

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

Tuesday, February 03, 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)  
Dawn Lyons  
Sandra Sinicrope  
Jennifer Kane  
Laura Thompson (Non-Voting)  
David Nuestro

**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  
Trina Bourke, VR Bureau Chief I  
Cyndy Cendagorta, Chief of the Office of Disability Employment Policy  
Matthew Dorangricchia, VR Northern District Manager  
Raquel O'Neill, Statewide Rehab Manager for the Blind.  
Marshal Hernandez Statewide Rehab Manager for Pre-ETS  
Vivian Rosas, Rehabilitation Counselor III  
Jenna Varshabi, Rehabilitation Counselor III  
Kelsey Meno, Rehabilitation Counselor III

Marla Robinson, Management Analyst IV  
Edward Green, Administrative Assistant III  
Uriah Carter, Administrative Assistant II

**GUESTS/PUBLIC:**

Tamara Russell, American Sign Language (ASL) Translator  
Mitch Bartlett, ASL Translator  
Kate Osti, Executive Director of NDALC  
Robin Kincaid, Nevada PEP  
Chuck Neuwohner, Opportunity Village  
Allison Cyr, Market Decisions Research  
Davis Thorton, Market Decisions Research  
Lashauna Griggley  
Danielle Stroop  
Ellen Marquez

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

Jack Mayes, N.S.R.C. Chair, called the meeting to order at 1:03 pm. Jenny Richter Livia, N.S.R.C. Liaison, conducted roll call. All Council members were present.

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-Goodman, 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.

Drazen Elez, Vocational Rehabilitation Administrator, addressed the Council to announce and celebrate the return of two former Nevada State Rehabilitation Council (NSRC) leaders to key roles within Nevada Vocational Rehabilitation (VR). Raquel O'Neill was welcomed as the new Statewide Manager of the Bureau of Services to the Blind and Visually Impaired, bringing over two decades of experience in VR counseling, clinical social work, advocacy, and program design, including the development of Nevada's residential blindness skills training center.

Cynthia Cendagorta was introduced as the new Chief of the Office of Disability Employment Policy, contributing extensive expertise in public policy, workforce development, legislative strategy, and organizational leadership.

Additionally, Trina Bourke was reintroduced as the newly appointed Bureau Chief I, a position created during the recent legislative session; she brings over 20 years of vocational rehabilitation experience, including significant leadership in Southern Nevada. The Council expressed appreciation for their continued commitment to serving Nevadans with disabilities.

With no further public comments, the Chair moved to the next agenda item.

**3. VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SUCCESS STORIES**

Chair Mayes opened the floor to Mechelle Merrill, VR Deputy Administrator of Programs. She invited counselors to share client success stories starting with Jenna Varshabi, Rehabilitation Counselor III.

Counselor Varshabi presented her client, Danielle Stroop, who has worked with Vocational Rehabilitation since 2021 after graduating high school as a first-generation student with a learning disability and an IEP.

Ms. Stroop described the challenges she faced navigating college and employment with limited external support and explained how Vocational Rehabilitation services helped her access resources, develop strategies aligned with her learning needs, and successfully complete her associate's degree at Truckee Meadows Community College in Communications Studies, followed by a bachelor's degree in Communications with a minor in HR Management from University of Nevada, Reno (UNR) in May 2025. She shared that she secured employment with Reno Housing Authority as a Resident Engagement Specialist, where she now supports others entering the workforce. Ms. Stroop expressed gratitude for the program's impact on her academic and professional success, and the team acknowledged her achievements and contributions.

Mrs. Merrill proceeded with additional Vocational Rehabilitation success stories and invited Vivian Rosas, Rehabilitation Counselor III, to share client's success story.

