Troy. The report would then transition into client success stories.

Mrs. Irish stated that the client stories would be simplified into an easy-to-scan format. Each profile could include a brief quotation from the client, the services received, the employment outcome, and potentially the client's wages and work hours. Whenever possible, the team would also seek a quotation from the employer. Readers would continue to have the option of scanning a QR code to access each client's complete story, while the printed report would offer a shorter summary for easier reading. The remaining sections would include an "In Memory of Judith Swain" tribute and an updated collaborations page renamed "Proud Partners," consistent with VR Nevada's recent branding. The Proud Partners page would display the logos of participating organizations. The report would also provide a statewide breakdown of clients served. The back page would list program locations, feature an updated design, and contain the disclaimers and required information relocated from the beginning of the report.

During discussion, Council Member Estipona recommended that future annual reports consider distributing client success stories throughout the document instead of placing them together in one section. He explained that the report

contains a substantial amount of quantitative information and that weaving personal stories into the performance sections could strengthen the narrative by illustrating the human impact behind the data. Estipona clarified that he was not proposing a major change to the current draft given its stage of development but encouraged the team to consider the idea in future years.

Chair Mayes acknowledged Council Member Estipona's suggestion and noted that the team continues to identify better ways to present the report's information. He emphasized that one of the principal changes for the 2026 report was moving important material, including the executive summary, toward the front because some readers may not progress beyond the first few pages. He confirmed that the suggestion regarding the placement of success stories would be retained for future consideration.

When asked about the next steps, Mrs. Irish stated that she, Mrs. Childers, and other internal team members would continue gathering content and final performance figures. A substantially completed draft would be presented at the next meeting, although the team might still be awaiting some final numbers. Chair Mayes complimented the report's design and thanked Irish for her work.

Council Member Kincaid also praised the improvements and suggested exploring a different color scheme or another visual distinction for the 2026 report so that it could be readily differentiated from the 2025 edition when the reports are displayed together.

Before proceeding to Agenda Item 7, Mrs. Richter informed Chair Mayes that formal action was required to accept and move forward with the progress completed to date on Agenda Item 6, the Annual Report. Chair Mayes acknowledged the oversight and requested a motion to approve the progress made thus far on the Annual Report.

Council Member Jayakumar made the motion to approve the progress on the Annual Report, and the motion was seconded by Council member Obioma Officer.

Chair Mayes then called for a vote. Members voted in favor of the motion, with no opposition expressed. The motion passed, formally approving the progress completed to date on the Annual Report. Following the vote, Chair Mayes thanked the members and proceeded to Agenda Item 7, Consumer Satisfaction Quarterly Results from Market Decisions Research.

7. CONSUMER SATISFACTION QUARTERLY RESULT FROM MARKET DECISIONS RESEARCH

Chair Mayes introduced Agenda Item 7, the Consumer Satisfaction Quarterly Results, and welcomed representatives from Market Decisions Research (MDR). Alison Cyr, MDR Project Manager, presented alongside Davis Thornton, MDR

Analysts, Mrs. Cyr explained that data collection will continue through the remainder of the year and that the presentation focused on Trimester 1 results from earlier in 2026. The presentation covered respondent demographics, core performance metrics, summary findings, scores by service area and district, and consumer feedback. She reported that most survey respondents were participants in General Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), with additional respondents from Youth in Transition and Older Individuals Who Are Blind (OIB) programs. Most respondents had been receiving services for 18 months or longer, followed by individuals who had been receiving services for up to six months and individuals with closed cases. The six-to-twelve-month service group was the smallest. The OIB respondent population was particularly small, which Mrs. Cyr emphasized should be considered when interpreting results for that group. Geographically, the Southern District accounted for the largest share of respondents, followed by the Northern and Rural districts.

MDR uses core metrics to evaluate the overall VR consumer experience and track changes between reporting periods and across years. These measures also allow Nevada's results to be compared with organizations providing similar services. Nevada's survey contains 11 core metrics consisting of six multi-question domains and five individual key questions, with results generally measured on a 0-to-100 scale. Areas evaluated include overall satisfaction and expectations, experience with VR services, experiences with staff and counselors, communication, consumer control and involvement, and outcomes and achievement of goals.

