

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

Tuesday, May 05, 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
Ashley De Loera (Non-Voting)
David Nuestro
Jennifer Kane
Mary Brabant
Obioma Officer
Rebecca Rogers
Sandra Sinicrope

COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT:

Dawn Lyons
Robin Kincaid

STAFF:

Rosalie Bordelove, 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 the Office of Disability Employment Policy
Miriam Ramirez, Rehabilitation Counselor II

Michael Johnson, Rehabilitation Counselor II

Raquel O'Neill, Rehabilitation Manager II

Jenny Richter, N.S.R.C Liaison

Edward Green, Administrative Assistant III

Uriah Carter, Administrative Assistant II

GUESTS/PUBLIC:

Lisa, American Sign Language (ASL) Interpreter

Ava, ASL Interpreter

Kate Osti, Executive Director of NDALC

Michael O'Brien

Doralee Martinez

Laura Fussell

Steven Cohen

Alexandria Sullivan

Shauna Griggley

Alfredo Mena

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

Jack Mayes, N.S.R.C. Chair, called the meeting to order at 1:02 pm. Jenny Richter Livia, N.S.R.C. Liaison, conducted roll call. Robin Kincaid, NSRC Council Member, and Dawn Lyons, NSRC Council Member, were unable to attend.

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, Rosalie Bordelove, 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.

No public comments were received from the Las Vegas or Reno in-person locations.

One virtual public comment was provided by Michael O'Brien, who identified himself for the record and expressed concerns regarding alleged violations involving Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and DETR, stating that he had contacted multiple individuals regarding perceived violations of USC, CFR, and NRS provisions. Mr. O'Brien described his comments as a last resort, expressing frustration over what he characterized as fees being shifted onto disabled individuals, and urged initiation of an interactive process before further escalation.

Chair Mayes thanked Mr. O'Brien for his comments and, after confirming there were no additional hands raised online, concluded the public comment period.

3. VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SUCCESS STORIES

Mechelle Merrill, VR Deputy Administrator of Programs, opened the floor to Rehabilitation Counselor Miriam Ramirez, who introduced VR Participant, Alexandria Sullivan for the discussion of the participant's success story.

Mrs. Sullivan shared her vocational rehabilitation success story, explaining that in 2021 things dramatically changed, greatly impacting her life and ability to work. Previously, a business owner in the restaurant industry, she found herself unable to work in many environments or participate in normal social and family activities.

Seeking support through EmployNV, Mrs. Sullivan was referred to VR, where she was able to qualify for services. Working closely with her VR counselor, Mrs. Sullivan, received training through an ETPL-approved program and mentorship that helped her transition into a safer career path. She is now able to provide permanent makeup and paramedical tattooing services, including scar restoration, stretch mark camouflage, and post-mastectomy nipple and areola restoration. Mrs. Sullivan emphasized that the program not only provided career training but also restored her confidence, independence, and sense of purpose, allowing her to move from merely surviving to thriving again.

Mrs. Ramirez highlighted Mrs. Sullivan's dedication and work ethic, noting that the collaborative support and training opportunities were instrumental in helping her achieve success. Both Mrs. Sullivan and Mrs. Ramirez expressed gratitude for the Vocational Rehabilitation program and the positive impact it has had on Alexandria's life and career.

Mechelle Merrill, VR Deputy Administrator of Programs, opened the floor to Rehabilitation Counselor Michael Johnson, who introduced VR participant Alfredo Mena, who shared his journey toward employment.

Mr. Mena explained that although he initially struggled to complete the Vocational Rehabilitation program, he eventually reached a point where he was ready to pursue employment and fully engage in services. Through the support of VR staff, including counselors, job development services, interview coaching, and ongoing encouragement, Mr. Mena successfully secured competitive integrated employment with Walmart in a customer service and money services role. He highlighted the value of the program's resources, community partnerships, and the consistent support provided by his counselors throughout the employment search process. Having maintained employment for nearly eight months, Mr. Mena expressed satisfaction with his current position while sharing his long-term goal of working with youth through the Boys & Girls Club.