Counselor Rosas shared two client updates, beginning with Sharon Ann Gross, whose intake occurred in November 2024. After 30 years in the dental field, Mrs. Gross sought a career transition within healthcare and, with Vocational Rehabilitation support, enrolled in online coursework to become a certified registered central service technician. She is now employed at Renown Health. Counselor Rosas, shared by quoting Mrs. Gross expressing gratitude for the guidance and encouragement provided through the program, specifically acknowledging the support in helping her confidently transition into a new profession. Counselor Rojas also noted that Mrs. Gross entered services struggling with her disabilities but recently has shown great progress and improvements in her well-being.

Counselor Rosas further shared a second success story highlighting client Jerry Brent Shaw, who experienced significant medical challenges which ultimately forced her to leave the workforce and exhaust her savings. After receiving appropriate medical treatment, Mrs. Shaw engaged with Vocational Rehabilitation services and participated in training, including a 700-hour program, where she received support with coursework, applications, and mock interviews. With assistance from program staff, she secured a local position in Reno with the Nevada Gaming Control Board, aligning with her prior gaming industry experience at International Game Technology. Mrs. Shaw reported that she has now been in

this new role for several weeks. She feels supported in her work environment, and expressed strong appreciation for the encouragement and practical assistance she received throughout the rehabilitation process.

Mrs. Merrill thanked the Counselors for their hard work and the dedication that is reflected in our client's success stories.

#### **4. APPROVAL OF NOVEMBER 18, 2025, MEETING MINUTES**

Chair Mayes opened the floor for review and approval of the November 18, 2025, meeting minutes. Members were invited to examine the minutes and offer any corrections or changes; none were noted.

Dawn Lyons, N.S.R.C. Council Member, moved to approve the minutes as presented, and David Nuestro, N.S.R.C. Council Member, seconded the motion. All members in favor, none opposed, none abstained, motion carried.

#### **5. PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS OF THE FFY2025 CONSUMER SATISFACTION SURVEY, CONDUCTED ON BEHALF OF THE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM BY MARKET DECISIONS RESEARCH**

Chair Mayes introduced Agenda Item 5, a presentation on the Fiscal Year 2025 Consumer Satisfaction Survey conducted on behalf of the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program by Market Decisions Research (MDR).

Alison Cyr, Project Manager, and Davis Thornton, Research Analyst, presented in place of Candace Welsh. The survey included 1,441 completed responses from consumers with open or closed cases between January and September 2025, including 991 general VR consumers, 413 Youth in Transition, and 37 Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB). Respondents represented a range of service durations, from IEP to six months (552 clients), six to twelve months in service (121 clients), and 18 months or longer (521 clients), as well as 239 clients with closed cases. Presenters outlined the methodology and explained that results are measured using 11 core metrics -six multi-question domains and five individual key questions- scored on a 0-100 scale to allow year-over-year and interstate comparisons. Domains assessed included: overall satisfaction and expectations, service experience, staff and counselor interactions, communication, consumer involvement and control, and program outcomes, while key questions addressed the ease of application, office accessibility, employment satisfaction, likelihood of recommending the program, and problems experienced. Overall results indicated the highest client score (89) in office accessibility, while overall satisfaction and expectations received the lowest score among the core metrics.

Ms. Cyr provided a summary of the core survey metrics, indicating that consumers continue to report positive experiences and general satisfaction with VR services. The highest-rated areas across all groups included accessibility of the VR office, likelihood of recommending the program to friends or family members with disabilities, and positive experiences with staff and counselors. Staff interactions were then emphasized as a notable achievement, which Ms. Cyr said she would return to later in the discussion. Youth in Transition consumers reported slightly higher core metrics than general VR and OIB consumers. Lower-rated metrics across groups included the percentage of consumers experiencing problems, overall satisfaction and expectations, experience with services provided, and communication with staff. Ms. Cyr noted that additional details on these lower-scoring areas would be reviewed by consumer group.