Overall results remained relatively stable compared with previous reporting periods. Overall satisfaction and expectations and experience with services each increased by approximately three points from the previous trimester. Satisfaction with current employment, however, declined and was identified as the lowest-scoring core metric. Despite lower relative scores for overall satisfaction and service experience, 90% of surveyed consumers indicated they would recommend VR services to a friend. Accessibility of VR offices received a score of 87, while experience with staff and counselors scored 85. Mrs. Cyr emphasized that relationships between consumers, counselors, and staff appear to be an important contributor to positive consumer experiences.

Differences were identified among service populations and geographic areas. Only eight OIB consumers participated in the survey, but within that limited sample, respondents reported comparatively lower ratings for the ease of the application process and accessibility and were more likely to report problems. Rural consumers generally reported the highest scores across most measures and were the least likely to report problems, although the rural sample was also smaller than the other districts. Youth in Transition respondents generally reported higher scores than General VR and OIB consumers, particularly regarding their experiences with staff and counselors. Consumers receiving services for 18 months or longer reported some of the highest satisfaction levels, while individuals with closed cases reported the lowest overall satisfaction.

Several trends were highlighted for continued monitoring. Satisfaction with current employment declined from 77 in the prior reporting period to 72 in Trimester 1 of 2026, representing the lowest level observed in the available trend data. Office accessibility remained consistently high, and the ease of the application process received a score of 78. At the same time, the percentage of consumers reporting problems increased to 37%, the highest level observed across the previous trimesters and years reviewed. OIB respondents reported problems at a rate of 52%, compared with 35% for General VR and 37% for Youth in Transition. District-level results showed strong scores in the Northern and Rural districts, while Southern District results were somewhat lower on several measures. MDR noted that the Southern District represented the largest respondent population.

Consumer feedback identified communication, responsiveness, processing times, and guidance as recurring areas of concern. Nearly one-third of respondents reported issues involving counselors or staff not returning telephone calls or emails or providing follow-up. Slightly more than one-quarter referenced lengthy or slow processes, while approximately 17% indicated a need for additional guidance, support, or explanation. MDR noted that staffing demands, service volume, and differing expectations regarding processing times may contribute to some of these concerns. At the same time, consumer comments demonstrated substantial variation in individual experiences. Some consumers specifically praised staff for being responsive, listening to their employment goals, providing individualized services, and communicating promptly, while others described significant delays in obtaining counselors, entering programs, or pursuing certifications.
During discussion, Council Member Estipona asked whether MDR could identify why satisfaction with current employment had decreased and whether dissatisfaction varied by consumer age.

Mrs. Cyr stated that some consumer feedback indicated a disconnect between expectations about a job and the reality of the position after beginning employment. She agreed to further examine whether age may be associated with the results.

Mr. Thornton clarified that Nevada's current analysis does not disaggregate results by age but stated that MDR could provide such analysis in the future. Council Member Neuwohner subsequently asked whether general-population employment satisfaction metrics could be used as a baseline for comparison. Mrs. Cyr agreed that MDR could investigate available comparative data.

Sheena Childers, VR Bureau Chief II, requested that consumer feedback regarding communication be presented as trend data across trimesters to determine whether communication outcomes are improving following interventions.

Mrs. Cyr confirmed that MDR could analyze the information in this manner. Chair Mayes noted that communication is an area the program is actively attempting to

address. Chair Mayes also raised an accessibility concern regarding the presentation materials, requesting that MDR avoid dark background colors because they can make printed information difficult to read, particularly for committee members with low vision. She explained that colors had been used to identify high and low scores and agreed that MDR could use a more accessible method of highlighting those results in future materials.

Robin Kincaid, NSRC Council Member, discussed communication concerns from the perspective of the Parent Training and Information Center, noting that calls received by the organization frequently involve breakdowns in communication between counselors and individuals with disabilities. She asked whether additional context was available regarding reports of unanswered calls and emails, including whether consumers were waiting days, weeks, or months or had lost communication entirely.

Mrs. Cyr stated that MDR maintains a compilation of verbatim consumer comments and could review those comments to provide additional context regarding the nature and duration of communication problems.

Council Member Kincaid also asked how current communication-related findings compare with results from approximately one year earlier.

