

N.S.R.C. Meeting Minutes
May 06, 2025

**NEVADA STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL (N.S.R.C.)
MEETING MINUTES**

Tuesday, May 6th, 2025, at 1:00 pm
Vocational Rehabilitation
1325 Corporate Blvd., Reno, NV 89502
&
Vocational Rehabilitation
3016 West Charleston Blvd., Suite 200, Las Vegas, NV 89102

COUNCILMEMBERS' PRESENT:

Raquel O'Neill
Jack Mayes
Robin Kincaid
Dawn Lyons
Drazen Elez (Non-Voting)
Judy Swain
Rebecca Rogers

COUNCILMEMBERS ABSENT:

Cynthia Gustafson
Jennifer Kane

GUESTS/PUBLIC:

Steven Cohen
Vernon Gomez
Kersten Mora
Teresa Morros, B.R.A.I.N Nevada
Doralee Martinez

STAFF:

Joseph Ostunio, Deputy Attorney General
Mechelle Merrill, VR Deputy Administrator of Programs
Brett Martinez, VR Deputy Administrator of Operations
Jenny Richter Livia, N.S.R.C. Liaison
Mat Dorangricchia, VR Northern District Manager
Ken Pierson, Business Services Manager
Brian Adragna, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor
Jacqueline Quintero, Administrative Assistant III
Uriah Carter, Administrative Assistant II
Rachel Fraser, Rehabilitation Counselor III
Jake Merrill, Rehabilitation Counselor III

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Lisa McCulloch, Quality Control Specialist II
Kaye-Lani-Tiafau, Administrative Assistat II

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1. CALL TO ORDER, ROLL CALL, QUORUM CONFIRMATION, AND AGENDA POSTING VERIFICATION

Raquel O'Neill, NSRC Chair, called the meeting to order at 1:15 pm. Jenny Richter Livia, N.S.R.C. Liaison, conducted roll call. Council Members Kane and Gustafson were absent.

N.S.R.C Liaison Richter determined a quorum was present and verified that the posting was completed on time in accordance with open meeting law. Ms. Richter also established that the Deputy Attorney General, Joseph Ostunio, was in attendance as well as all VR Staff.

2. FIRST PUBLIC COMMENT

Chair O'Neill opened the floor to public comments stating the time limitations to each comment due to time constraints. Legal notice was read, and the meeting phone number was provided.

At the beginning of the public comment session, Doralee Martinez addressed the meeting with the concerns about the Nevada TRIP Roadmap through Innovative Partnerships (Nevada TRIP) website. Ms. Martinez expressed concerns about the inaccessibility of the Nevada TRIP website. She explained that she had hopes for the Nevada TRIP Website to be improved and reach the target audience of younger people and those who need a job. Ms. Martinez stated she had reached out to Mechelle Merrill, Deputy Administrator of Programs, and had not received much help and wanted to bring these issues to the attention of the public.

No other public comments were made by Northern or Southern locations or by online attendees, advancing the meeting onto the next agenda item.

3. APPROVAL OF FEBRUARY 04, 2025, MEETING MINUTES

Chair O'Neill asked the council for any corrections or clarifications about the NSRC Meeting Minutes for February 4th, 2025. There were no comments.

Chair O'Neill asked for a motion to approve. Rebecca Rogers, NSRC Council Member, made a motion to approve the minutes as presented. Jack Mayes, Vice-Chair, seconded the motion. All were in favor, none opposed, Robin Kincaid, NSRC Council Member, abstained, motion carried.

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4. DISCUSSION OF MODIFICATION OF NSRC SCHEDULE

Chair O'Neill opened the item for discussion regarding the proposed rescheduling of the NSRC full meeting originally set for September 9, 2025. The new proposed date was Tuesday, September 16, 2025, at 1:00 PM.

N.S.R.C Liaison Richter confirmed the proposed date change. When asked if any members opposed to the change or any members would have difficulties attending, Dawn Lyons, NSRC Council Member, noted a scheduling conflict due to a mandatory Aging and Disability Services meeting, which may cause her to arrive up to an hour late. Chair O'Neill verified that the new date would not conflict with other major council meetings, such as the IL Council.

Chair O'Neill asked for a motion to approve the change of the date of the NSRC full meeting to September 16, 2025, at 1:00 PM. Vice-Chair Mayes made a motion to approve Member Kincaid seconds. All in favor, none opposed, none abstained, the motion carried.

5. DISCUSSION OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SUCCESS STORIES

Chair O'Neill opened the floor to Mechelle Merrill, VR Deputy Administrator of Programs, to present Vocational Rehabilitation success stories. Ms. Merrill introduced Rachel Fraser, Rehabilitation Counselor III.