Ms. Cyr reviewed findings specific to general VR consumers, noting that overall experiences remain positive, particularly in accessibility of the office, likelihood to recommend the program, and interactions with staff and counselors, with top scores of 88 for accessibility and recommendation. Accessibility declined in late 2024 to 85 but rebounded to 91 in 2025. Consumers receiving services for 6–12 months reported the most positive experiences, especially regarding staff support and goal achievement. Lower-scoring domains among these consumers included overall satisfaction (72), experience with services (73), and communication with staff (73), though these lower scores are still within the satisfied range. Consumers with closed cases reported significantly lower satisfaction (34% overall satisfied), and only 30% indicated they had not experienced a problem. Those who worked with multiple counselors were more likely to report communication issues and service delays. In summary, while 67% of consumers overall reported no problems, common concerns among those who did included lack of responsiveness from counselors, insufficient support, paperwork challenges, and delays entering the program; individuals in service 18 months or longer reported the most issues. Employment outcomes showed that 46% of general VR consumers are working, and 76% of employed individuals are satisfied with their jobs. Among those dissatisfied (22%), concerns centered on low pay, with 10% expressing desire for higher wages as a “pain point.” 15% said that they faced no challenges, but had limited growth opportunities.

Ms. Cyr reviewed detailed data specific to Youth in Transition VR Consumers, noting that overall experiences for this subgroup remain generally positive. Domain scores ranged from 72 to 90, with youth in transition rating 9 of the 11-core metrics higher than general VR consumers. The highest-rated areas were accessibility of the VR office (90) and likelihood of recommending VR services to friends with

disabilities (90), as well as positive experiences with staff and counselors, which again were highly rated metrics among general consumers. Additionally, Trimester 1 of 2025 reflected improvement over the prior trimester, with core metrics rising by an average of more than three points. Accessibility saw an eight-point increase, while reports of not experiencing problems improved significantly compared to the previous period, a decrease of nine points.

Ms. Cyr reported that despite these strengths, several areas of concern were identified. Communications with staff received the lowest domain score (72), and 29% of youth in transition reported experiencing problems—an increase of 13 percentage points compared to 2024. Problem resolution rates remain relatively low, with only 39% of those reporting an issue indicating that Nevada VR worked to resolve it. Other declining or less favorable trends included communication and responsiveness, ease of application (which dipped mid-year), and slightly weakened perceptions around outcomes and meeting goals. While Youth in Transition continue to report higher satisfaction overall compared to other groups, fewer consumers experiencing fewer problems, these downward trends warrant monitoring.

Regarding service utilization, Ms. Cyr reported that approximately half to two-thirds of Youth in Transition reported receiving targeted pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS). Among those who participated, satisfaction was extremely high. Job exploration counseling (64% participation) was rated valuable by 95% of users; workplace readiness (63%) and work-based learning (59%) were each rated 98% valuable; instruction in self-advocacy (52%) was rated 99% valuable; and counseling on postsecondary or trade opportunities (48%) was rated 96% valuable. These findings indicate strong perceived value among participants, even where utilization rates are moderate.

Ms. Cyr reported that of youth consumers overall, 71% reported not experiencing a problem with VR services. However, among those who did report issues, common themes included counselors not returning calls or emails, insufficient follow-up, communication gaps, delays in services, and difficulties with paperwork or forms. Only 39% of those who did report issues indicate that VR worked to resolve the issues. Many of those experiencing issues reported being in service for 18 months or more, reflecting experiences in other subgroups. Over half of dissatisfied respondents cited communication challenges, and nearly half noted difficulties completing required documentation or waiting extended periods for services.

Chair Mayes commented on an observation about a pattern of high satisfaction with staff alongside concerns about communication. Ms. Cyr suggested that this disconnect may stem from unclear expectations regarding response times and counselor availability. She noted that consumers may expect rapid follow-up, while agency response standards may reasonably require more time due to workload demands. She recommended greater transparency around communication timelines to better align expectations and reduce perceived dissatisfaction.