Mrs. Cyr stated that the results appeared relatively consistent but agreed to conduct a trend analysis across previous trimesters and years to evaluate changes and the possible impact of communication improvement efforts.
Council member Kincaid additionally asked whether consumer comments posted on social media are considered. Mechelle Merrill responded that social media is monitored but explained that responding can become difficult when individuals begin discussing personal circumstances in a public forum.

Following the questions and discussion, Chair Mayes thanked MDR for the presentation before moving onto the next Agenda item.

8. DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT BUSINESS PARTNERSHIPS PROGRAM UPDATES

Chair Mayes opened the floor, which was offered to Cyndy Cendagorta, Chief of the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP).

Mrs. Cendagorta provided an update on the Disability Employment Business Partnerships Program. She reported that ODEP has undergone several changes over the past few months and is preparing its first annual report, which is expected to be released within the next several months. The report will include data regarding VR Nevada and its overall impact, including information related to economic impact. It will also highlight the activities and accomplishments of the Business Services Team and provide information on new initiatives being

developed and implemented within VR Nevada. She also announced plans to expand ODEP's online presence by adding a dedicated section to its website for research and data. This section will serve as a centralized location for publishing accessible research products, including one-page reports, brief data summaries, and other concise informational documents. At the next meeting, Mrs. Cendagorta plans to provide members with a packet containing examples of the research, data, and informational products ODEP is developing.

Regarding employer engagement, Mrs. Cendagorta reported that business outreach efforts continue to be strong. As part of these efforts, an Inclusion Award was recently presented to Tapestry, an employer partner in Southern Nevada, in recognition of its successful work with individuals with disabilities. She noted that she had an opportunity to tour the Tapestry site and viewed the organization's approach as a strong model for effective employer partnerships and disability-inclusive employment practices.

Mrs. Cendagorta indicated that ODEP hopes to develop a future case study examining Tapestry's practices and successes in employing and working with individuals with disabilities. Such a case study could provide a model for strengthening similar partnerships with other employers. She concluded by noting that several additional projects and initiatives are currently in development and that more detailed information will be presented at future meetings.

Chair Jack Mayes thanked Mrs. Cendagorta for the update and expressed interest in reviewing the forthcoming materials and research. No additional questions were raised by committee members, and the committee proceeded to Agenda Item 9.

9. DISABILITY INNOVATION FUND

Jennifer Kane, Nevada Department of Education, provided an update on the Disability Innovation Fund (DIF) grant and Nevada TRIP. The Nevada Department of Education serves as the DIF grantee, with required partners including Nevada Vocational Rehabilitation, the Northern and Southern Nevada Centers for Independent Living, and local education agencies. Additional partners include Nevada PEP, the Statewide Independent Living Council, and the Nevada System of Higher Education through the Nevada Center for Excellence in Disabilities at the University of Nevada, Reno.

Mrs. Kane explained that the five-year grant was awarded in 2023 and focuses on Pathways to Partnerships. The initiative is designed to improve coordination and create more seamless transitions for Nevada children and youth with disabilities, ages 10-24, as well as their families, support systems, and the professionals who serve them. A major accomplishment was the launch of the Nevada TRIP website on April 1, 2025. A Nevada TRIP mobile application is also under development and expected to launch in the future.

The third year of the grant, ending September 30, 2026, focused heavily on professional development for youth service professionals. Nevada TRIP is developing a series of on-demand training courses through the Nevada Department of Education's Canvas Learning Management System. Two courses have been launched -*Understanding Nevada's Centers for Independent Living* and *Understanding Disability Pride*- with a third course scheduled for release soon. The project intends to develop at least 12 additional training courses during the coming year featuring the various partners serving transition-age youth and their families.

Nevada TRIP also held its first large statewide conference on July 31 at Caesars Republic at Lake Tahoe, with more than 100 youth service professionals from across Nevada participating. Mrs. Kane indicated that survey results from both the conference and the Canvas training courses could be shared with the Committee if desired. Additionally, the project received federal pre-approval to send 20 state and local education agency staff members to the Division on Career Development and Transition Conference in October. Participants will subsequently bring information back to Nevada through three regional trainings in Las Vegas, Reno, and northeastern Nevada, expanding access to professionals in rural areas.

