

Board of Vocational Rehabilitation (BVR)
Wednesday, June 3, 2026 - 9:00 AM Central Time

Quarterly Meeting Held Via Zoom and DHS Hillsview Plaza/Conference Room

MEMBERS PRESENT: Jonathan Englund, Chris Olson, Betsy Drew, Tana Zwart, Sherry Van Liere, Jennifer Trenhaile, Kara Schweitzer, Eric Weiss, and Michael Kokesh, Cole Uecker, Julie Johnson, Shawn Lyons, Vicki Stewart, Sylvia Buboltz, Heidi Mecham, and Bonnie Gusso. **MEMBERS ABSENT:** Eric Larson and Alana LittleBird. **OTHERS PRESENT:** Bernie Grimme, Katie Gran, Lori Kwasniewski, Nancy Big Eagle, and Colette Wagoner. The interpreter was Julie Paluch.

OPENING ACTIONS: Jonathan Englund, Chairperson, called the meeting to order and invited everyone to introduce themselves. A quorum was present. Review & Approval of Agenda: **MOTION TO APPROVE THE AGENDA AS DISSEMINATED – MADE (M), SECONDED (S), AND CARRIED (C).** YEAS: Micheal, Sherry, Shawn, Vicki, Cole, Chris, Julie, Tana, and Bonnie. NAYS: None.

Review & Approval of Meeting Minutes: Jonathan asked for changes/additions to the Board's March 10, 2026, meeting minutes and the Executive Committee meeting minutes from May 21, 2026, hearing none, **MOTION TO APPROVE THE BVR'S MARCH MINUTES AND THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES AS DISSEMINATED, MSC.** YEAS: Micheal, Sherry, Shawn, Vicki, Cole, Chris, Julie, Tana, and Bonnie. NAYS: None.

PUBLIC COMMENT: There was none.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: Vicki announced that ADA Sioux Falls is hosting Matthew Whitaker at the Levitt At the Falls on July 11th; Beer and Bingo at Severance Brewing (100 W 3rd Street) on July 15th starting at 6:00 pm, and the showing of Good Bad Things on Wednesday July 22 at 7:00 pm and July 26 at 4:00 pm at The State Theatre. Colette spoke to the Statewide Independent Living Council's solicitation for Champion of Independent Living Services' nominations, due June 26. And Pierre River Cities Public Transit is hosting a public meeting on June 10th, 5:30 – 6:30 pm at 1600 E Dakota Avenue in the Dakota Room.

DIVISION OF REHABILITATION SERVICES (DRS) DIRECTOR'S COMMENTS & UPDATES: Eric welcomed newly appointed members, reappointed members, and standing members. He thanked everyone for attending today's meeting. Program Year Quarterly Report: The most recent data is from Program Year 2025 third quarter (January 1 – March 31, 2026). There was a total of 518 applications with 3,603 individuals served and 526 closures during this period. There was a steady increase in

VR applications and services; federal fiscal year 2020 to 2025, applications rose 39% (1,441 to 1,999). For the state fiscal year case service expenditures increased by \$800,000 over the previous year and FY26 is projected to rise to another \$300,000.

Budget: Eric reported that Division staff are working with Budget and Finance personnel and utilizing a grant expenditure forecast model to manage federal and state funds. The difference in fiscal year timelines provides flexibility to absorb fluctuations in expenditures. The current fiscal outlook remains positive, with expenditures stabilized and supporting uninterrupted service delivery. Planning for the SFY 2028 budget is underway, reflecting the ongoing nature of state budgeting cycles.

Eric also shared that the 2026 Annual Disability Statistics Compendium is available. The report indicates that South Dakota has the highest employment rate for individuals with disabilities at 59.9%, compared to the national rate of 46.5%. South Dakota also ranks second nationally for the smallest employment gap between individuals with and without disabilities. The compendium can be accessed at:

<https://www.researchondisability.org/sites/default/files/media/2026-03/2026-Full-Compendium-for-Print.pdf>.