Board members and staff congratulated Mr. Mena on his perseverance and success, thanked him for sharing his story, and acknowledged the positive impact of Vocational Rehabilitation services in helping participants achieve their employment goals.

4. NSRC MEMBERSHIP UPDATES

Due to Agenda Item 10, NSRC Membership Updates, being taken out of order, Chair Jack Mayes invited newly appointed council members to introduce themselves and provide a brief overview of their backgrounds. Mrs. Richter explained that the agenda item was informational and intended to familiarize the Council with its newest members. She noted that introductions had been received from Ashley De Loera, Mary Brabant, and Edward Estipona, while Obioma Officer, who was attending virtually, would provide an introduction at a future meeting.

Member Ashley De Loera introduced herself as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor III in the Las Vegas office, serving on the supportive employment team. She explained that her work focuses primarily on individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, often in partnership with the Desert Regional Center. Mrs. De Loera shared that she has been with Vocational Rehabilitation for nearly six years and has approximately ten years of experience working with individuals with disabilities. Her professional background includes work as a behavior consultant, career coach, job developer, and employment services specialist. She expressed enthusiasm for serving on the Council and contributing her experience to its work.

Member Mary Brabant, Director of Disability and Volunteer Programming at Goodwill of Southern Nevada, introduced herself and highlighted her nearly 30-year career with the organization. She emphasized her commitment to helping individuals with disabilities achieve self-sufficiency through employment and vocational opportunities. Mrs. Brabant discussed Goodwill's longstanding partnership with VR and described several workforce development initiatives, including community-based training programs, student work experience programs, and the STEPS program, which supports individuals facing multiple barriers to employment. She shared recent program successes, including serving more than 630 participants and celebrating graduates who are already demonstrating promising employment potential.

Member Edward Estipona introduced himself as the representative of the Governor's Workforce Board and current Vice Chair of that board. He described his involvement in Nevada's workforce system over the past several years and explained that he brings a private-sector perspective through his ownership of a full-service marketing and advertising agency with more than three decades of experience. Mr. Estipona noted that his expertise in communications has helped him advocate for greater awareness and understanding of workforce development programs and services. He expressed appreciation for the opportunity to serve on the Council and his interest in learning more about VR.

The Council acknowledged and welcomed the new members. Chair Mayes thanked each participant for volunteering to serve and contribute their expertise.

Mrs. Richter confirmed that an Obioma Officer would provide her introduction at a future meeting, concluding the informational agenda item.

5. APPROVAL OF FEBRUARY 3, 2026, MEETING MINUTES

Chair Mayes noted that the only revision made to the previously distributed minutes was the correction of Candace Walsh's name spelling. He then asked for any additional corrections or changes. Hearing none, Chair Mayes requested a motion to approve the minutes.

David Nuestro, NSRC Council Member, moved to approve the February 3, 2026 meeting minutes, and Sandra Sinicrope, NSRC Council Member, seconded the motion.

During discussion, Council member Estipona asked whether he needed to abstain because he had not attended the February meeting; Chair Mayes clarified that abstention was not necessary. The motion was then put to a vote, receiving unanimous approval with no opposition or abstentions. The motion passed, and the February 3, 2026, meeting minutes were approved as presented.

6. ELECTION OF THE NSRC CHAIR & VICE-CHAIR FOR TERM JULY 1, 2026, THROUGH JUNE 30, 2027

Chair Mayes opened the floor to Drazen Elez, Administrator of the Rehabilitation Division, to take the lead on the election of the Nevada Rehabilitation Services Council (NRSC) Chair and Vice Chair for the term beginning July 1, 2026, and ending June 30, 2027. Mr. Elez reviewed the Council's bylaws governing officer elections and emphasized the important role of Council leadership in guiding priorities, supporting partnerships with the Rehabilitation Division, and advancing services and outcomes for Nevadans with disabilities. He also recognized the service and leadership of current Chair Jack Mayes and former Vice Chair Cyndy Cendagorta, thanking them for their contributions during the past year.