Ms. Fraser shared the success story of her client, Vernon Gomez. She explained that Mr. Gomez received job development services through Brain Recovery Association Institute Nevada (B.R.A.I.N.) and that Teresa Morros from B.R.A.I.N. was also in attendance and could speak further on his progress. She reported that Mr. Gomez secured employment with U-Haul and began working in February 2025. She detailed the support provided through VR services, which included assistive technology such as text-to-speech tools and a reader pen to assist with reading printed materials. Mr. Gomez also received auxiliary services, including an electronic bicycle for commuting, work boots, and clothing for interviews and employment.

Ms. Fraser highlighted Mr. Gomez's personal and professional development, noting that helping him had been a rewarding experience. She emphasized his growing independence and the active role he played in his own progress, citing his determination, resilience, and commitment as instrumental to his success. She then opened the floor to Mr. Gomez to speak and share his story.

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Mr. Gomez introduced himself and expressed that, having lived with a disability his entire life, he did not believe he would be able to work again. After the passing of close family members, he faced significant personal challenges while transitioning to independent living.

He described how, after deciding he no longer wanted to remain isolated at home, he reached out to Ms. Morros and Ms. Fraser for support. With their assistance, he secured employment at U-Haul on February 8 and has maintained the position since. Mr. Gomez shared that while some workdays are difficult, having a job gives him a sense of purpose and belonging. He emphasized how working, even part-time, helps him feel connected to society and less isolated.

He also expressed gratitude for the tangible support he received, including help with work boots, a bicycle, and clothing, which contributed to his successful job placement. Mr. Gomez spoke candidly about personal growth, particularly about learning patience and managing difficult interactions with customers, noting that the job is helping him become the person his mother hoped he would be.

Mr. Gomez thanked Ms. Morros and Ms. Fraser for their ongoing support and remarked that their efforts made him feel “like a human being again.”

Ms. Merrill thanked Mr. Gomez for sharing his story before opening the floor to Jake Merrill, Rehabilitation Counselor III.

Jake Merrill introduced himself, by stating his name and position along with his place of work, before introducing his client Kersten Law.

Mr. Merrill began working with Ms. Law in May 2021 during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. At intake, Ms. Law held an associate’s degree from a local community college. She quickly began pursuing her bachelor’s degree in graphic design at Sierra Nevada College in Lake Tahoe, a school she selected based on her individual needs and vocational goals.

While working toward her degree, Ms. Law participated in VR-sponsored programs, including Career, Recreation, And Vocational Education (C.R.A.V.E.) Camp and the Campus Connections program. She successfully graduated with a bachelor’s degree in graphic design.

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Following graduation, Ms. Law and her mother arranged independent housing in South Reno. With this transition, the focus shifted to employment. Ms. Law began developing soft skills and was placed in a three-month graphic design internship with Facilitate Joy, a partner organization serving individuals with autism and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Transportation assistance was provided to support her commute.

Upon completing the internship, Ms. Law was hired as a permanent part-time employee at Facilitate Joy, where she continues to work. She has contributed to meaningful projects in her role, including the development of graphic design materials. Additionally, she has begun work on writing and publishing an original book. As of May 5th, 2025, Ms. Law received an offer for a second part-time job located near her residence.

Mr. Jake Merrill concluded by opening the floor to Ms. Law to share her own comments and reflections on her experience.

Kersten Law addressed the Council to share her personal experience. She explained that, prior to participating in Vocational Rehabilitation services, she believed securing employment would be very difficult due to being on the autism spectrum, particularly because many jobs require strong communication skills—an area she found challenging.

Despite these concerns, Ms. Law reported that she has been successfully employed since August of the previous year and expressed pride in her accomplishments.

Mr. Jake Merrill followed her remarks by recognizing the significant personal growth Ms. Law has demonstrated over the past four years. He noted her development of a professional demeanor, consistent punctuality, and increased independence, emphasizing that she has become a capable and self-reliant young professional. Mr. Merrill expressed how proud he is of the progress Ms. Law has made.

Mechelle Merrill thanked Mr. Jake Merrill and Ms. Fraser for bringing their clients to share their experiences, stating how big of a deal it meant to the council to hear these stories.

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6. LETTER TO THE GOVERNOR

Chair Raquel O'Neill introduced a draft letter addressed to the Governor, thanking him for recognizing the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation in the state budget. Chair O'Neill invited Council members to review the draft and provide edits or suggestions for improvement.