Ms. Cyr reported on survey findings related to Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB) and their experiences with the VR program. Overall, OIB consumers reported generally positive experiences, though their satisfaction levels were somewhat lower compared to youth in transition and general VR populations. It was noted that the OIB group had the smallest sample size, which should be considered when interpreting results. As with other subgroups, the most positively rated aspect of the experience was working with program staff and counselors. Additional strengths included outcomes and goal attainment, as well as willingness to recommend VR services to friends with disabilities. Notably, OIB consumers who had been in service for 18 months or longer reported more positive experiences and fewer problems, a trend that differs from patterns observed in other groups.

Ms. Cyr presented areas identified as less positive for OIB consumers which included accessibility of VR offices, communication with staff, timeliness of services, and ease of the application process. The lowest scoring core metric was overall satisfaction and expectations (65), followed by communication with staff (67) and ease of application (68).

While 64% of OIB consumers reported not experiencing problems, among those who did report issues, only 19% indicated that VR had worked to resolve them. Common sources of dissatisfaction included difficulty completing paperwork, the need for more accessible forms, transportation and distance barriers to VR offices, lack of timely follow-up from counselors, and delays in initiating services. Consumers with closed cases consistently reported lower satisfaction levels.

Ms. Cyr presented additional feedback from dissatisfied consumers which reinforced these themes. Approximately half cited communication challenges or difficulty reaching staff, and a similar proportion reported challenges with paperwork and the need for assistance completing forms. About 30% indicated that the VR program was not effective in helping them meet their goals. These issues were consistent with patterns observed in other subgroups, though the degree of concern varied.

During the discussion period, Chair Mayes brought up a submitted question which was raised regarding whether targeted youth survey responses about receipt of Pre-ETS services were cross-checked against services listed in respondents' IPEs.

Mr. Thorton clarified that while survey logic includes backend demographic and program characteristics to tailor questions, they do not receive detailed service-level data from IPEs within the sample file. Therefore, data cannot currently be analyzed at that level of specificity. It was agreed that this issue may require further internal review, and staff indicated willingness to explore potential survey enhancements to provide more detailed data in future reporting.

Ms. Cyr concluded the survey review by summarizing key findings related to consumer experience across VR programs. The most positive aspects continue to be interactions with staff and counselors, as well as progress toward outcomes and goals. Youth in Transition consistently report the most positive experiences among surveyed groups. However, overall satisfaction and expectations within the general VR population have declined across trimesters and will require monitoring. Accessibility of VR offices, while still scoring relatively high, has shown slight decreases over time for Youth in Transition and Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB), warranting further review.

Ms. Cyr identified several areas for quality improvement. Consumer feedback emphasized the need for clearer and more timely communication, additional assistance with paperwork and forms, and shorter waiting times to initiate services. Communication concerns appear to reflect both capacity constraints and differences in expectations regarding response times. Suggested improvements included: establishing clearer timelines for follow-up, improving transparency about service processes, simplifying forms where feasible, and continuing strong counselor support throughout the application and service delivery process. Additional challenges cited by consumers included: limited support in reaching goals, perceived insufficient counselor assistance, and delays in receiving services. Core areas that data identified for continued monitoring covered communications with staff, overall satisfaction and expectations, and timeliness of services.

Looking ahead, survey data collection will continue in three trimesters (January-April, May-August, and September-December), with telephone outreach remaining the primary method, supplemented by online options when requested. The OIB population will be oversampled in the next cycle to address prior concerns regarding small sample size and strengthen the reliability of findings. Ms. Cyr

stated that the presentation is available for anyone that wants to look deeper at the data themselves and asked if there were any questions.

Drazen Elez, VR Administrator, thanked Ms. Cyr and Mr. Thornton for their work on the presentation. He then started a discussion which provided additional context regarding program scale and capacity. Mr. Elez clarified that the general VR and youth programs are supported by an annual grant of approximately \$30-\$31 million, whereas the Older Blind program operates under a significantly smaller grant of approximately \$290,000. The OIB program is currently managed primarily by one staff position, which is presently vacant, though reorganization and recruitment efforts are underway. A future presentation on the direction of the Older Blind program is anticipated.