The floor was opened for nominations for the Chair position. Chair Mayes stated that he was willing to continue serving but would also support another member stepping into the role if interested. After no additional nominations were offered, Council member Brabant expressed support for Mayes' continued leadership and nominated him to remain as Chair. Chair Mayes confirmed his willingness to serve another term. With no further nominations received, the Council voted unanimously to re-elect Jack Mayes as Chair for the upcoming fiscal year.

The Council then proceeded with nominations for Vice Chair. Chair Mayes briefly outlined the responsibilities of the position, including chairing the Planning Subcommittee and presiding over Council meetings in the Chair's absence. He

also encouraged members interested in gaining leadership experience to consider serving in the role.

Following discussion, Council member Sinicrope volunteered to serve as Vice Chair. No other nominations were received. The Council voted unanimously to elect Sandra Sinicrope as Vice Chair for the term beginning July 1, 2026.

Following the elections, Mr. Elez congratulated the newly elected officers and thanked them for their willingness to serve. Chair Mayes resumed leadership of the meeting, and the Council proceeded to the next agenda item.

7. VOLUNTEERS FOR SUBCOMMITTEE TO REVIEW THE BYLAWS

Chair Mayes discussed the need to establish a subcommittee to review the organization's bylaws. He noted that the current bylaws were last reviewed approximately ten years ago and are included in the meeting packet. Given the length of time since the last review, members agreed that it is appropriate to reevaluate and update the bylaws. A tentative meeting date of June 9 at 1:00 p.m. was identified for the subcommittee's work. During the discussion, Chair Mayes sought clarification regarding the structure of the subcommittee and whether a chair needed to be designated.

Mr. Elez advised that at least one voting member of the Council must serve on the subcommittee and act as chair, while additional participants could be added later. It was determined that the full membership of the subcommittee did not need to be finalized during this meeting.

Chair Mayes volunteered to serve as chair of the Bylaws Review Subcommittee. Members also discussed the possibility of reaching out to absent Council members, including Robin Kincaid, to gauge their interest in participating.

Rosalie Bordelove, Deputy Attorney General, clarified that the chair could assist in developing the committee's plans and recruit additional members as needed. She also noted that any future subcommittee meetings could be conducted virtually or by telephone and that a formal committee structure would require agendas and compliance with meeting procedures. To formally establish the subcommittee, DAG Bordelove recommended approval through a motion and vote.

The motion to create a Bylaws Review Subcommittee was made by Council Member Estipona and seconded by Council Member Sinicrope. The motion passed unanimously by with no opposition or abstentions. The Council officially authorized the formation of the subcommittee to begin reviewing and evaluating the current bylaws.

8. VOLUNTEERS FOR SUBCOMMITTEE FOR EMPLOYMENT ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE

Chair Mayes opened the floor for the creation of an Employment Engagement Initiative Subcommittee focused on strengthening relationships with employers and expanding employment opportunities for individuals served by the agency.

Mr. Elez explained that the subcommittee would help develop strategies to enhance employer engagement and identify new approaches for increasing employment outcomes.

Cyndy Cendagorta, Chief of the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), emphasized the importance of the committee in helping the agency re-evaluate business outreach efforts, measure success in employer engagement, and build sustainable, long-term partnerships with employers. She noted that the initiative aligns with several ongoing employer-focused efforts and would provide valuable input as the agency continues to expand its workforce development activities.

Council Member Sinicrope volunteered to serve on the subcommittee. During the discussion, members sought clarification regarding whether individuals who are not Council members could participate.

DAG Bordelove confirmed that non-members may be appointed to subcommittees at the discretion of the Council and would be considered official members for quorum purposes.

Following this clarification, Mrs. Sullivan expressed interest in working on the subcommittee, highlighting her extensive experience developing and managing employment engagement initiatives through the iFoster Jobs Program, where she partnered with major employers and workforce development organizations. Chair Mayes welcomed her participation, and staff indicated that additional interested members of the public would also be invited to participate.

