



# **Rehabilitation Council of Texas (RCT)**

**May 1-2, 2025**

**4241 Woodcock Dr.,**

**San Antonio, TX 78228, Suite A110**

**In person and via Zoom**

Day 1: <https://youtu.be/EqDHiOTOVZ0>

Day 2: <https://youtu.be/rqb3dTOggyI>

## **Council Members Present**

Gennadiy Goldenshteyn, Chair, Dallas

Peggy Schmidt, Vice Chair, Lucas (Virtually)

Glenda Born, Austin (Virtually)

Mark Baird, San Angelo (Virtually)

Jennifer Clouse, Temple (Virtually)

Norine Gill, Taylor Lake Village

Emily Robinson, Pflugerville (Virtually)

Daniel Solcher, Allen

Jordan Smelley, Burleson (Virtually)

Karen Stanfill, Houston

Shannon Rosson, Bedford (Virtually)

Erica Kress, Aubrey (Virtually)

Tammy Martin, Austin

Melva Henderson, Dallas (Virtually)

## **Council Members Absent**

Kiffany Jefferson, Rowlett

Michele Norris, LaPorte

Michele Harper, San Marcos

## **TWC Employees Attendance as Panelist:**

Melinda Paninski, Scott McCune, Christopher Speckhard, Christy Lerche, Jamie Haywood, Jonas Schwartz, Sara Weems, Daniel Prado, Shelly Caillouet, Ed Serna, Lisa Godwin, Karen Hess, Elyse Luke, Larry Elliott, Dawn Natalino-White, Nicholas Casillas, Angela Bazaldua, Elizabeth Barkley, Elsa Y Perez, Malcolm Ifoezeh, Melissa Huston, Heather Cooke, Joel Miranda

## **TWC Employees Attendance non-Panelist Virtually: 111**

## **Public Attendance: Onsite 3 Virtual 131**

**Thursday, May 1, 2025**

### **Welcome:**

- Gennadiy Goldenshteyn, RCT Chairman, welcomed attendees in person and remotely. Thanked Larry Elliott and Dawn Natalino-White (Region 6) for hosting.
- Mentioned reflecting on VR and TWC while driving to meetings, emphasizing the challenges and uncertainties faced by the VR division, and the need to focus on core mission, trust, and individual responsibilities.
- Housekeeping notes included instructions for public comments sign-ups (email Lisa Godwin by 3:10 p.m. CT), microphone use, enunciating for interpreters, introducing speakers and describing visual materials, and directions to restrooms.
- Introduced Elise Luke as the new deputy director of strategy.

## **VR Division Organizational Realignment:**

- Tammy Martin, Director, Vocational Rehabilitation, Texas Workforce Commission, presented the VR Division's organizational realignment plan.
- The goal is to create capacity without adding FTEs, support field offices and counselors by aligning policies, procedures, and communication to improve efficiency and customer outcomes.
- Discussion included a review of the new organizational chart, with four deputy division directors:
  - Deputy Division Director of Blind Services: Juanita Barker (oversees Criss Cole Rehabilitation Services and Business Enterprises of Texas, Older Individuals Who Are Blind, and Field Support for BVE specialty staff).

- Deputy Division Director for Field Services: Jamie Haywood (oversees six regional directors and the State office transition team).
- Deputy Division Director of Program Operations: Scott McCune (oversees business systems, administrative services, budget & personnel, provider and field support, and specialized services).
- Deputy Division Director of Strategic Alignment and Program Improvement: Elyse Luke (oversees policy and planning, program management, quality assurance and program improvement).
- The Communications department (Melinda Paninski) is now under the Division Director's office, focusing on internal and external communications.
- Jennifer Clouse inquired about the Business Services Team; confirmed it reports to Melinda Paninski within VR Communications.
- Tammy also mentioned plans to restructure field offices and regional offices using Tiger Teams with staff input.