Chair O'Neill confirmed that NSRC Liaison Richter would incorporate the recommended edits. Regarding the letter's signature, the Council agreed that Chair O'Neill should sign on behalf of the full Council.

Chair O'Neill asked for a motion to approve with the technical corrections. Member Lyons made a motion for approval for the letter to the governor, N.S.R.C. Council Member Rebecca Rogers, seconded the motion. All in favor, none opposed, none abstained, motion carried.

7. OTHER REPORTS

Chair O'Neill opened the floor to Kate Osti, Executive Director of Nevada Disability Advocacy and Law Center (NDALC), to provide updates about the Client Assistance Program (CAP).

N.S.R.C. Liaison Richter made Chair O'Neill aware of the fact that Ms. Osti was unable to attend the meeting.

Chair O'Neill thanked N.S.R.C. Liaison Richter before opening the floor to Dawn Lyons, Executive Director of the Nevada State Independent Living Council (NSILC), to provide updates from the program.

Member Lyons provided an update on behalf of the NSILC. She reported that the Council most recently convened on April 9th–10th, during which the Northern and Southern Nevada Centers for Independent Living presented their new emergency preparedness resources. These tools and videos, developed with recent grant funding, are tailored to support individuals with disabilities in planning for emergencies and are available on both centers' websites. The project addresses previous challenges around making emergency preparedness information both accessible and widely disseminated, and it was noted as a significant achievement.

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Additionally, Member Lyons attended the "Navigating the Road to Independence" conference on April 18th–19th in Reno, accompanied by the Council's Youth Outreach Specialist. The conference was described as informative and well attended. The Youth Outreach Specialist participated in sessions while Ms. Lyons engaged attendees from the Council's vendor table.

Member Lyons also announced that Aging and Disability Services has officially released the Disability Innovation Fund Award from the U.S. Department of Education. This development allows the Council to begin requesting reimbursements for activities under this long-standing grant partnership.

Looking ahead, the Council is initiating planning efforts related to one of its State Plan for Independent Living goals: improving education for healthcare providers on disability-related needs. Planning meetings will be held in collaboration with regional coordinators from Aging and Disability Services, and stakeholders are invited to participate in this process. Interested individuals are encouraged to contact Member Lyons directly for involvement. The next Council meeting is scheduled for the afternoons of July 9–10, with details to be posted on the Council's website approximately one week in advance.

Chair O'Neill concluded by thanking Member Lyons for the updates and congratulating the Council on the funding milestone. She also expressed support for the emergency preparedness videos, noting positive feedback.

8. DISABILITY INNOVATION FUND (DIF) GRANT UPDATE

Chair O'Neill opened the floor to Mechelle Merrill, Deputy Administrator of Programs, will provide an update on the Nevada TRIP.

Ms. Merrill was happy to report that on April 1st of 2025, the Nevada TRIP Roadmap through Innovative Partnerships (Nevada TRIP) went live on the Vocational Rehabilitation website. Since then, Vocational Rehabilitation has gone live for the first 3 pilot counties, which are White Pine, Carson City and Humboldt. Ms. Merrill reported that VR was gaining momentum with so far over 75 students having registered in those three small counties for the site. Ms. Merrill stated that more were joining every day and showed a slide displaying the campaign that has been put out by VR Partners, social media, as well as their websites, all sharing the fact that Nevada Trip has been launched to try and drive users to the websites.

Ms. Merrill reported that the focus will be the rollout to the future counties; we'll go live in October with Douglas, Nye, and Pershing Counties. The following October of 2026 will be Elko, Eureka, Lander, Lincoln, Lyon, and Washoe Counties. Lastly

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in October of 2027, we will go live in Churchill, Clark, Esmeralda, Mineral, and Storey Counties, as well as the State Public Charters.

Ms. Merrill reported that the mobile version of the Nevada TRIP website is currently working. She reported that VR is also currently working on developing a Nevada TRIP app that will work for both the IOS Apple system as well as the Android system. This would allow users to have a dedicated app. It was stated that designing the app is a heavier load and that we are currently working on the app to improve it. The app is currently available to get on your mobile device. Ms. Merrill also reported that the Nevada TRIP app is already compliant, but they are currently working with an outside contractor to improve the app's compliance in a never-ending attempt to constantly improve.

Ms. Merrill has been receiving excellent feedback that would allow Ms. Merrill to improve the app even more. 2 weeks ago, Mechelle Merrill along with Andrew Jensen as well as Jake Merrill all presented at the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR) Transition Conference that was held at the Truckee Meadows Community College (TMCC). There at the presentation, Ms. Merrill, along with Mr. Jake Merrill and Mr. Jensen, performed a live demonstration where they registered as a Carson City student. Currently we're working on adding the additional 5 languages that we will ultimately have on the website, and the next one will be the rollout of Spanish as the secondary language.