Beginning October 1, Nevada TRIP will enter the fourth year of the five-year grant and expand participation by adding six school districts to the six already involved. The expansion will include Washoe County School District, larger rural districts such as Elko County, and additional rural and remote districts. This will bring Nevada TRIP participation to 12 of Nevada's 18 school districts. Participating districts are also identifying Nevada TRIP Outreach Specialists, who receive grant-funded stipends to assist with implementation and outreach.

Mrs. Kane concluded that Nevada TRIP continues to make progress in expanding partnerships, professional training, and statewide transition services. She offered to provide additional information and updates at future meetings. Chair Mayes thanked Mrs. Kane for the presentation, asked for questions from the Committee, and hearing none, proceeded to Agenda Item 10.

10. OTHER REPORTS

Kate Osti, representing the Nevada Disability Advocacy and Law Center's Client Assistance Program (CAP), provided an update, covering June, July, and August. Mrs. Osti reported that CAP received 22 new Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) cases during the three-month reporting period. She noted that a more comprehensive fiscal-year report will be presented at the November meeting and will include a breakdown of cases by category, such as failure to provide services and communication-related concerns.

Mrs. Osti also reported that CAP received one case involving a Center for Independent Living, noting that CAP's responsibilities include matters involving the Centers for Independent Living in addition to Vocational Rehabilitation. The case

involved concerns with the Southern Nevada Center for Independent Living, and CAP is currently working with Mary Evelseizer to address and resolve the issues. Osti further reported that CAP was not currently representing any individuals in fair hearings. She stated that the complete fiscal-year report would be provided for the November meeting and that she anticipated submitting the report to Benny in mid-October.

Chair Jack Mayes thanked Osti for the update and invited questions from the Committee. No questions were raised. He then noted that Dawn Lyons was unable to attend and introduced Julie Steinbaugh to provide the next report.
After being welcomed by Chair Mayes, Julie Steinbaugh, Chair of the Nevada SILC, provided updates on upcoming SPIL Workgroup meetings.

Chair Mayes thanked those that provided reports for attending and invited questions from the Committee. No questions were raised, and the Committee proceeded to Agenda Item 11.

11. DIVISION REPORTS

Mr. Elez introduced Agenda Item 11, Division Reports, and turned the presentation over to Bureau Chief Sheena Childers to provide updates regarding staffing vacancies, caseloads, program goals, performance indicators, and fair hearings. Mr. Elez indicated that he would subsequently provide additional information regarding the Division's recent accomplishments, ongoing initiatives, and progress toward its strategic priorities.

Mrs. Childers began by reviewing staffing vacancy rates for VR Nevada. She reported that the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation (BVR) had a vacancy rate of 16.1%, while the Bureau of Services to the Blind and Visually Impaired (BSB) had a vacancy rate of 16.6%. The combined vacancy rate was reported as 16.1%, representing 27 vacant positions across both bureaus. Mrs. Childers explained that these figures included newly authorized legislative positions intended to support the development of a statewide intake unit. Hiring for these positions had not yet moved forward, contributing to the overall vacancy figures. She noted that staffing remained an important consideration as the Division continued working to strengthen service delivery and address increasing demand for vocational rehabilitation services.

Mrs. Childers then reviewed the NSRC goals and performance indicators for Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2026, with data reported through June 30, 2026. The first goal focused on increasing competitive integrated employment outcomes. As of June 30, the Division achieved 345 successful employment closures toward its annual goal of 550. Mrs. Childers acknowledged that the Division was behind the pace necessary to meet its federal fiscal year target, with one quarter remaining. She also reported that the Division had achieved 428 successful employment outcomes during the state fiscal year ending June 30, 2026, which was slightly below the previous state fiscal year's total. She expressed concern regarding the

downward trend in successful employment outcomes and emphasized that both bureaus were actively developing strategies to improve performance and increase the number of individuals successfully obtaining employment.

The second goal addressed increasing participation among students with disabilities in Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS). Mrs. Childers reported that 1,965 students had received Pre-ETS services as of June 30, compared to the annual goal of 2,200. She expressed confidence that the Division would meet or exceed this target, noting that a substantial portion of Pre-ETS activities takes place during the summer months. The third goal focused on increasing the number of potentially eligible students with disabilities who transition from receiving Pre-ETS services to applying for comprehensive vocational rehabilitation services. Mrs. Childers explained that this measure helps determine whether participation in Pre-ETS encourages students who are not currently VR clients to apply for additional services.