### **CSAVR and NCSRC Takeaway:**

- Scott McCune attended fiscal matters sessions, discussing states in order of selection and steps for implementation, emphasizing forecasting models and learning from other states. He also noted the increased federal appropriation for the VR grant.
- Jamie Haywood attended personal development and retention sessions, focusing on building staff through organized development and training. Jamie plans to review the information she learned to figure out which strategies can be implemented in Texas.
- Tammy Martin attended a new VR director training and NCSAB, with a common theme of federal-level changes and the potential move of VR to the Department of Labor, while VR programs appear to be viewed positively as an economic development platform. There was a focus on fiscal forecasting with concerns that multiple states may be going into an order of selection.
- Karen Stanfill attended services oriented sessions, highlighting Class Wallet (a possible purchasing solution) and self-employment resources ("Go, No Go" presentation).
- Peggy Schmidt attended the conference highlighting networking with other councils, learning about an intake pilot program, and discussions on developing and maintaining fee schedules.
- Gennadiy Goldenshteyn observed the complexity of Texas compared to other states, praised the technical unit, and highlighted the view of VR as an economic development platform at the federal level.

- Glenda Born asked about support from the Hill; Gennadiy clarified it relates to the Department of Labor and both House and Senate, stemming from the recognition of VR's ROI.

### **Legislative Session Update:**

- Karen Hess, Program Management Specialist, Vocational Rehabilitation Division, provided an update on Texas legislative bills potentially affecting VR.
- Reported an increase in the number of bills filed compared to previous sessions.
- The House Bill 1 includes an appropriations request for VR, with House and Senate differing on the amount, requiring conference committee resolution.
- House Bill 500 includes a supplemental appropriation request for the current year and has passed the House.
- Discussed key bills, including:
  - HB 2791 (procurement authority for VR).
  - HB 3493 (phasing out subminimum wages).
  - HB 2093 (CPR certification for food service employees).
  - HB 2082 and 2281 (voter registration).
  - HB 645 and Senate Bill 1653 (services for deaf-blind individuals).
  - HB 1188 (referral of special education students with IDD).
  - HB 2542 (HHSC workgroup on services for individuals with IDD).
  - HB 2807 and Senate Bill 2896 (statewide IDD coordinating council).
  - HB 3090 (hearing aid coverage).
  - HB 2094 (food service establishment warning signs for peanuts).
  - SB 186 (Texas students with disabilities scholarship program).
  - HB 1040 (weapon possession restrictions).
  - HB 473 (Bill of Rights for mental health).
  - Senate Bill 1330 and House Bill 3150 (durable medical equipment billing).
  - HB 4228 (voter registration application distribution restrictions).
  - SB 1610 (procurement allowances and restrictions for HHSC).
  - Senate Bill 1484 and House Bill (sale and marketing of catfish).
- Discussion included clarification on competing bills and the legislative process.

### **TWC VR Budget Update:**

- Scott McCune, Deputy Director of Program Operations, presented a budget update.
- Reviewed budget status as of the end of February, including salaries/wages, travel, operating expenses, and client services.
- Discussed budget and expenditure reports by division/region and service type.
- Provided client services distribution plan for the remainder of 2025, as well as projections for 2026-2027.

- Scott to provide a slice of salaries and wages used for direct customer service to be reviewed in email.
- He also suggested discussing personnel in committee meetings.
- Review of regional spending and the remaining balance.
- Highlights of mid-year progress across the state including preETS.
- Discussion about the high end vehicle modification average of \$14,000.
- Self-Employment plans were reviewed and there was discussion of helicopter pilot and funding for that.
- Discussed the decision-making process for self-employment and out-of-the-box scenarios.
- It was reported that there were supplemental funds of 70.4 million being released to the regional offices for a total of 220 million.
- Karen Hess gave an explanation that supplemental is for the house and HB500.
- Peggy asked for concerns that things might not be able to be spent with the additional resources so close to the fiscal year end.
- Shannon also provided some comments about not being given the opportunity to utilize funds for work based learning.