Council Member Sinicrope agreed to serve as chair of the Employment Engagement Initiative Subcommittee, with staff support provided as needed. Members discussed potential meeting dates but agreed that scheduling could be determined at a later time.

To formally establish the subcommittee, Council Member Estipona made a motion to create the Employment Engagement Initiative Subcommittee, which was seconded by Council Member Sinicrope. The motion passed unanimously with no opposition, officially authorizing the formation of the subcommittee.

9. DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT BUSINESS PARTNERSHIPS PROGRAM INITIATIVES

Chair Mayes opened the floor to Cyndy Cendagorta, regarding disability employment business partnerships and related initiatives. Mrs. Cendagorta outlined ODEP's expanded role, which combines public policy development with oversight of the Business Services Team. She described the office's four primary focus areas: employer outreach and engagement, talent acquisition and hiring initiatives, employee retention and workplace optimization, and policy leadership with data-driven evaluation. Current activities include disability awareness training, employer outreach, development of community-based assessment and on-the-job training opportunities, summer youth internship placements, and a new Inclusive Apprenticeship Initiative in partnership with the Nevada Apprenticeship Council. She also highlighted efforts to address emerging issues such as the impact of artificial intelligence screening tools on applicants with disabilities and the need for transportation solutions that improve access to employment opportunities.

She also presented the Business Services Team's employer engagement framework, which focuses on understanding the employer customer journey, strengthening long-term employer relationships, and transitioning employers from service users to advocates for vocational rehabilitation programs. The team is implementing performance metrics and evaluation tools to better measure outcomes, identify successful strategies, and improve service delivery. She reported strong year-to-date activity levels, including hundreds of employer contacts, direct employer meetings, outreach events, disability awareness trainings, community-based assessment and work experience sites, employer-focused Lunch and Learn events, workforce meetings, and rapid response activities supporting workers affected by layoffs. She noted that the team is increasingly emphasizing meaningful employer engagement and data-driven decision-making to improve employment outcomes for clients.

During discussion, Council Member Estipona commended the presentation and asked about coordination with Employ NV and other workforce partners.

Mrs. Cendagorta explained that the agency works closely with Employ NV through shared databases, co-location, collaborative outreach efforts, and joint employer engagement activities.

Council Member Estipona suggested expanding cross-training opportunities between vocational rehabilitation staff and Employ NV business account managers to improve awareness of VR services and increase referrals from employers.

Mrs. Cendagorta agreed that the recommendation had merit and indicated that the agency is already working to simplify materials and strengthen outreach efforts.

Chair Mayes praised the clarity and organization of the presentation materials, particularly the customer journey framework, noting that they provided a clear understanding of the office's mission, strategies, and objectives. The Council thanked Mrs. Cendagorta for the informative presentation before moving to the next agenda item.

10. OTHER REPORTS

Chair Mayes opened the floor to Kate Osti, Executive Director of NDALC, who provided the Client Assistance Program (CAP) report covering the period from February 1, 2026, through April 30, 2026. She reported that CAP received 14 new requests during this period, with 11 originating in Southern Nevada and three in Northern Nevada. The requests included one involving the Southern Nevada Center for Independent Living (SNCIL), seven related to Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) issues, one request for assistance with an application to Blind Services, two requests for information regarding Vocational Rehabilitation and the CAP program, one request for application assistance, and two cases involving communication issues with counselors. Of the 14 cases, nine remain open; however, none have progressed to the level of a fair hearing, and all appear to be on track toward resolution. No questions were raised by the committee following the report.

Chair Mayes also shared an update on behalf of Dawn Lyons, who was unable to attend the meeting. He reported that the Statewide Independent Living Council is currently working on amendments to its existing State Plan for Independent Living to meet federal requirements. Once those amendments are completed, work will begin on the next three-year State Plan for Independent Living, which is anticipated to start in January 2027. Additionally, a State Plan for Independent Living workgroup meeting is planned following May 11, and information about the meeting will be shared with committee members who may be interested in attending. Chair Mayes expressed appreciation for the update and noted Ms. Lyons' apologies for not being able to present the information in person.