Chair Mayes asked at what point a consumer would know what the expectations are for return calls and communications.

Mr. Elez responded by noting that policy guidance is 48 hours, but that Sheena Childers would be able to provide more details. He opened the floor to Sheena Childers, VR Bureau Chief.

Mrs. Childers discussed expectations around communication timelines. Consumers are informed of program expectations during pre-intake and formal intake interviews, and through review of the information and disclosure statement. She noted that expectations may be revisited with participants as needed throughout the service process.

Chair Mayes, thanked Ms. Cyr for the presentation and information displayed, then opened the floor for additional questions or comments from the council. No further questions or comments were noted, so the meeting advanced to the next agenda item.

## **6. REPORTS FROM OTHER AGENCIES**

Chair Mayes opened the floor to Kate Osti, Executive Director of Nevada Disability Advocacy and Law Center (NDALC), to provide an update regarding Client Assistance Program (CAP) cases.

Mrs. Osti noted that since January, five new CAP cases have been opened in the second quarter reporting period. She described this as a relatively small number and shared that overall outcomes have been positive. One of the cases involved a Northern counselor and was successfully resolved through prompt communication and collaboration between the counselor, supervisor, herself, and

the client. Although the client had initially requested to file for a fair hearing, the issue was resolved through a three-way discussion, eliminating the need for a hearing and resulting in a satisfactory outcome for all parties. The other four cases are still being worked through. Mrs. Osti asked if there were questions.

Chair Mayes asked whether communication issues were the root cause of the concerns raised.

Mrs. Osti confirmed that clients were trying to get communication going with counselors again, but iterated that the source of the Northern case that was resolved appeared to stem from a miscommunication of some kind.

Chair Mayes, noting no further questions for Mrs. Osti, next opened the floor to Dawn Lyons, Executive Director of the Nevada Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC), who provided an update on current activities and initiatives. She noted that feedback from the disability community has indicated ongoing concerns about a lack of responsiveness from VR Counselors. Council Member Lyons stated that hearing similar concerns reflected in other discussions suggests a shared awareness of the issue and offers hope that coordinated efforts may lead to improvements.

Council Member Lyons reported that SILC is currently planning its next workgroup related to the State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL). The council must complete a major amendment to the plan due to previously unapproved budget requests during the legislative session. However, she shared positive news that the U.S. House of Representatives recently passed the Senate amendment to the Appropriations Act, allowing the remaining funding for the current federal fiscal year (FFY) to move forward, alleviating concerns about additional delays.

She noted that the Council is also focusing on identifying service gaps across the state. She explained that while SILC conducts annual consumer satisfaction surveys, response rates have declined over the past year, partly because staff were unable to conduct in-person outreach in rural communities as frequently as in previous years. To better assess statewide needs, SILC is exploring the possibility of commissioning a professional study to more thoroughly analyze service gaps. Council Member Lyons noted that the Centers for Independent Living have historically been underfunded, resulting in an inability to provide all desired services, and that stronger data will help support advocacy for increased funding. SILC is currently discussing potential collaboration with organizations such as the Guinn Center and the Larson Center. Council Member Lyons invited VR and Council members to consider participating in these efforts.

Council Member Lyons further reported that SILC recently adopted a handbook developed for the Nevada TRIP program and the Youth Action Council. The handbook includes hands-on activities designed to teach key independent living topics and allows users to select lessons rather than follow a strict sequence. Because the handbook was developed by members of the independent living

community, the council views it as a valuable training tool for youth in transition throughout Nevada.

Additionally, SILC is participating in the development of training materials for the Nevada TRIP program. As part of this effort, video interviews are being recorded with Youth Action Council members and partners. Council Member Lyons and Youth Action Council member Calvin recently participated in interviews in Las Vegas, while additional interviews with Hannah Hansen and Kaison Fuong are planned in Ely and Reno respectively. Council Member Lyons expressed pride in the Youth Action Council members and their contributions to training and outreach efforts.