## **VR Division Report:**

- Tammy Martin, VR Division Director, presented with Geoffrey Miller (Analytics & Evaluation) and Christopher Speckhard (VRGIS Team Manager, Information, Innovation, and Insight (I|3)).
- General updates included information on projects and the Combined State Plan goals, strategies, and success measures.
- Discussion on Goal 1 to recruit and retain VR staff:
  - Purchasing workbook for rehab assistants.
  - Lead Academy and Pathways Academy.
  - Efforts to streamline hiring processes.
- Discussion on Goal 2 to improve provider recruitment:
  - Enhancement of provider support and training.
  - Quarterly call with providers.
  - Strengthening provider recruiting efforts.
  - PCG Rate Study Implementation update: Jamie Haywood reported on ongoing efforts to prepare for potential implementation based on legislative outcomes, noting a target implementation date of September 1, 2025.
- Discussion on Goal 3 to streamline policy, processes and procedures:
  - The self-employment policies and procedures are underway and scheduled to be published later this year.
  - Discussion on Goal 4 to improve customer informed choice:
  - Work Incentive of the Month and monthly webinars.

- Regional benefits specialist activities.
- Discussion on Goal 5 to improve staff knowledge and system capacity:
  - Update on the Tri agency work group (TWCVR, HHSC, and TEA).
  - Planning for the second Tri agency employment services conference.
- Discussion on Goal 6 to increase and enhance partnerships with employers:
  - Business relations team activities.
  - Spotlight events.
  - Work based learning opportunities (1215 VR customers referred).
  - Project Search (34 active sites).
  - VR skills training to employment project (STEP).
- There was a discussion on a 50% drop in SEAL for the Region 5 program.
- There was also discussion regarding to reaching out to communication and being sure to reverse the negative effects with 2025 as well as how structurally run 2026.
- The discussion had concluded to make sure it's based off what's reasonable and allowable.

### **PCG Rate Study Implementation Update:**

- Haywood noted that implementation of rate increases will depend on the exceptional item being approved.
- There's a project team developing a communication and implementation plan.
- There's a goal set of working to implement the service by September, 1st of this year.

### **VR Performance Update:**

- Christopher Speckhard, Manager VRGIS Team, Information, Innovation, and Insight (I|3), provided a performance update, highlighting:
  - Turnover rate.
  - Improve provider recruitment.
  - Streamline policy processes and procedures.
  - Improved staff knowledge and system capacity.
- Statewide participate engagement rate.
  - TBI/Stroke/SCI comparison data.
- Discussion about staff turnover and if it incorporates salaries and whether the organization is getting more personnel by average.
- Christopher was requested to refresh data that has been reported in the past as it is relative to today's current climate for the next session.
- After that, a presentation of statewide performance measures, compared to the yearly target.
- Discussed different elements that are measurable skills,

- Educational Functioning Level.
- Attainment of Secondary School diploma.
- A report card.
- A concern was risen on data if the number reported was a real number.
- It was suggested that he should investigate it for the TBI and other data about it not being good data.

### **TBI/Stroke/SCI Follow Up and Best Practices:**

- Jonas Schwartz, Specialized Services Support Program Manager and Melissa Huston presented an overview of the ESBI program, its goals, progress, and lessons learned.
- Emphasized the collaboration with HHS comprehensive services, community vendors, and national outreach,
- Melissa presented a plan to get help with brain injury and spinal cord injury at the state office to lead focus initiatives in TWC VR.
- Identified the three components and the medical knowledge base, there needs to be more time afforded to counselors, participation from these parties.
- The floor had mentioned that the role would be a specialized counselor.
- That plans will be to establish 2025

### **Public Comment:**

- Ashley Frias, Dr Amanda Frias, a professor and occupational therapist, shared experiences and proposed integrating OT into the TWC system to support individuals with IDD. Discussed providing consultation for employment and employers.
- Barbara Brewer shared concerns about requiring a neuro psychological evaluation, the problems that have occurred at IEP, and that tickets to work is a volunteer program but Texas work is forcing those that she talked with to have them. She asked for more awareness with the issues she has with the Texas Workforce.

## **5:30 Recessed for the day**

**May 2, 2025**

### **Welcome:**

- Chairman opened day 2
- State of TWC:
- Ed Serna, TWC Executive Director, provided an update on TWC, including confirmation of funding for VR services and the nursing apprenticeship program.

- Reported on plans for all staff to come back into the office soon and mentioned that this would affect things.
- Mentioned the need for accountability, that it's better to look at how we are currently doing everything.