11. NEVADA WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITY ACT. (WIOA) STATE PLAN 2024-2027

Chair Mayes and Administrator Elez provided an overview of the vocational rehabilitation (VR) portion of the Nevada Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) State Plan for 2024 – 2027 state plan and its two-year modification.

Mr. Elez explained that VR's portion of the state plan serves as Nevada's federally required roadmap for delivering vocational rehabilitation services under Title IV of WIOA and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The plan outlines who is served, how services are delivered, agency priorities, and how success is measured. It also aligns vocational rehabilitation services with Nevada's broader workforce and

economic development strategies to ensure individuals with disabilities are fully integrated into the state's workforce system.

He explained that the plan serves both strategic and operational purposes by detailing eligibility requirements, service priorities, transition services for students, supported employment programs, employer engagement, and coordination with education, workforce, and community partners. The plan also establishes accountability measures through federal performance indicators, including employment outcomes, wages, credential attainment, and measurable skill gains. Strategic priorities identified in the plan include expanding youth transition services, increasing supported employment outcomes, strengthening employer partnerships, and improving access to services statewide.

Mr. Elez highlighted significant program growth in recent years. The number of individuals served by vocational rehabilitation increased from approximately 3,600 in 2021 to nearly 8,300 in federal fiscal year 2025, up from 7,300 in fiscal year 2024. Additionally, vocational rehabilitation assisted 425 individuals in achieving competitive integrated employment during the last federal fiscal year, with the average wage at case closure increasing to \$19.44 per hour. The agency also met or exceeded most of its negotiated federal performance indicators.

Council member Estipona raised concerns regarding disconnected youth, noting that approximately 42,000 youth in Clark County and 8,000 in Washoe County are considered disconnected from education and employment systems. He shared observations from a local youth hub, where staff indicated that approximately 33 percent of participating youth had Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) while in high school. Council Member Estipona emphasized the need to better support youth with disabilities, including those with ADHD and autism spectrum disorders, as they transition from school environments with accommodations into the workforce. He stresses partnerships and of developing additional resources, fostering partnerships, and addressing systemic barriers to prevent these individuals from becoming disconnected from the workforce.

Mr. Elez agreed that serving students and youths with disabilities remains a major priority for the agency. He reported that vocational rehabilitation served approximately 2,200 students with disabilities during the past year, representing a significant increase from pre-pandemic levels. He also noted the agency's focus on disconnected and disadvantaged youth and invited staff to provide additional information regarding current initiatives.

Sheena Childers, Vocational Rehabilitation Bureau Chief II, described a new initiative developed in partnership with Workforce Connections and the Clark County School District. The initiative places vocational rehabilitation counselors at the Desert Rose and St. Louis Adult Education campuses to connect disconnected and opportunity youth, particularly those between the ages of 18 and 24 who have

histories of special education services or otherwise identify as individuals with disabilities, to vocational rehabilitation services.

Mrs. Merrill provided an update on the Nevada TRIP initiative, a statewide website developed through a grant partnership among Vocational Rehabilitation, the Department of Education, Centers for Independent Living, and other stakeholders. The website serves youth ages 10 to 24 by providing a centralized resource to help students transition from secondary education to post-secondary education and employment opportunities. The platform connects youth with disability resources, educational support, and work-based learning opportunities. Mrs. Merrill reported that the initiative has been implemented in six school districts and will continue expanding to additional districts throughout the year.

Chair Jack Mayes thanked Mr. Estipona for his engagement and willingness to serve as a bridge between the council and the workforce system. He expressed appreciation for the collaborative approach being taken and emphasized the importance of a continued partnership to address the shared challenges facing youth with disabilities transitioning into employment. With no further questions, the council concluded the discussion.

12. DIVISION REPORTS

Drazen Elez introduced the Division Report and explained that it provides an overview of the agency's performance based on federal and state performance indicators selected by the NSRC, as well as information regarding staffing, organizational stability, client outcomes, customer feedback, communication trends, and staff development initiatives. He noted that the report is intended to provide the Council with a clear understanding of the agency's current performance and future direction and welcomed feedback on additional information that may be beneficial to include in future reports.

