Florida Rehabilitation Council

Andy Houghton, FRC Chair
Teams Meeting Minutes-January 9, 2023

Members:
Andrew Houghton, Michael Adamus, Denny Clark, Tammy Davis, Brent McNeal, Delaina Parrish, Allison Klein, Victoria Gaitanis

VR Staff:
Kim Thomas, Roy Cosgrove, Derrinita Walker

The following represents a summary of deliberations, advice, comments and motions that comprise this FRC meeting/Teams call.

Call to order-Quorum established
Andy thanked everyone for being on the call and wished everyone a happy new year. The council approved the agenda.

Andy discussed the issue of the department proposing changes to the council’s language in their recommendations to the State Plan in the Annual Report. Brent added that the Governor’s office weighed in on it as well and that the intent was to fine-tune the language to reflect what’s going on currently as far as the salary initiative in the legislative budget request. He felt that the recommended language does reflect the reality of where the salary increase is at this time. Andy discussed that it’s important to recognize that the council is concerned about changes to the language without them having any input so he is appreciative of the opportunity to discuss. He felt the language in Recommendations 1 and 2 is acceptable and that his primary concern is the opening paragraph. Brent said he doesn’t have any concerns about any of the recommended changes.

Delaina said she was only concerned about “VR workforce” language and Brent clarified that it relates to employees. Vendors and providers are not included in “VR workforce” in this respect. Tammy said that while wordsmithing is important, it’s also important to get the the required report submitted as soon as possible. Andy said the council should come to a consensus and Brent will take it back to leadership for approval. Michael said he is concerned about the council’s voice being rewritten but the focus is the same; only reworded with the same meaning. Andy said the proposed language doesn’t capture the voice of the council but if the council approves the language, he will support it; he would just prefer keeping the majority of
the paragraph as originally written. The concerns and observations haven’t changed from the intent of the former FRC members who wrote the language. Brent said he doesn’t feel there will be any additional tweaks from leadership. Andy reminded all that the language was approved months ago so moving forward, they will look at it more closely and will do so earlier in the year.

After discussion, the council approved the following language: “The FRC is equally concerned with staff retention and turnover. The current high level of turnover has serious and significant impacts on the clients being served as well as staff. For Florida to have an impactful program of services for individuals with disabilities, actions should be taken to, at minimum, achieve pay more commensurate with experience and educational requirements, which would bring Florida closer to the national average. Action is needed by policy makers who can approve budgetary authority so that VR can be competitive in recruiting, hiring and retaining staff. The FRC appreciates the vision that VR leadership continues to bring to the agency and supports VR’s 2023-2024 legislative budget request to increase pay for VR Technicians, Counselors, Consultants and Supervisors. The FRC applauds these efforts and will continue to monitor the Division’s progress. The FRC is ready to meet the challenges with VR as a partner.”

Proposed recommendation #1: Approved
Proposed recommendation #2: Approved

Brent appreciated the willingness of the council to reconsider the language. He added that 2023 is a big year for VR with the legislative budget request and implementing AWARE, which should go live in June.

Adjourned