

**Board of Vocational Rehabilitation (BVR)**  
**Tuesday, March 10, 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.

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Cole Uecker, Julie Johnson, Shawn Lyons, Vicki Stewart, Jolleen Laverdure, and Eric Larson.

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Bernie Grimme, Kim Ludwig, Katie Gran, Laura Schmit, Dr. Carla Miller, Kara Palmer, 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: Betsy, Michael, Sherry, Kara, Chris, and Tana. NAYS: None. Review & Approval of Meeting Minutes: Jonathan asked for changes/additions to the Board’s December 3, 2025, meeting minutes and the Executive Committee meeting minutes from February 18, 2026, hearing none, **MOTION TO APPROVE THE BVR’S DECEMBER MINUTES AND THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES AS DISSEMINATED, MSC.** YEAS: Betsy, Michael, Sherry, Kara, Chris, and Tana. NAYS: None.

**PUBLIC COMMENT:** There was none.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS:** There was none.

**DIVISION OF REHABILITATION SERVICES (DRS) DIRECTOR’S COMMENTS & UPDATES:** Eric extended his thanks to members, noting their time and commitment serving in a voluntary capacity. Program Year Quarterly Report: The most recent data is from the 2025 second quarter (October 1, 2025 - December 31, 2025). Total applications are 588, with 3,402 individuals served and 455 closures during this period. Applications have shown slow, steady gains since COVID. As total applications continue to increase, the growing demand is stretching the Division’s budget, staff resources, and provider capacity, particularly for job development and job coaching services.

Budget Update: Division staff work with Budget and Finance Management personnel to review case service costs and effectively manage grant funds. An expenditure forecast summary indicated that the Division may have 25% of the 2027 grant funds remaining, and 7% of the 2028 grant funds remaining. The positive news is that the 2026 grant year was fully funded and included a 2.57% increase. This funding level is expected to delay the need to implement an Order of Selection, which had been predicted by the forecast tool. If the Division is unable to serve all eligible applicants, it would be required to implement an Order of Selection, prioritizing services for individuals with the most significant disabilities.

Performance Indicators: Eric reported that RSA published the 2024 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) assessment results for the VR program. The report shows how states performed after the RSA statistical adjustment model was applied.

He reviewed the following performance indicators for the Division after the Rehabilitation Act adjusted module was applied:

1. Employment rate – 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter after exit: 100.3%
2. Employment rate – 4<sup>th</sup> quarter after exit: 94.6%
3. Median earnings (2<sup>nd</sup> quarter after exit): 90.2%
4. Credential attainment (percentage of participants in an education program who attain a recognized credential or diploma): 128%
5. Measurable skill gains: 122.5%

Division staff will meet with Rehabilitation Services Administration staff soon to re-negotiate new performance levels for 2027.

2026 Legislative Update: Provider inflation is currently being discussed at 1.4%, compared to 0% as proposed by the Governor in his budget address.

Three bills signed by the Governor impact the Open Meetings Laws:

- Senate Bill 46 requires proposed agendas to list all items and describe them in sufficient detail to reasonably inform the public.
- Senate Bill 47 revises the requirements for a public body to enter an executive session or closed meeting.
- Senate Bill 48 clarifies that an official meeting agenda must be posted online at least seventy-two hours before the scheduled start of the meeting.

Eric noted the BVR already does an excellent job complying with these requirements.

Eric explained that the Department of Legislative Audit is conducting an audit – based on the 2025 OMB guidelines – of the VR program. If the state expends \$500,000 or

more in federal funds within a fiscal year, it must undergo a Single Audit. This audit verifies that federal funds are used in compliance with applicable laws, regulations, and grant terms.

Eric noted that the U.S. Department of Education is currently exploring the possibility of moving RSA to another Federal agency.

**DIVISION OF REHABILITATION SERVICES PROGRAM INITIATIVES:** Bernie provided additional clarification regarding when the state contracts with a for-profit provider, independent contractor, business, as opposed to utilizing a state employee.

State Plan: Bernie explained that the 2024-2028 Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act Combined State Plan is a four-year plan covering July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2028. Midway through the State Plan cycle, specific sections must be updated, such as the State Rehabilitation Council Input, and the Division must report on the 3-year Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment. This updated information was submitted prior to March 3<sup>rd</sup>, and the Division is now waiting for approval from RSA.

Katie Gran, DRS Transition Specialist, provided an update on the Request for Proposal issued in November to conduct the summer Pre ETS (Pre Employment Transition Services) youth programs. Pre ETS services are designed to help students with disabilities to prepare for postsecondary education and/or competitive employment.