Sheena Childers was introduced again to present the Division Report contained in Tab 12. She reported that the VR program had a vacancy rate of 8.1 percent and the Bureau of Services to the Blind and Visually Impaired (BSBVI) had a vacancy rate of 13.3 percent, resulting in a combined vacancy rate of 8.58 percent. She noted that the vacancy rate has remained relatively stable over the past several years and includes newly authorized legislative positions that the agency is actively working to fill. Ms. Childers then reviewed the NSRC goals and indicators for Quarter 2 of Federal Fiscal Year 2026.

Under Goal 1, increasing competitive integrated employment outcomes, the agency had achieved 281 successful employment closures toward its annual goal of 550 and was implementing additional strategies through the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) initiatives to improve outcomes. She clarified that successful employment is measured after a participant has maintained employment for at least 90 days. Under Goal 2, increasing participation of students with disabilities in Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS), the agency had

served 1,312 students toward its goal of 2,200 and anticipated meeting or exceeding the target. Under Goal 3, increasing participation of potentially eligible students in VR services, the agency had converted 551 students from Pre-ETS services to VR services toward its goal of 1,100 and expected to meet the annual target. For Goal 4, increasing participation of supported employment consumers, Ms. Childers reported that the agency had already exceeded its goal of serving 700 supported employment consumers, with 820 individuals currently receiving services. However, only 21 consumers had achieved successful employment outcomes toward the annual goal of 125, making this objective a significant challenge for the remainder of the year.

Ms. Childers also reviewed several performance indicators, including employment outcomes among targeted disability populations, such as individuals with mental health disabilities, blindness or low vision, deaf or hard of hearing individuals, and individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. She further reported that the average VR counselor caseload had risen to 104 cases, significantly above the agency's optimal caseload target of 70, while the BSB average caseload remained stable at 60 cases. In response to a question from Mary Brabant, Ms. Childers indicated that the higher caseloads are likely to become the new norm due to increasing demand for services. Ms. Childers provided an update on the agency's 700-Hour Program, reporting that there were currently 24 active participants and that nine participants had completed the program and achieved competitive integrated employment between October and the end of March.

Chair Mayes inquired whether legislative expectations accompanied the additional staffing positions authorized during the previous legislative session.

Mr. Elez explained that the additional positions were intended to increase service capacity and support the creation of a new intake unit. He stated that implementation of the intake unit had been delayed due to construction and permitting issues associated with the agency's new office location but expressed optimism that the intake unit would be operational by late summer or early fall. He explained that the new model would divide responsibilities between counselors focused on eligibility determinations and counselors responsible for service delivery and employment outcomes.

Ms. Childers added that extensive planning and training have been completed for the intake unit, including the hiring of a supervisor and implementation of a pilot model that has shown promising results. She stated that the intake unit is expected to modernize and improve the efficiency of the VR process. She then presented information regarding statewide fair hearings, reporting that between October 1 and the end of April only five fair hearing requests had been received out of 8,294 participants served, representing less than one percent of total clients. She stated that the agency views this as a positive performance measure.

Mrs. Childers then discussed client communication, following concerns identified through the Market Decisions Research (MDR) client satisfaction survey. She

reported that 27 percent of survey respondents indicated that better communication was needed, 16 percent reported that counselors did not return calls or emails or follow through, and 15 percent indicated a desire for more frequent follow-up. She noted that communication satisfaction has fluctuated over the past two years and currently stands at approximately 70 percent. Ms. Childers explained that communication challenges have been influenced by substantial growth in the number of clients served, which increased from 5,557 clients in 2022 to 8,294 clients in 2025, nearly doubling within a three-year period with only modest staffing increases. She also reviewed historical vacancy trends and noted that the agency has made significant progress in rebuilding staffing levels following the COVID-19 pandemic.