REVIEW OF DIVISION'S DRAFT INFORMATION: Bernie Grimme presented three draft program guides for review:

1. Employment Specialist Provider Standards Program Guide
2. Applicant for Vocational Rehabilitation Services and Availability for the Assessment Process
3. Residency Requirement for VR Applicants and Individuals Being Served by Multiple State Public VR Agencies

Revisions across all three guides included language cleanup, alignment with federal regulations, and improvements to operational flexibility. Bernie highlighted key policy updates, including the removal of the annual RFP requirement for private providers and streamlined contracting processes for independent contractors. The application process was expanded to allow verbal and virtual submissions, eliminating the requirement for signed paper forms and to ensure compliance with federal regulations. Additionally, the residency policy was clarified to allow individuals without permanent addresses or those receiving services from multiple states to qualify appropriately.

The Employment Specialist Provider Standards Program Guide includes clarification of provider types:

- Accredited providers that do not require contracts
- Consumer-certified providers for unique job coaching services
- Private for-profit providers with updated contracting procedures

Due to the minimal nature of the changes and updates primarily reflecting current leadership and provider classifications, this guide was recommended for immediate approval.

The Applicant for VR Services and Residency Requirement Program Guides were recommended for a 30-day delay to allow BVR and SBVI board member feedback, ensure thorough review, and confirm full alignment with federal requirements and practical implementation. The Board agreed that minor edits could be finalized internally following the comment period; however, any significant changes would be brought back for further discussion. **MOTION: TO APPROVE THE EMPLOYMENT SPECIALIST PROVIDER STANDARDS PROGRAM GUIDE AND TO DELAY FINALIZATION OF THE REMAINING TWO PROGRAM GUIDES FOR 30 DAYS TO ALLOW FOR BOARD MEMBER FEEDBACK AND ADDITIONAL REVIEW, MSC.** YEAS: Micheal, Sherry, Shawn, Vicki, Cole, Chris, Julie, Tana, and Bonnie. NAYS: None.

POST-SECONDARY OUTCOMES (INDICATOR 14) SURVEY RESULTS: Lori Kwasniewski, Transition Program Specialist, with the Department of Education, presented on the Post Secondary Outcomes Indicator 14 Survey Results. She noted recent changes to data collection and reporting methods, resulting in a revised presentation format.

Indicator 14 measures outcomes for students with disabilities one year after exiting high school (2023–2024 school year) and is part of the State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report (SPP/APR) required under IDEA. States must meet federally established targets or provide justification and corrective action plans. Targets are developed with stakeholder input and are used to guide continuous improvement efforts.

The survey tracks the percentage of youth who are:

- Enrolled in higher education
- Competitively employed
- Participating in other post-secondary education or training (e.g., apprenticeships, military)
- Engaged in other employment

Data is collected between May and August 15 through telephone surveys, with up to three contact attempts. Some school districts conduct their own interviews, while others use a contracted vendor. Additional methods, such as text messaging, are being explored to improve response rates.

Results show positive trends, including increases in higher education enrollment and competitive employment, with outcomes meeting or nearing federal targets. The 2024 response rate was 33%, with higher participation from districts conducting their own outreach.

Discussion included questions regarding underemployment and alignment of employment with training. Lori clarified the survey is limited to youth within one year of exiting high school. Additional discussion addressed data collection on wages, hours worked, and participation in programs such as Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS), Let's Talk Work, Catch the College Wave, and other Transition Services Liaison Project (TSLP) initiatives. Lori noted that future system improvements aim to better capture these data and demonstrate program impact.

Lori thanked members for their input and provided contact information for follow-up.

(Jonathan left the meeting, and the gavel was passed to Vicki to continue the meeting.)

DIVISION OF REHABILITATION SERVICES PROGRAM INITIATIVES: Kati Gran, DRS Transition Specialist, provided an overview of Transition Services Liaison Project (TSLP) activities statewide. TSLP hosted multiple "Let's Talk Work" events with a total of 616 attendees, including students, family members, employers, educators, and agency representatives. Topics included interviewing skills, Project Skills, assistive technology, and disability disclosure. Employer participation enhanced relevance, and survey feedback indicated increased student knowledge of workplace accommodations and career readiness.

