

Brief Notes about a State Rehabilitation Council

Ohio has the opportunity to enhance the ability of Ohioans with disabilities to participate in the provision of vocational rehabilitation (VR) services by Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD). Currently, OOD has a Commission with 7 members when full, and also a Consumer Advisory Committee. Changes in federal law have caused almost all other states to have a State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) that advises the VR agency (OOD in Ohio). 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. The Commission and CAC as they now exist each perform some, not all, of the functions of an SRC. As a result, individuals with disabilities often feel it is difficult for them to get information or have meaningful input in how OOD helps individuals with disabilities. The SRC proposal would change that.

- Under federal law, there would be at least 15 members on the SRC, all appointed by the Governor. The Governor has to consider input from individuals with disabilities and organizations interested in them, and must consider the inclusion of minority populations. This could be more members than the Commission and CAC currently have, allowing room for disability and geographic diversity to grow. The law also provides categories for members of the SRC to ensure a variety of viewpoints are represented and that OOD can get more input from the SRC than it does from the Commission or the CAC independently.
- In a new opportunity for Ohio, direct business input would be represented on the SRC. The categories ensure that four members represent business and industry, delivering the viewpoint of the labor market. OOD has developed valuable business relationships and this is a potential way to expand those relationships to aid individuals with disabilities and the SRC.
- The Statewide Independent Living Council, the Client Assistance Program, the Workforce Investment Board, a parent training and information center, and the state Department of Education would also be represented, along with other disability-related entities. A qualified VR counselor with experience in VR field work must be a member, to ensure that experience in the actual provision of services is present, as well as the OOD Director or his designee as a non-voting member to represent OOD itself. With these groups, the SRC brings a wide spectrum of ideas to the table and also ensures that what the SRC (and OOD) does is accessible to everyone.
- Individuals with disabilities who do not work for OOD, representing a cross section of disabilities and including those who have difficulty representing themselves, must make up a majority of the members of the SRC. This ensures that the SRC is a voice for individuals with disabilities and their organizations in the most direct way possible – to ensure that even if there are differences of opinion, the overall SRC provides representative input for OOD.
- The proposed SRC will involve consolidation from the Commission and the CAC as they now exist, allowing for organizational efficiencies but also ensuring that input of the type those groups provided is present in the SRC and shared with OOD. The SRC approach allows OOD to enhance its ability to gather more types of input from more individuals with disabilities and more groups with interest in the provision of VR services.
- The process of establishing the SRC involves people with disabilities with the Governor's office and General Assembly, and promotes their broader engagement in public policy.