The third goal addressed was Increase Participation of Potentially Eligible Students With a Disability in VR Services. Mrs. Childers reported that as of June 30, the Division had received 557 transition student applications toward its annual goal of 1,100. She acknowledged that achieving this target would be challenging. She also discussed a newly available conversion-rate measure provided through collaboration with the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), which tracks the percentage of eligible students with disabilities who become VR clients. She emphasized the importance of using this information to evaluate the effectiveness of Pre-ETS activities and improve future student engagement and enrollment.

The fourth goal addressed increasing participation and successful employment outcomes among individuals receiving supported employment services. Mrs. Childers reported that the Division was serving 874 supported employment consumers statewide, exceeding its annual participation goal of 700. However, the number of supported employment consumers achieving successful employment outcomes remained below expectations. As of June 30, only 74 consumers had achieved employment outcomes, compared to the annual goal of 125. Mrs. Childers noted that successful supported employment outcomes had been declining over the past several years and acknowledged that meeting the current target would be difficult. She indicated that the Division continued to monitor these outcomes closely and was working to improve employment success among individuals requiring supported employment services.

Following the review of program goals, Mrs. Childers presented the Division's performance indicators. The first indicator examined successful employment outcomes among specific disability populations to assess the extent to which the Division was serving individuals across different disability categories. As of June 30, the Division reported 131 successful employment closures among individuals with mental health disabilities, 23 among individuals who are blind or have low vision, and 40 among individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. She also

highlighted the addition of a new reporting category for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, which recorded 47 successful employment closures. She explained that the reported figures represent individuals who successfully obtained employment rather than the total number of individuals receiving services. These indicators were presented for informational and monitoring purposes and did not have established performance targets.

The second performance indicator focused on average caseload sizes across the two bureaus. Mrs. Childers reported that, as of June 30, the average caseload for the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation was 113 cases, while the Bureau of Services to the Blind and Visually Impaired maintained an average caseload of approximately 61 cases. These figures included all open cases, regardless of case status. She emphasized that caseload levels remained an important operational consideration and were being closely monitored by the Division.

The third indicator addressed participation and successful employment outcomes within the 700-Hour Program. Mrs. Childers reported that 23 individuals were actively participating in the program and that seven participants had successfully completed the program and achieved competitive integrated employment during the reporting period.

Mrs. Childers concluded her initial presentation by providing an update on fair hearing requests. She reported that the Division had received seven requests for fair hearings during FFY 2026 through June 30. She explained that these requests represented less than one percent of the Division's overall caseload and individuals served during the reporting period. While acknowledging that some clients experience challenges or disagreements regarding program services, Mrs. Childers emphasized that the number of cases requiring formal fair hearings remained relatively low. She noted that the Division continues to address client concerns through established resolution processes, including mediation and other efforts to reach agreements before formal hearings become necessary.

Following Mrs. Childers presentation, Chair Mayes invited questions from Council members. Hearing none, he turned the discussion back over to Drazen Elez for additional Division updates.

Mr. Elez began his report by recognizing Jenny Richter for her service as the NSRC liaison over the past two years. He expressed appreciation for her dedication, hard work, and commitment to supporting the Council and ensuring its effective operation. Mr. Elez emphasized the significant amount of administrative and organizational work that takes place behind the scenes to support Council activities and acknowledged Mrs. Richter’s contributions to those efforts. He announced that Mrs. Richter had accepted a promotion within VR Nevada and would therefore be attending her final meeting as the NSRC liaison. Mr. Elez congratulated her on the new opportunity and thanked her for her service to both

the Council and VR Nevada. He indicated that a new liaison would be introduced at a future Council meeting once the position had been filled.

Mr. Elez then provided an overview of several significant activities and accomplishments since the previous Council meeting, highlighting their alignment with the Division's strategic priorities. He discussed the recent Nevada TRIP Conference, which brought together representatives from education, workforce development, disability services, community organizations, and government agencies to strengthen transition outcomes for students and youth with disabilities. Mr. Elez emphasized the active participation of VR Nevada staff, who attended the conference, delivered presentations, and helped facilitate important discussions. He noted that Nevada TRIP has evolved beyond its original function as a website or grant-funded initiative and is becoming an important collaborative effort to strengthen connections between service systems. These partnerships are intended to improve coordination and reduce the likelihood that young people with disabilities experience gaps in services as they transition from education into employment and adulthood.