To address communication concerns, Ms. Childers discussed several initiatives, including implementation of the Consumer Portal, which allows participants to access information about their cases and communicate electronically with staff. Although initial utilization was low, the agency has increased outreach and marketing efforts to encourage participation. She also highlighted the agency's new initiative requiring counselors to conduct 20 client appointments per week to promote more direct engagement with clients through in-person or virtual meetings.

Council member Estipona recommended that counselors use those appointments to remind clients about the Consumer Portal and other communication tools available to them. He also emphasized the importance of managing client expectations regarding increasing service demand and staffing limitations.

Mrs. Childers agreed and explained that communication preferences and accessibility needs are discussed with participants during intake and throughout the rehabilitation process to ensure that communication methods meet individual needs. She also discussed the agency's investment in staff development and training, noting that new rehabilitation counselors complete an 11-month probationary period with extensive training to develop expertise in vocational rehabilitation and disability services. She explained that additional training modules are being developed in conjunction with the new intake unit to strengthen eligibility determinations and case management processes.

Before concluding the agenda item, Mr. Elez introduced the newly developed NSRC New Member Training Guide and invited Mechelle Merrill to provide an overview.

Ms. Merrill explained that the 12-page guide was created to assist new Council members in understanding the Council's purpose, responsibilities, and the operations of the VR program. The guide includes information on Council governance, membership requirements, agency mission and vision, VR services, funding sources, and the VR case process, as well as QR codes linking to additional resources, including the agency website, bylaws, and orientation materials.

Ms. Merrill highlighted the significant employment disparities experienced by Nevadans with disabilities, noting that 58 percent of working-age individuals with disabilities remain unemployed and that 24 percent of employed individuals with disabilities live in poverty compared to 10 percent of individuals without disabilities. She also emphasized the program's return on investment, reporting that every dollar invested in vocational rehabilitation results in approximately \$2.96 in taxpayer savings over the lifetime of a VR participant.

Chair Mayes thanked staff for their efforts in addressing communication concerns and commended Ms. Merrill on the development of the new member training guide, noting that it would be a valuable resource for current and future Council members. Mr. Elez concluded the Division Report and indicated there were no additional items under Agenda Item 12.

13. COMMENTS BY THE COUNCIL

During Council comments, Chair Mayes invited members to share comments, upcoming activities or events, and suggestions for future agenda items.

Council member Estipona thanked staff for the information and presentations provided during the meeting, noting that the information was especially valuable as a new member of the Council and helped him better understand the work being done. He also expressed appreciation for the staff's hard work and stated his hope of becoming more involved as he gains additional knowledge of vocational rehabilitation services and identifies opportunities to connect vocational rehabilitation with other organizations and resources where appropriate. With no additional comments from Council members, Chair Mayes concluded the agenda item and moved on to Agenda Item 14.

14. PUBLIC COMMENT

Chair Mayes invited members of the public to provide comments and outlined the procedures for participation and time limits. No public comments were received from the Las Vegas or Reno in-person locations.

Mike O'Brien addressed the Council regarding concerns about program shortcomings, including claims of inadequate counselor training, outdated practices, and barriers to accessing resources. He commended his counselor, Vivian Rosas, Rehabilitation Counselor III, for her efforts and expressed his willingness to assist the Council and the Division in identifying areas for improvement to better serve individuals with disabilities. Mr. O'Brien also shared his personal motivation to achieve self-sufficiency and improve opportunities for his family, particularly his nonverbal autistic son.

Raquel O'Neill then offered remarks recognizing the passing of Judy Swain, describing her as a dedicated advocate whose work positively impacted Nevada's disability community. Speaking as a former Council Chair, Ms. O'Neill

acknowledged the significant loss to the community and noted that Ms. Swain's contributions and advocacy would be greatly missed. With no additional public comments, Chair Mayes closed the public comment period and moved on to Agenda Item 15.

15. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Mayes called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Council member Estipona 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. The meeting adjourned at 3:22 p.m.

MEETING MINUTES SUBMITTED BY URIAH CARTER, AA II

EDITED BY: JENNY RICHTER LIVIA, NSRC LIAISON.

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

Approved By:

Jack Mayes, Chair