Typical applicants include schools, educational cooperatives, and adult service agencies. Pre ETS serves students with disabilities ages 14-21 who are receiving services from a secondary school.

There were twenty requests submitted, and all twenty were approved. Examples include proposals from Independent Living Choices and the Center for Disabilities. The total budget for these contracts is \$193,118, and each program must have a minimum of five participants to receive funding.

The Transition Services Liaison Project (TSLP) is funded by the Department of Education and Divisions of Rehabilitation Services and Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired. A transition stakeholder group is in place to review the project and ensure quality services are being provided to students with disabilities. TSLP recently revamped its website to create a more comprehensive “one-stop” resource for students and their families. Katie shared her screen and walked through the new design and features. The updated site is more consumer friendly and uses clearer, more accessible language. It includes tabs for:

- SD high school graduation requirements
- Post-secondary education opportunities
- Employment
- Assistance with activities of daily living
- Self-advocacy
- What to do if you're having a disagreement with your IEP team.

Members provided positive feedback on the updated website.

Project Skills is a paid work experience program for students with disabilities. VR has partnerships with public schools throughout the state. Schools or educational cooperatives are responsible for identifying jobs, conducting job development, providing job coaching, and monitoring students at the worksite. VR pays the students' hourly wages. This program helps students with disabilities build their resume, develop work skills, and gain valuable work references.

Katie has been working on required written agreements for the program. A total of 132 agreements has been completed, with 13 remaining to be finalized.

Kim Ludwig, DRS Business Specialist; provided an update on the upcoming 2026 Fall Conference, "Raising the Stakes, Advancing Employment and Independent Living for All". The conference will be held in Deadwood, October 13-15, 2026. A planning committee meets monthly to coordinate conference details.

Speakers for opening session, closing session, and luncheon have been confirmed: Chase Milke, Winston Clements, and Kathy Buckley. "Save the Date" information will be disseminated this week. Additional details can be found on South Dakota's RehabACTion website: <https://www.sdrehabaction.org/fall-conference/2026-fall-conference>.

Statewide Training for Businesses: DRS, Employment Disability Resources (EDR), and the Workplace Disability Network of the Black Hills (WDNBH) are continuing their quarterly statewide virtual training series for businesses, titled "The Morning Blend: Employer Disability Solutions." The series began in July 2025.

The next session is scheduled for April 16, 2026, from 9:00 – 10:00 AM (CT). This session will focus on how well-written job descriptions support leaders and Human Resource professionals when managing ADA accommodation requests, including how

job descriptions can serve as key evidence for the EEOC when determining essential job functions.

In addition to the training quarterly series, EDR and WDNBH are launching a new monthly interactive video education and discussion series titled “West Meets East: Access at Work.” These 30-minute live sessions allow for real-time discussion, Q&A, and ongoing learning. Each session is recorded and archived for future viewing.

The first session was held on March 4 and focused on South Dakota’s 2026 Service Animal Legislation related to Senate Bill 82. The session addressed the bill’s intent to prohibit the intentional misrepresentation of a service animal, clarify what qualifies as a legitimate service animal (excluding emotional support animals), and outline associated penalties. Intentional misrepresentation would be classified as a Class 2 misdemeanor, with potential penalties of up to 30 days in jail and a \$500 fine. Archived sessions will be made available in the future.

**SIoux FALLS DISTRICT OFFICE OVERVIEW:** Laura Schmit, DRS District Supervisor, provided an overview of the Sioux Falls District Office operations and staff. The Sioux Falls district serves two counties - Minnehaha and northern Lincoln – which represent the largest population area in the state. The district has fifteen employees: one supervisor, 10 VR counselors, and four support staff, as well as four contract/program specialists. Laura identified the fourteen schools served by the Sioux Falls office and discussed various partner agencies with which staff collaborate.

She highlighted service data from January 1, 2025 through December 31, 2025. The four most commonly served disability groups included depression (620 applicants), anxiety (617 applicants), ADHD (407 applicants), and Autism (272 applicants). These conditions are most often co-occurring with other disabilities.

Laura outlined several challenges facing the Sioux Falls office, including serving a dense population, which results in high caseloads for VR counselors. Additional challenges include a provider waitlist, transportation, which remains the number one barrier for clients, and a tight job market in Sioux Falls, making it difficult for providers to place individuals into employment. These factors present ongoing challenges for both VR counselors and providers.

