

Ohio Sunset Commission  
November 30, 2015  
Testimony of Freddie Johnson  
Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation

Good afternoon Chairman Brown and members of the Ohio Sunset Review Committee my name is Freddie Johnson, and I am the Chief of Medical Services for the Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation. I am here on behalf of the Labor Management Government Advisory Council created in ORC 4121.70 and OAC 4123-18-18.

In summary, this council is tasked to advise the Administrator on the quality and effectiveness of rehabilitation services and make recommendations pertaining to the rehabilitation of injured workers, including the overall operation of the bureau's program. The council is comprised of fifteen members representing stakeholders of the workers' compensation system and vocational rehabilitation experts. Terms of the appointed members are six years in length.

BWC staff has struggled to find individuals with expertise in the vocational rehabilitation field who are willing and able to commit to a six year term and structured format. To that extent, the committee has met many challenges in garnering attendance and has not regularly had a fully attended council meeting since at least 2010. This has led to the associated struggle to even achieve a quorum of the seated council members. Due to these attendance challenges, the committee has only met once in 2015.

BWC knows investing the time and energy to gather input from all stakeholders in the development of effective policies and procedures which impact the workers' compensation system is integral to creating a world class system. In any aspect of the operations whether it is rules, policies or procedures, BWC provides information to our stakeholders and collaborates with them prior to implementation. This collaboration is not limited to vocational rehabilitation and most recently has been a key to success in transitioning to a prospective billing system. A major but necessary change for moving Ohio's workers' compensation to be in line with best industry practices. This transition has been successful by working with all of our stakeholders.

In regards to vocational rehabilitation, BWC also sees rewards in working with all of our stakeholders. Most recently a workgroup of stakeholders of injured worker and employer representatives, vocational providers, both for profit and not for profit - some of whom have had interactions with LMG, was established to solicit feedback on challenges in the vocational rehabilitation program at BWC. The feedback the group provided was crucial and significantly shaped and assisted BWC in making paramount changes to the vocational rehabilitation environment.

Furthermore, the group worked together to develop and implement a new approach to reimbursing vocational providers for services rendered. The workgroup vetted the proposed reimbursement methodology, and identified opportunities and ways BWC could ensure

success. BWC received useful feedback on the goals and objectives of the new fee schedule, and direction on components of the program which were still under development.

These changes have improved the quality of service for the injured worker and improved return to work, which benefits employers and workers. Utilizing a more nimble approach of a workgroup, provided just in time, industry- specific knowledge, high quality feedback and allowed stakeholders and interested parties to be more engaged with BWC. Despite not having a formal setting, such as the LMG advisory council, the workgroup was flexible and provided timely advice on formulating policy and strategies to improve the vocational rehabilitation system. Seeing such successes, BWC continues using this approach for updates to the vocational rehabilitation program as well as other agency reforms.

It is important to note, in addition to these workgroups, there are other formal opportunities for feedback at BWC. Although not solely tasked to review vocational rehab, BWC has a Health Care Quality Assurance Advisory Council and the Board of Directors. Established in statute, both provide a forum where stakeholders can provide additional, formal, public feedback on proposed changes to the workers' compensation system.

Since we have obtained high quality feedback and initiative from BWC's stakeholder groups, BWC has been able to maintain increasingly higher levels of engagement and successes than what was achieved in the structured council setting. Therefore, we believe the Labor Management Government Advisory Council can be sunset without compromising BWC ability to maintain an open, effective forum for expert stakeholder input. The objective of the LMG council relative to BWC has and can be met through the continued used of the diverse workgroups and BWC's public forums. It is through these channels that, employers, injured workers, their representatives, as well as other interested stakeholders such as providers and nonprofit organizations are provided assessable methods to provide high-quality input into our system as we continue to improve the workers' compensation system.

Thank you for allowing me to present testimony today. I am happy to answer any questions.