During the Nevada TRIP Conference, VR Nevada also presented its inaugural Disability Impact Award to Jennifer Kane of the Nevada Department of Education. Mr. Elez recognized Mrs. Kane for her exceptional partnership with VR Nevada, particularly her efforts to improve transition services and strengthen collaboration between educational institutions and vocational rehabilitation programs. He explained that the newly established award was intended to acknowledge individuals whose contributions demonstrate the importance of meaningful partnerships in improving outcomes for Nevadans with disabilities. Mr. Elez expressed appreciation for Mrs. Kane's continued collaboration and emphasized that this type of interagency cooperation represents the partnerships VR Nevada hopes to expand throughout the state.

Mr. Elez continued by outlining the Division's primary strategic priorities, which include strengthening organizational capacity, improving service delivery, expanding youth transition services, modernizing operations, and increasing responsiveness to client needs. He acknowledged the ongoing challenges associated with recruiting and retaining qualified vocational rehabilitation professionals, particularly as the Division works to integrate and fill newly authorized positions. He explained that Nevada does not currently have a higher education program specifically designed to prepare vocational rehabilitation professionals, making recruitment particularly challenging. Individuals who complete specialized vocational rehabilitation programs in other states must relocate to Nevada to pursue employment opportunities, which can create additional barriers to recruitment. Despite these difficulties, the Division has successfully recruited qualified individuals from other social service disciplines who have adapted their professional experience and developed the specialized knowledge necessary to provide vocational rehabilitation services.

To address these long-term workforce development challenges, Mr. Elez reported that VR Nevada has initiated discussions with the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) regarding the potential development of specialized vocational rehabilitation education opportunities. Rather than establishing an entirely separate academic degree program, the discussions have focused on the possibility of creating a vocational rehabilitation-specific enhancement or additional educational component for individuals who have completed a master's degree in a social services-related field. Mr. Elez explained that such an initiative could help establish a more sustainable pipeline of qualified vocational rehabilitation professionals within Nevada, reduce dependence on out-of-state recruitment, and strengthen the Division's future workforce capacity. He emphasized that discussions were still ongoing and that additional information would be provided to the Council as plans developed.

Mr. Elez also highlighted the Division's continued expansion of youth transition services and employment preparation opportunities. He reported that VR Nevada is strengthening its partnerships with school districts, adult education programs, and PACE Labs while continuing to offer summer programming, summer camps, and the Summer Youth Internship Program. These initiatives are designed to provide students and youth with disabilities with opportunities to develop employment-related skills, gain practical work experience, and prepare for successful transitions into the workforce. Elez emphasized that these direct service initiatives complement the broader collaborative work of Nevada TRIP, which continues to strengthen coordination among education, workforce, and disability service systems across the state.

Mr. Elez then provided updates on several technology modernization initiatives designed to improve operational efficiency, reduce administrative responsibilities, and enhance service delivery for vocational rehabilitation clients. He highlighted significant progress on the AWARE Artificial Intelligence (AI) Project, explaining that the technology is intended to assist VR staff with administrative functions rather than replace professional judgment or decision-making. He emphasized that AI will not make determinations on behalf of VR counselors and is not expected to generate the majority of case notes. Instead, the technology will help streamline administrative tasks, including completing forms, entering information into various sections of the AWARE case management system, and improving data collection and analysis. These enhancements are expected to provide staff with greater flexibility in evaluating program information and identifying opportunities to improve client services.

Mr. Elez also discussed the Division's continued expansion of Microsoft Power BI to strengthen reporting capabilities and data analysis. He explained that the Division is developing additional reports for internal program evaluation and external publication, allowing staff to access and analyze information more effectively. He further reported progress on the Disability Benefits 101 website; a project initiated approximately four years ago that has experienced several

contractual and administrative delays. Although the website has not yet launched, Mr. Elez indicated that development was nearing completion. Once available, the website is expected to provide individuals with disabilities with valuable information regarding how employment may affect their existing public benefits, including Social Security, medical coverage, and other state or federal assistance programs. The website will also help individuals estimate how many hours they may be able to work before potentially affecting their benefits, allowing them to make more informed employment decisions. Additionally, Mr. Elez noted that the Division is expanding the use of its consumer portal and pursuing other technology improvements to simplify processes for clients and provide staff with more effective tools.