Project Search: South Dakota currently has five Project SEARCH sites (Brookings, Sioux Falls (2), Rapid City, and Yankton). The program serves students ages 18–21 on IEPs who have not yet received a diploma or certificate of completion, providing internship-based training at host business sites.

Host partners include Monument Health, South Dakota State University, Sanford Health, Mount Marty University/Avera Sacred Heart, and Avera McKennan. The program combines classroom instruction (e.g., financial literacy, soft skills, resume development) with up to three internships lasting 10–12 weeks each.

Project SEARCH reports an overall 86% employment rate since inception. For the students finishing the 2025-2026 school year, four are employed, earning an average of \$15.25 per hour and working approximately 26 hours per week; remaining participants are actively seeking employment.

State Plan: Bernie provided an update on the 2024-2028 Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act, Combined State Plan, which covers July 1, 2024 through June 30,

2028. At the midpoint of the plan cycle, required sections must be updated. The Division's State Plan has 13 narrative sections. Of the 13 narrative sections, in the Division's State Plan, five were recently revised and submitted.

These updates, along with the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (completed jointly by the Division and the Board), were reviewed by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA). Required revisions included removal of certain Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) language per federal guidance, along with minor edits and clarification of goals, strategies, and performance measures.

Bernie noted that the Division's goals and strategies will be further updated to reflect findings from the most recent needs assessment, with completion anticipated by November 2027. This process will involve convening the Board's Consumer Services Committee in late summer or early fall to review and revise goals and strategies. The committee also addresses consumer satisfaction surveys, program and policy recommendations, and service delivery.

Heidi and Bonnie volunteered to serve on the Consumer Services Committee.

STATEWIDE INDEPENDENT LIVING COUNCIL (SILC): Eric provided an update on SILC, noting that the Division administers Independent Living (IL) funds from the Administration for Community Living (ACL). Federal requirements mandate that each state maintain a SILC to develop and monitor the State Plan for Independent Living.

The SILC last met on March 25. Updates included reports from the DRS IL Program Specialist on Centers for Independent Living (CIL) activities, consumer satisfaction survey progress, contract status, program reviews, and quarterly performance highlights. CIL directors also shared updates on local activities and staffing.

SILC is currently accepting nominations for the Champion of IL Services Award, due June 26. Members were encouraged to submit nominations recognizing contributions to independent living services.

The next SILC meeting will be held June 23. Eric also demonstrated the state's Boards and Commissions portal and how to access SILC and BVR webpages. The State's Boards and Commissions portal: <https://boardsandcommissions.sd.gov/>.

BVR STAFF UPDATE: NATIONAL DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT AWARENESS MONTH (NDEAM): NDEAM is a national initiative held each October to promote the contributions and inclusion of individuals with disabilities in the workplace. The 2026 NDEAM Theme is "Celebrating Value and Talent".

NDEAM activities are supported by BVR, SILC, and Board of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired (B/SBVI), with shared financial support from all three entities and the Division of Rehabilitation Services. A Request for Proposals (RFP) was issued in December, with submissions due in February. A joint review committee evaluated proposals and provided funding recommendations.

A total of 11 communities submitted proposals (Aberdeen, Mobridge, Brookings, Madison, Mitchell, Yankton, Rapid City, Deadwood, Sioux Falls, Sisseton, Watertown), requesting \$49,606. After review of speaker fees, advertising, in-kind contributions, funding was adjusted to \$46,356.

One speaker contract has been finalized for events in Mitchell, Yankton, and Vermillion. Additional event details will be shared as finalized. Board and Council members are encouraged to attend local events.

GOVERNOR'S AWARDS UPDATE: The 2026 nomination cycle opened in March and closed May 1. This is another joint initiative the BVR works in partnership with the SILC and B/SBVI. A review committee representing all three entities will meet June 30 to recommend award recipients to the Governor for final approval.

A total of 34 nominations were received for the seven categories: Individual with a Disability; Employee with a Disability; Small Private Employer; Large Private Employer; Public Employer; Transition Services; and Distinguished Service.