Finally, Council Member Lyons shared administrative updates, noting that SILC completed its annual report by the January 31st deadline. However, they experienced a slight submission delay due to system issues with the Q90 reporting platform and administrative changes within the Aging and Disability Services Division. She also announced that the annual SILC Congress will take place in April in Orlando, Florida. Due to other commitments among council members, Council Member Lyons will attend as the sole representative and will report back to the group afterward. No questions were raised.

## **7. NSRC MEMBERSHIP UPDATES**

Chair Mayes moved to Agenda Item 7. He noted that several membership positions on the council remain vacant and encouraged members to assist with recruitment efforts. He also announced that the vice chair position has become vacant following Cyndy Cendagorta's transitioning to an employee role for VR. Members were directed to review the list of open positions included in the meeting materials. He invited Administrator Elez to share more details.

Mr. Elez provided additional context regarding the vacancies. He explained that delays in approvals from the Governor's Office have slowed the appointment process. Currently, eight applications have been submitted for consideration, and once these are approved, most council positions are expected to be filled. However, two positions will likely remain open: one representing business, industry, and labor, and another position representing the Native American Section 121 VR program. Mr. Elez encouraged members to share potential candidate connections, particularly for the Native American representative role, which has remained vacant for several years despite previous expressions of interest. Mr. Elez continued by explaining that to ensure broader participation in council leadership, elections for council member positions were postponed until the next meeting. This delay is intended to allow time for the pending applicants to be confirmed and to provide a larger pool of eligible members for leadership roles.

During the discussion, Mrs. Osti informed the council that her application for the Client Assistance Program representative position has already been submitted and is currently awaiting approval from the Governor's Office.

Council Member Dawn Lyons asked whether a representative from the Governor's Workforce Development Board was also in the appointment process and inquired about the board's strategic plan.

Mr. Elez confirmed that an applicant from the Governor's Workforce Development Board has applied and indicated that the council could provide an update on the board's strategic planning efforts at the next meeting. He explained that the board intends to finalize its strategic plan after the statewide WIOA plan is completed to ensure alignment. He also noted that public comment on the state plan is currently open and encouraged interested members to review the document through the Office of Workforce Innovation website. Before concluding the agenda item, the Chair asked staff to follow up with meeting participants who had requested additional information about the application process for Council membership.

## **8. DIVISION REPORTS**

Chair Mayes opened the floor to Mr. Elez who introduced the report and in turn asked Sheena Childers, VR Bureau Chief II, to present updates on program data and performance indicators.

Mrs. Childers began with staffing information, noting that the overall vacancy rate across Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and Blind Services currently stands at 12.34%. This represents a slight increase compared to previous reports where vacancies were below 10%. She explained that the increase is primarily due to newly created positions from recent legislative gains, including roles such as a Bureau Chief, District Manager for Blind Services, Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor, and a Program Officer for Internal Job Development. Despite the increase in total positions, recruitment efforts have moved quickly, and the division has already made progress filling leadership roles.

Mrs. Childers then reviewed Quarter 1 performance data for Federal Fiscal Year 2026 (October 1 - December 31, 2025) in relation to the Nevada State Rehabilitation Council (NSRC) goals. For the goal of increasing competitive integrated employment outcomes, 109 clients were successfully closed with employment outcomes during the first quarter, contributing toward the annual goal of 550 placements. For the goal related to Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) participation among students with disabilities, the program served 672

students in the first quarter, putting the division on track to meet or exceed the annual target of 2,200 students.

Mrs. Childers also discussed the goal of increasing conversion of potentially eligible students into VR clients. During the reporting period, 245 transition students applied for VR services, which supports progress toward the annual goal of 1,100 applications. The report also included a new metric from the federal Rehabilitation Services Administration dashboard showing that 17% of potentially eligible students ultimately apply for VR services after receiving Pre-ETS support. Another goal focuses on supported employment participation, where there were 785 open supported employment consumers and 21 successful employment closures during the quarter, with an annual target of 125 successful outcomes.