Mr. Elez connected these modernization efforts to the consumer satisfaction information presented earlier in the meeting. He acknowledged that survey results reflected positive experiences among consumers regarding their interactions with VR staff and counselors. However, he also recognized that communication, responsiveness, and timeliness remained areas requiring improvement. He emphasized that the Division's responsibility extends beyond reviewing consumer satisfaction findings and that the information must be incorporated into strategic planning and operational decision-making. He explained that the Division intends to use consumer feedback to identify service delivery challenges, improve the client experience, and guide future program enhancements.

As part of these improvement efforts, Mr. Elez provided an update on the Division's plans to establish a new statewide intake team using additional positions authorized through the legislative process. He explained that implementation of these positions had been delayed because of space limitations and the inability to occupy the Division's new Las Vegas office location. Although the location had been selected and contractual agreements finalized nearly a year earlier, the facility remained unopened due to delays involving required permits, licensing, and approvals from local jurisdictions. Mr. Elez expressed optimism that the remaining issues would be resolved and that the facility could open within approximately four to six weeks. He indicated that the new location would provide the necessary capacity to move forward with hiring and implementing the intake team.

Mr. Elez explained that the proposed statewide intake model is intended to improve efficiency by combining intake and eligibility functions during the initial phase of the vocational rehabilitation process. By assigning these responsibilities to a dedicated team, the Division hopes to reduce the administrative workload of existing VR counselors and allow them to devote more time to individualized employment planning, coordinating and delivering appropriate services, monitoring client progress, and assisting individuals in securing employment. He emphasized that these changes are designed to create a more streamlined experience for clients while allowing counselors to concentrate on activities that directly contribute to successful employment outcomes. Mr. Elez reiterated that, although significant progress has been made toward the Division's strategic goals,

additional work remains necessary. He identified building organizational capacity, improving consumer experiences, strengthening partnerships, modernizing operations, and increasing meaningful employment opportunities for Nevadans with disabilities as the Division's continuing priorities.

Following Mr. Elez's report, Mrs. Childers provided an announcement regarding upcoming VR Nevada town hall meetings. She reported that two virtual town halls were scheduled for Monday, October 5, at 10:00 a.m., and Monday, October 12, at 5:00 p.m. Both meetings would be conducted exclusively through Zoom, with no in-person participation option. She explained that an informational flyer would be distributed to community partners once it had been finalized and remediated for accessibility. She encouraged Council members and partners to mark their calendars and participate in the upcoming sessions.

Mr. Elez added that this would mark the third consecutive year that VR Nevada has conducted town hall meetings. He emphasized that these events serve as an important opportunity to gather feedback from consumers, community members, and stakeholders regarding their experiences with vocational rehabilitation services and their expectations for the agency's future direction. He explained that the information collected through the town halls would be considered alongside consumer satisfaction surveys, Council discussions, and employee surveys to inform the Division's strategic planning process. Mr. Elez noted that incorporating feedback from multiple perspectives allows the Division to better understand the needs of its clients, staff, and community partners and supports a more comprehensive approach to identifying priorities and improving services.

Following the conclusion of the Division's report, Chair Mayes invited additional questions or comments. He then raised the issue of the Council's bylaws subcommittee, noting that the subcommittee had held a meeting since the previous Council meeting. Chair Mayes requested clarification regarding the next steps in the bylaws review process.

Mr. Elez responded that the next step would be to schedule another bylaws subcommittee meeting. He acknowledged that the Division had originally intended to hold the follow-up meeting before the current Council meeting but that several unexpected circumstances during the summer had delayed scheduling. He apologized for the delay and indicated that the Division hoped to schedule both the bylaws subcommittee and employer subcommittee meetings within the next couple of months.

Mr. Elez further explained that the findings and recommendations developed through the subcommittee meetings would determine whether any proposed changes or actions needed to be presented to the full Council for consideration and approval. If the subcommittees identified recommendations requiring formal Council action, those items would be brought forward for a vote. If additional review or development was necessary, the subcommittees would continue meeting until

recommendations or other work products were sufficiently developed for Council consideration and eventual implementation.

