



## Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities

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Governor  
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Bureau of Services for the Visually Impaired  
Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation  
Division of Disability Determination

### Testimony of Bill Bishilany, Assistant Executive Director Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities

Chairman Amstutz, Ranking Minority Member \_\_\_\_\_ and distinguished committee members, my name is Bill Bishilany and I am the Assistant Executive Director of Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD). I am pleased to present to you today a proposal to enhance the ability of Ohioans with disabilities to more effectively engage with and advise the vocational rehabilitation (VR) programs provided through Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD).

Currently, OOD has three separate entities that represent individuals with disabilities in Ohio and provide feedback to the agency:

- The ***seven-member OOD Commission*** approves the state vocational rehabilitation plan, jointly approves the state plan for independent living with the Ohio State Independent Living Council and serves as an advisory body on the effectiveness of, and consumer satisfaction with, the vocational rehabilitation programs of OOD.
- The Commission appoints the ***seventeen-member Consumer Advisory Committee (CAC)*** which also advises OOD on its vocational rehabilitation programs. This volunteer body is comprised of individuals who have successfully attained or retained a job with the help of OOD.
- In addition, Ohio has a ***twenty-one member Governor's Council on People with Disabilities (GCPD)*** charged with providing input and guidance to the Governor and members of the General Assembly on policy and legislation as it pertains to laws in Ohio that affect the disability community.

Currently we have 45 individuals on three separate bodies representing individuals with disabilities. Having three separate entities with different statutory defined missions and duties makes staff support and interaction complex and disjointed. Moving to one entity with one statutory authority would streamline communication and staff support.

Despite significant changes in the operation of the vocational rehabilitation program and our agency, the nature and operation of the Commission, the CAC and the GCPD have remained virtually unchanged for decades. With the implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and OOD's inclusion as a cabinet level agency in the Governor's Administration, a clearer and more effective streamlined approach is needed.

We would propose integrating all of the aforementioned advisory entities into a State Rehabilitation Council (SRC). This structure, recognized under federal law, would require at least 15 members appointed by the Governor. Individuals with disabilities who do not work for OOD, representing a cross section of disabilities and including those who have difficulty representing themselves, would make up a

majority of the members, but membership would also include members of the business community, partner agencies and a VR counselor.

Disability Rights Ohio (DRO), a non-profit organization that advocates for the civil and legal rights of people with disabilities in Ohio, is supportive of moving to a SRC model. DRO approached us to discuss this option. They provided us with a set of talking points for further discussion (attached) which noted:

“A SRC would be able to advise OOD and provide a concrete voice for individuals with disabilities not just in terms of providing feedback, but also by actually commenting on and affecting policies and procedures that the VR agency utilizes in the delivery of VR services.”

It is also worth noting that Ohio is the only state in the country still using the commission structure.

Besides providing for a more unified and effective process for feedback and engagement, moving to SRC would involve significant savings in reimbursement and travel costs alone. The current structure allows for as many as 45 members while SRC structure would only require 15 members. At full participation, 45 members requires \$49,950 (based on average costs), while 15 members would require only \$16,650; a costs savings of \$33,300.

In addition, the current structure requires approximately 47 hours of direct support per month from the OOD Office of Communications and other direct support staff. This support includes:

- scheduling and arranging meetings
- agenda creation
- meeting notices and minutes
- arranging special accommodations
- creating and filing expense reports
- follow-up on action items, etc.

This does not include support services such as fiscal and IT. Nor does it include programmatic or policy research and reporting.

Modernizing how Ohio serves individuals with disabilities has been a priority for OOD and Governor Kasich. This proposed change would allow for greater access, greater awareness and follow a model that has been adopted across the country all while saving taxpayer dollars.