Mrs. Childers further reported on the performance indicators used for tracking program activity. These include outcomes for specific disability groups, where, in the 1st Quarter, 41 individuals with mental health disabilities, 4 individuals who are blind or visually impaired, 15 individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing, and 11 individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities achieved employment outcomes. Additional indicators showed an average counselor caseload of 99 in general VR and 62 in Blind Services. The 700-hour program, which helps individuals transition into state employment, had 16 active participants, with 7 participants completing the program and obtaining competitive integrated employment during the quarter.

Finally, Mrs. Childers addressed fair hearing requests, reporting that three requests occurred during the reporting period out of 8,294 total participants served, representing approximately 0.04% of cases. When asked about the root causes of the fair hearings, Mrs. Childers indicated that communication issues were a contributing factor in at least one case and may have played a role in the others as well, including miscommunication, unclear expectations, or delays in service provision. Overall, the division reported steady progress toward its goals and emphasized continued monitoring of communication and service delivery practices.

Mr. Elez provided several updates to the Council. He first announced the upcoming Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) conference, which will take place from March 28th through April 1st in Washington, D.C. Council members interested in attending were encouraged to contact staff to make arrangements. Travel expenses such as flights, hotels, and incidentals may be covered by Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), though attendees' time would not be reimbursed. The registration deadline for the conference was noted as March 6th.

Mr. Elez then presented an overview of Nevada VR's 2026 Strategic Plan, which is available on the agency's website. The plan is based on information gathered from consumer surveys, staff feedback, vendor communications, performance metrics, and other relevant data. The overall goal of the strategic plan is to improve employment outcomes for Nevadans with disabilities while modernizing agency operations and strengthening statewide partnerships.

The first strategic priority focuses on expanding client services and improving outcomes. VR is working to refine programs and strengthen outcome tracking to help clients move more efficiently toward competitive integrated employment. Initiatives include developing meaningful day partnerships and implementing a "20 client employments per week" initiative. Mr. Elez noted that demand for VR services has increased significantly, with applications rising by approximately 280% over the past four years while staffing levels remained largely unchanged. As a result, counselors now spend a much greater portion of their time (40%) on intake and eligibility processes. To address this challenge, the agency received approval for additional counselor positions and is developing a statewide intake unit designed to improve efficiency, consistency, and timeliness of services. Plans also include establishing a new VR facility in Las Vegas to support these operations.

The second priority focuses on youth and young adults. VR will continue expanding pre-employment transition services and strengthening collaboration with the Clark County School District. The agency is currently working on an agreement with the district that represents a significant investment in services for students with disabilities in Southern Nevada. Additional initiatives include expanding work-based learning opportunities and partnerships with adult education and workforce programs, as well as increasing use of tools such as PaceLabs, Pathful Explorer, summer internship programs, and youth camps. VR is also participating in the Opportunity Youth Coalition to better connect youth, particularly those not currently engaged in school or workforce systems, with available services.

The third priority addresses modernization and digital transformation. VR is accelerating the adoption of digital tools to improve efficiency and service delivery. This includes implementing the VEX Purchase Card system, which will allow approved service funds to be loaded onto client cards, reducing reliance on purchase orders and expanding vendor access. The agency is also developing the Disability Benefits 101 website to improve access to benefits planning information statewide. Additional efforts include exploring AI-supported tools that could assist counselors with administrative tasks, expanding data analytics through Power BI

dashboards, and enhancing the recently launched VR Consumer Portal, which allows clients to view case information, update personal details, and communicate directly with counselors.

The fourth priority focuses on expanding employer engagement. Recognizing that employment outcomes depend heavily on strong relationships with employers, VR plans to strengthen outreach and partnerships with Nevada businesses. The agency recently hired a new Chief of Disability Employment Policy (Cynthia Cendagorta) to lead these efforts, and plans to launch targeted employer marketing campaigns and quarterly “lunch and learn” events for employers and HR professionals. These initiatives aim to promote disability inclusion and demonstrate the value of partnering with VR by building deeper and ongoing relationships with Nevada’s business community.