## **Region 6 Showcase:**

- Employer, Toyota of Texas, was presented by Nicholas Casillas (Business Coordinator), and Naomi Ramirez Campos. Presentation included video and details of onboarding strategy, a 13 week program (360 hours, paid internship), the rotating schedule and more. At the current time, there are 12 participants of Toyota, six offer and four accepted employments.
- Andrea Robertson, Customer was presented by Joel Miranda, vocational rehab counselor. They have worked together for 17 years. There was a discussion of the adjustment process to transition while also facing vision loss.
- Regional Update: Larry Elliott, Regional Director and Dawn Natalino-White, Deputy Regional Director. Shared how they are feeding into and aligning Director Martins strategic priorities. Highlights include staff development/recognition, customer engagement and outreach.
- Many topics had been reviewed during the process with all of this.
  - The new employee training modular series.
  - The data for the monthly basis.
  - Circle of resolution.
  - Monthly progress from our providers.
  - Statewide participate engagement rate.

## **Region 6 Showcase:**

- Dawn gave a presentation the area's goal to standardize purchasing and make teams. In April 2022 the project was started but then found other things they hadn't thought about.
- High lights include the following
  - To reduce the variability of tasks.
  - Increase staff satisfaction and moral.
  - Reduce turn over.
  - Improve cycle time.
  - Improve customer satisfaction and to make all come out better.
- It was learned after 2024 and 2025 that the data for the years was not great due to many factors, one being a transition of folks and other folks that couldn't take part in the implementation.
- She then showed the responsibility, communication and accountability that went into the workflow.



## **Region 4 Intake Pilot Update:**

- Malcolm provided an update on their intake pilot project, implemented to streamline the VR process through specialization and improve efficiency.
- The goal was to reduce workload and improve employee satisfaction,
- The team saw improvements but experienced new problems.

## **Peer Support Program Overview & Pilot:**

- VR Perspective: Jonas Schwartz, Manager Specialized Services Support, presented information for the peer specialist pilot project in the State. The goal is to add a new service. The peer is to take a class room course for training.
- Provider Perspective: Jordan Smelley gave a slide show about having a relationship map and a communication cart. This provides a plan for how they would like to be treated and help the counselor meet their needs. They also follow what and how in the 2 day plans.

## **Liaison Reports Full Reports are included in the binder:**

- Client Assistance Program (CAP): Karen Stanfill reviewed a meeting from CAP that had taken place in February. They discussed the goals as well as signature on the IPEs.
- Community Rehabilitation Provider (CRP): Peggy Schmidt stated that there was a date set for June 24th for the Statewide provider call. She also requested that they get an audio copy of these events, due to there being multiple issues with many of the providers not getting the material.
- Partners Resource Network (PRN): Shannon Rosson talked about their 157 workshops and that they have serviced over 47,000 people through that program, as well as helping the youth with many programs in the future.
- State Independent Living Council (SILC): Melva Henderson stated what SILC has been working on the data base . Their focus is to evaluate the state plan, sexual assault and different aspects that are included.
- Texas Education Agency (TEA): Emily Heise. Highlighted items in the shared point. There is a map for students that will need support. To get the help that they will need for students in special education .
- Texas Workforce Investment Council (TWIC): Report was shared in the binders with no additional review.

## **Committee Reports:**

- **Policy, Procedure & Personnel Development (Karen Stanfill):** Provided an update about having HR send an email about the exit survey for the position to all the areas, also that VR wants to revisit with this process.

- **Education and Membership (Emily Heise):** Discussed members terming out and need for recruits for RCT Membership
- **Customer Satisfaction & Needs Assessment (Jennifer Clouse):** Discussed the customer satisfaction survey results, focusing on satisfaction with job and that they are good, that the committee will be looking for a way to increase those numbers to show more benefit to the overall programs.

### **Council Business:**

- Approved February Minutes
- RCT Budget Report presented
- Discussion of members terming out and election of RCT officers
- Strategic planning session scheduled for September 8-9 in Austin.
- The next Quarterly meeting would be at Criss Cole.

### **Public Comment:**

- Jerry DeCicca: Appreciated that small rural providers were identified on Scott's slide yesterday, wants field staff to have information about large problems.
- Mark Spurlock: Inquired about the impact of actions taken in Washington on state VR services.
- A. Turner: Shared about getting refused for accommodations, talked about all the different ways people were able to,

### **Adjourn**