Despite these challenges, the office reported several successes during the same timeframe. The district served 1312 clients, achieved 190 successful closures, received 716 new applicants, and maintained an average caseload size of 87.9 clients

per counselor. Laura emphasized that the most significant success has been the move to the new one-stop facility, noting that the space and environment are highly supportive of staff, client meetings, and collaboration with partner agencies.

**STATEWIDE INDEPENDENT LIVING COUNCIL (SILC):** Eric provided an update on the SILC explaining that the state, through the Division, receives Independent Living (IL) funds from the Administration for Community Living (ACL). Each state is required to have an established SILC, which is responsible for developing and monitoring the State Plan for Independent Living.

The SILC last met on December 17<sup>th</sup>. Agenda items included updates from the Division on the status of the Centers for Independent Living (CILs), a consumer satisfaction survey update; the status of CIL contracts; and highlights from the CIL quarterly reports. The CIL directors provided updates on activities and staffing levels.

The SILC approved the finalization of its Program Performance Report (PPR), allowing staff to submit the report to ACL prior to the end of January. Updates were also provided regarding the Boards of Vocational Rehabilitation and Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired.

Jessica Lamb, Executive Director of the Council on Developmental Disabilities, presented an overview of the Council's mission, organizational structure, funding, current state plan goals and development activities for the upcoming state plan cycle.

The next SILC meeting is scheduled for March 25. Eric displayed the state's Boards and Commissions portal (<https://boardsandcommissions.sd.gov/>) and demonstrated how to access the SILC's and BVR webpages.

## **BREAK**

**BVR STAFF UPDATE:** BVR and SILC Membership Update: As of June 30, the BVR will require a total of ten appointments or reappointments to meet the minimum requirement of 15 members. Three members are terming off, Jolleen is no longer with the Lower Brule Tribal VR Program, and efforts are underway to solicit a nomination to fill the American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Program representative position. Additionally, Eric Larson has chosen not to seek a second term due to workload demands. Five members will continue serving beyond June 30. The BVR has received six new nominations, three of whom are individuals with disabilities.

**SILC Membership:** To maintain its current size, the SILC will require eight appointments or reappointments. One member is terming off, and seven members will

continue serving beyond June 30. An additional seven members will complete their first term and have expressed interest in reappointment.

The SILC has received four new nominations, one of whom is an individual with a disability.

All nomination materials for both the BVR and SILC have been compiled and routed to the Division. The Division will forward the information to the Governor for review and consideration.

National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM): The NDEAM Review Committee met on February 26 to review and evaluate NDEAM funding requests submitted by 11 participating communities: Aberdeen, Mobridge, Brookings, Madison, Mitchell, Yankton, Rapid City, Deadwood, Sioux Falls, Sisseton, and Watertown.

The total funding requested by the eleven communities was \$49,606.00. The Committee reviewed multiple aspects of each request, including speaker fees, advertising budgets, in-kind contributions, and allowable and non-allowable expenditures as outlined under federal guidelines. The Committee agreed to reduce speaker fees for communities proposing to share presenters, which resulted in reductions to several overall funding requests.

As a result, the Committee is recommending approval of \$46,356.00 to support 2026 NDEAM activities.

The Committee noted that the submitted budgets were well developed, with clear detail and justification. Communities demonstrated strong local partnerships, provided substantial in-kind support, and proposed advertising across multiple platforms, which the Committee supported.

A total funding difference of \$3,250.00 was identified during the committee's review, resulting from adjustments to speaker fees and the removal of non-allowable expenditures.

Several communities proposed shared speaker arrangements to reduce costs:

- Aberdeen & Mobridge will share a speaker from the Rocky Mountain ADA Center, reducing overall speaker expenses.
- Mitchell, Yankton, and Vermillion also plan to share a speaker, resulting in additional cost efficiencies.

Watertown’s funding request was reduced by \$250.00 due to the inclusion of items that are not allowable for purchase with federal funds.

**Recommended Funding**

The NDEAM Review Committee is recommending approval of \$46,356.00 to support communities in planning their 2026 NDEAM events. This funding recommendation will be shared with the SILC and the Board of SBVI. Both groups will review the recommendation and consider their respective levels of financial support.

**Funding Structure and Historical Context**

- The Boards and Council serve as the primary financial supporters of NDEAM initiatives.
- The Division provides supplemental funding if a shortfall occurs.
- Historically, communities have come in under budget, as funding requests are based on best estimates for upcoming events.