Chair Mayes thanked Mr. Elez for the clarification and provided another opportunity for questions or comments. Hearing none, he concluded Agenda Item 11 and moved the meeting forward to Agenda Item 12, Comments by the Council.

12. COMMENTS BY THE COUNCIL

During Council comments, Chair Mayes invited members to share comments, upcoming activities or events, and suggestions for future agenda items. With no initial comments from Council members, Chair Mayes requested that a future meeting agenda include a discussion regarding employment placements and the efforts currently being undertaken to improve placement outcomes. He expressed concern about the downward trend in employment placement statistics presented earlier in the meeting and emphasized the importance of providing Council members with an opportunity to ask questions, offer input, and explore potential strategies to address the decline. Mr. Elez acknowledged the request and confirmed that the topic would be included on a future meeting agenda. Chair Mayes again invited additional comments from Council members. Hearing none, he concluded the agenda item and proceeded to the final public comment period.

13. PUBLIC COMMENT

Chair Mayes invited members of the public to provide comments and outlined the procedures for participation and time limits.

Chair Jack Mayes opened the floor for final public comments and invited members of the public to provide comments. He reminded attendees that, pursuant to Nevada Revised Statutes (NRS) 241.020, no action could be taken on matters raised during public comment unless those matters were included on a properly noticed agenda as items for possible action. Due to time constraints, public comments were limited to three minutes per speaker.

Chair Mayes requested that individuals wishing to speak state and spell their full names for the record. He explained that individuals attending at the designated in-person locations would be given the opportunity to comment first, followed by those participating virtually or by telephone.

Steven Cohen, Member of the Public, addressed the Council and stated that, in the interest of time, he would defer to the written public comments he had previously submitted to Mrs. Richter, and Uriah Carter, Administrative Assistant II.

Chair Mayes thanked Mr. Cohen for his participation and proceeded to invite additional comments from attendees at the Southern Nevada and Northern Nevada locations. Hearing no further comments from those locations, he opened the floor to virtual participants.

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Obioma U. Officer, Executive Director of the DHHSI Commission, addressed the Council to extend an invitation to an upcoming Engagement Conference scheduled for November 13–14. She explained that the conference would be free to attend and would involve a partnership with Vocational Rehabilitation (VR). As part of this collaboration, VR staff would participate as presenters, and students enrolled in VR programs would have opportunities to gain valuable work experience through employment at the event. Ms. Officer emphasized that the conference would provide an opportunity for Council members and community partners to support students, recognize the contributions of VR staff, and strengthen engagement with the deaf and hard-of-hearing community. She further explained that the event would feature an advocacy camp for deaf, hard-of-hearing, and Children of Deaf Adults (CODA) students, modeled after an existing Deaf Camp program. The advocacy camp would provide opportunities for students to participate in educational activities, develop advocacy skills, and learn about legislative initiatives affecting the communities represented by the Commission. Ms. Officer encouraged Council members to attend the conference, support participating students and staff, and recognize the event's potential to promote advocacy, inclusion, and positive change throughout Nevada.

Chair Mayes thanked Ms. Officer for sharing the information and noted that he had recently received a community-distributed save-the-date announcement for a Deaf Awareness Month public event scheduled for September 12, from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. in Reno. He shared this information to acknowledge that outreach efforts were reaching community members and helping promote awareness of upcoming events. Ms. Officer expressed her appreciation for the acknowledgment.

Following these comments, Chair Mayes provided one final opportunity for additional remarks. Hearing none, he thanked attendees for their participation and proceeded to the final agenda item, adjournment. No formal action was taken during the public comment period.

14. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Mayes called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Obioma U. Officer made the motion to adjourn, which was seconded by Council member Edward Estipona.

Chair Mayes called for a vote, and the motion carried with no opposition recorded.

Chair Mayes thanked all attendees for their participation, and the meeting was officially adjourned at 3:07 p.m.

MEETING MINUTES SUBMITTED BY URIAH CARTER, AA II

EDITED BY: AMANDA MATA, NSRC LIAISON.

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Amanda Mata, N.S.R.C. Liaison

Approved By:

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Jack Mayes, Chair

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