The fifth priority centers on operational excellence and staff development. VR is investing in staff training, recognition programs, and leadership development to ensure employees have the tools and support needed to succeed. The agency has expanded recognition initiatives, including employee awards and public acknowledgment of staff accomplishments on the VR website. Mr. Elez also noted that preparations are underway for the agency’s 2027-2028 legislative budget planning process to ensure continued growth and sustainability of VR programs. Mr. Elez finished by reinforcing 2026 strategic priorities as: expanding services, strengthening youth pipelines, modernizing systems, deepening employee engagement, and investing in the workforce. He thanked Chair Mayes for the time to present and asked if there were any questions.

Following the presentation, Chair Mayes asked whether the agency planned to hold an in-service training for staff this year. Mr. Elez responded that in-service trainings are planned on a biennial basis due to the cost and the operational impact of having staff away from client services for several days. The next training will therefore occur the following year.

Council member Laura Thompson asked about the potential use of artificial intelligence in determining eligibility. Mr. Elez explained that AI would serve only as a supportive tool to improve efficiency and assist with drafting or reviewing information, while final eligibility decisions would remain the responsibility of VR counselors. He emphasized that AI would not replace professional judgment and that policies and guidance around these tools are still evolving at both the state and national levels.

Noting no further questions thereafter, Chair Mayes advanced the meeting to the next agenda item.

## **9. COMMENTS BY THE COUNCIL**

Chair Mayes invited members to share any remarks or announce upcoming events. A comment was noted in the chat by Jennifer Kane N.S.R.C. Council Member.

Member Kane explained that within the Office of Comprehensive Student Services, her office, also oversees Native American Indian education. She referenced an earlier discussion regarding difficulty filling a designated seat on the Council and offered assistance by sharing the NSRC membership information with members of her team. She indicated that her team could distribute the information through their statewide network in hopes of identifying a qualified individual interested in filling the vacancy.

Chair Mayes thanked Member Kane for her willingness to assist with outreach. He also informed the Council that the annual report had been mailed to all members since the last meeting and advised anyone who had not received a copy to contact NSRC liaison Jenny Richter.

Chair Mayes requested that communication be included as a discussion topic on a future agenda. He noted ongoing concerns related to communication from both the counselor's perspective and client expectations and expressed interest in further examining the issue, despite the addition of staff intended to address the concern. Following these remarks, the meeting proceeded to the next agenda item.

## **10. PUBLIC COMMENTS**

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

Mrs. Richter confirmed that there were no public comments from attendees in the Las Vegas or Reno offices. One individual participating online requested to speak.

Ellen Marquez of the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities announced that applications are now open for the 2026 Silver State Self Advocacy Conference, expected to take place on August 3rd – 4th in Las Vegas at the Palms, with the venue currently being finalized. Mrs. Marquez shared that applications are

available both for attendees and for individuals interested in serving as speakers or keynote presenters. She encouraged interested participants to apply as soon as possible, noting that attendance will be limited to approximately 120 participants and that spaces typically fill quickly. Additional information and registration are available on the council's website, and she indicated that the link would also be posted in the meeting chat.

After confirming there were no additional comments from the public or online participants, Chair Mayes closed the public comment period and moved on to Agenda Item 11.

## **11. ADJOURNMENT**

Chair Mayes called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Council member Lyons made the motion, and Council Member Sinicrope seconded it. All in favor, none opposed, none abstained, the motion carried,

Chair Mayes thanked the participants for their attendance and noted it had been a productive meeting. The meeting adjourned at 3:08 p.m.

MEETING MINUTES SUBMITTED BY URIAH CARTER, AA II

EDITED BY: JENNY RICHTER LIVIA, NSRC LIAISON

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Jenny Richter, N.S.R.C. Liaison

**Approved By:**

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Jack Mayes, Chair