There was consensus among members to accept the NDEAM Review Committees funding recommendation of \$46,356.00 to support the 2026 events.

Community	Requested funds	Recommended Funding	Difference
1 Aberdeen	\$3,300.00	\$2,300.00	\$1000.00
2 Brookings	\$2,000.00	\$2,000.00	
3 Madison	\$2,000.00	\$2,000.00	
4 Mitchell	\$5,125.00	\$4,625.00	\$500.00
5 Mobridge	\$3,300.00	\$2,300.00	\$1,000.00
Rapid City &			
6 Deadwood	\$9,500.00	\$9,500.00	
7 Sioux Falls	\$9,931.00	\$9,931.00	
8 Sisseton	\$2,000.00	\$2,000.00	
9 Vermillion	\$4,500.00	\$4,500.00	
10 Watertown	\$2,250.00	\$2,000.00	\$250.00
11 Yankton	<u>\$5,700.00</u>	<u>\$5,200.00</u>	<u>\$500.00</u>
	<b>\$49,606</b>	<b>\$46,356</b>	<b>\$3,250</b>

**SD PARENT CONNECTION ORGANIZATIONAL FUNDING REQUEST FOR THE 2026 LIGHTING THE WAY CONFERENCE.** Dr. Miller presented an overview of the purpose and impact of the *Lighting the Way* Conference and how it supports VR outcomes. She explained that the conference provides training related to transition to adult services, work readiness, employment supports, and community inclusion, and builds skills, strategies, and knowledge that improve education, employment, and independent living outcomes for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD).

Dr. Miller addressed the conference's emphasis on community and interagency collaboration, as well as the relevance of breakout sessions and content areas. Topics aligned with workforce preparation and vocational supports, transition outcomes, the use of assistive technology in school and daily life, guardianship, and alternatives to guardianship, and Charting the LifeCourse principles.

She noted that the conference is expected to have a broad reach among educators, employers, VR counselors, community partners, and families. Anticipated benefits for attendees include increased awareness of VR services, enhanced networking that strengthens interagency collaboration, and improved skills to support individuals with ASD in school, work, and community settings.

Following discussion and questions regarding the conference, and noting that the proposal meets the BVR's outlined allowable use of funds and is consistent with established sponsorship amounts, the following action was taken: **MOTION: TO PROVIDE FINANCIAL SUPPORT IN THE AMOUNT OF \$2,000.00 TO SUPPORT SPEAKER-RELATED COSTS FOR THE 2026 LIGHTING THE WAY CONFERENCE.** YEAS: Michael, Sherry, Kara, Chris, and Tana. NAYS: None. ABSTAIN: Betsy.

**SILC STAFF UPDATE – CONTINUATION:** Governor's Awards Solicitation: The upcoming Call for Nominations for the 2026 Governor's Awards cycle will be issued mid-March, with nominations due by May 1. Nomination materials are available on the Division's website year-round. This effort is a joint activity of the BVR, B/SBVI and SILC.

As in previous years, a review committee will be convened at the end of June with representatives from each board and council to review and evaluate all submitted nominations. The Review Committee includes three BVR members (Shawn, Cole, Chris), two SILC members (CJ, Joe) and the B/SBVI has two members (George Seaman, Cherie Gerry).

Budget/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 and includes an option for four one-year extensions, if continued services are needed.

Two budgets were disseminated. The 2025 contract year budget included additional pages outlining a detailed list of expenditures. The BVR and SILC maintain separate budget line items, including member travel, meeting expenses and strategic planning. The SILC budget also includes a line item for CIL Staff Training, which supports training needs for Centers for Independent Living staff.

The majority of expenses for both the BVR and SILC typically occur during September, October, and November, aligning with the Governor's Awards Ceremony, NDEAM events, and BVR, SILC, and CIL staff attendance at the Fall Conference.

The 2026 Calendar-Year Budget identified expenditures through the month of January. There was one expense, incurred by the SILC, which provided support to the 2026 Disability Awareness Day event held at the Capitol in February.

Fall Conference: Colette reminded members of the upcoming Fall Conference and encouraged anyone interested in attending to notify her so that the necessary hotel accommodations can be secured.

**OTHER BUSINESS:** There was none.

**CLOSING ACTIONS:** Future Agenda Items: Jonathan encouraged members to pass along agenda items or topics of interest to staff. Next Meeting: a doodle poll will be disseminated to identify a date in June. Adjournment: Jonathan asked if there were any objections to adjourning the meeting, there were none. The meeting ended at 11:43 AM.