Nominations are accepted year-round via the Division's website, located at: <https://dhs.sd.gov/en/news-announcement/Governors-Awards-Nominations-2026?search=governor%27s%20awards>. Once the award recipients are announced and event details are finalized, information will be shared with the Boards and SILC.

Budget Update/Support Services Contract: Support services for the BVR and the SILC are provided through an agreement between the Division and Black Hills Special Services Cooperative (BHSSC). The contract follows a calendar-year budget cycle, with the current agreement starting on January 1st.

The budget pages disseminated via email showed minor expenditures through the month of April. Historically, the majority of expenses for both the BVR and SILC occur during the months of September, October, and November. These months align with key events: Governor's Awards Ceremony, National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) events, BVR/SILC members and CIL staff attending the Fall Conference.

Fall Conference: Colette spoke to the annual Fall Conference which is sponsored by DRS, SBVI and the Department of Human Services. It will be held October 13 – 15th in Deadwood at the Lodge. The theme this year is “Raising the Stakes: Advancing Employment and Independence for All”. Conference information can be located at South Dakota RehabACTion’s website: <https://www.sdrehabaction.org/fall-conference/2026-fall-conference> and there is a page specific to the speakers.

BVR members are encouraged to attend and expenses are covered. Registration fees are paid, hotel rooms are direct billed to BHSSC, and other costs are reimbursed, e.g., mileage and per diem. If you are interested in attending, please let staff know as soon as possible to ensure the necessary hotel accommodations are secured.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS: Vicki passed the gavel to Eric, asking him to speak on behalf of the Executive Committee. BVR officer positions consist of Chair, Vice Chair, and Member At Large. Eric introduced the proposed slate as Shawn Lyons/Chair, Chris Olson/Vice Chair, and Michael Kokesh/Member At Large. Each have indicated an interest in serving as officers. Eric emphasized that nominations can be made from the floor, noting that each position will be taken one at a time.

Eric started with the position of Chairperson. He called for further nominations for the Chair position in addition to Shawn’s name, two times. Hearing none – **MOTION TO CEASE NOMINATIONS AND ELECT SHAWN AS CHAIR – MSC**. YEAS: Michael, Sherry, Vicki, Cole, Chris, Tana, and Bonnie. NAYS: None. ABSTAIN: Shawn.

Eric moved onto the position of Vice Chairperson. Eric called for further nominations for Vice Chair, twice. Hearing none – **MOTION TO CEASE NOMINATIONS AND ELECT CHRIS AS VICE CHAIRPERSON – MSC**. YEAS: Michael, Sherry, Shawn, Vicki, Cole, Tana, and Bonnie. NAYS: None. ABSTAIN: Chris.

Eric moved to calling for further nominations for the position of Member-At-Large, twice. **MOTION TO CEASE NOMINATIONS AND ELECT MICHAEL AS MEMBER-AT-LARGE – MSC**. YEAS: Sherry, Shawn, Vicki, Cole, Chris, Tana, and Bonnie. NAYS: None. Abstain: Michael.

(Jonathan rejoined the meeting)

Eric thanked the new officers for their willingness to serve on the Executive Committee and encouraged other members to consider these roles, noting that elections are held annually. Eric also recognized members concluding their service on the Board, including Jonathan, Vicki, Jennifer, Jolleen Laverdure, and Eric Larson. Words of appreciation and encouragement were expressed. The virtual gavel was passed from Vicki to Jonathan and then to Shawn as the new Chair.

OTHER BUSINESS: There was no other business.

CLOSING ACTIONS: Future Agenda Items: A VR district office presentation will be scheduled to provide an overview of office operations, staff, and service territories. An annual review of South Dakota Open Meetings Laws will be included. Members were encouraged to share potential agenda items or topics of interest with the Chair or staff. Next Meeting: Staff will distribute a Doodle poll to determine a meeting date that accommodates the majority of members. Adjournment: Shawn called for a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded, and with no objections, the meeting adjourned at 12:30 PM.