Ms. Merrill finished with her presentation about the Nevada TRIP website offering to answer any questions that anyone attending had, however there were no questions.

Chair O'Neill thanked Ms. Merrill for the updates about the Nevada TRIP. Chair O'Neill remarked that she was glad and thankful for the responsiveness towards feedback and concerns given.

9. PRESENTATION OF THE DISABILITY INCLUSION AWARDS

Chair O'Neil opened the floor to Mechelle Merrill, to talk about Employer Recognition Program as well as the Disability Inclusion Partnership plaques (DIP).

Mechelle Merrill introduced Ken Pierson, Business Services Manager, to provide information about Employer Recognition Program.

Mr. Ken Pierson explained what the Disability Inclusion Partnership does; detailing the employers who hire people with disabilities through the VR program. The employers receive acrylic plaques as a token of recognition. The DIP program had been started in the 2024 – 2025 State Fiscal Year. Mr. Pierson stated that VR still has 6 weeks for some partners to receive their plaques.

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Mr. Pierson mentioned the names of companies across the state that were participating. There were companies from Carson City, Reno and Las Vegas, and additionally there were rural companies who received these plaques. Mr. Pierson stated that FedEx would be receiving a plaque on May 14th, and that the plaque would be presented by Matthew Dorangricchia, VR Northern District Manager. On June 10th Raley's will receive a plaque as well.

Mr. Pierson shared that a VR plaque was presented to Goodwill, which occurred on March 14, 2025 by VR Administrator Drazen Elez and Bureau Chief Sheena Childers. Due to the success of the program, Nevada Vocation Rehabilitation has been talking with other states about implementing the program through the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) deaf team. To provide additional help VR Nevada has been providing the other states with information necessary to start similar programs. Videos of the plaque presentations are available on the VR website (vrnevada.nv.gov). Mr. Pierson concluded his presentation.

Raquel O'Neill opened the floor for questions.

Vice-Chair Mayes commended the agency for its outstanding program, stating that it was a great initiative deserving of continued support. He then inquired whether Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) had formally recognized the State of Nevada Division of Human Resources Management (DHRM), noting his awareness of the state's strong performance in implementing the program. Vice-Chair Mayes asked specifically whether the agency had acknowledged their exemplary efforts in hiring VR participants.

Ms. Merrill stated that the In-Service Conference is held every other year with the last one being held in 2023. During In-Service VR had recognized the two Employers with the highest numbers of people with disabilities that were hired through Voc. Rehab. Ms. Merrill stated further that the number one employer was in fact the State of Nevada itself. Jack Robb, who at the time was the Administrator of the Division of Human Resource Management (DHRM), had attended the In-Service Conference and was awarded a plaque, and there was a big presentation. This was of noted importance to not only VR, but Mr. Robb and those he worked with. Ms. Merrill explained that every year in the VR Annual Report the highest-ranking employers are acknowledged and that the State is consistently at the top. Ms. Merrill expressed appreciation for the partnership between VR and the State. The second highest rated employer was Sephora; VR has held a strong relationship with Sephora in Las Vegas as they hire a lot of our participants.

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Mr. Pierson went on to highlight that Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) has the 700-hour program, which is a great feeder for VR participants to get into state service. Additionally, with Sephora, VR Runs an eight-week work readiness program. This initiative has proven highly successful, with approximately 95 percent of participants not only being hired by Sephora upon completion but also remaining with the company. Thanks in large part to Sephora's strong retention practices and supportive work environment.

Vice-Chair Mayes expressed his gratitude to Vocational Rehabilitation for their dedication and the success of the 700-Hour Program, emphasizing that he recognized the program's effectiveness and wanted to ensure that appreciation was clearly communicated.

Ms. Merrill reiterated that this year is the In-Service Conference, and that it will be held in September; the council will certainly be invited. The two highest rate Employers will be acknowledged at the awards ceremony as well.

Chair O'Neill thanked Vice-Chair Mayes as well as the presenters before asking if any of the Council in attendance had any questions or comments. After hearing none Chair O'Neill moved to the next Agenda item.

10. STATE PLAN SUBCOMMITTEE FOR THE SCHEDULED MEETING ON JULY 9, 2025

Chair O'Neill opened the floor to Vice-Chair Mayes to talk about the strategic planning for the July 9th NSRC Subcommittee meeting.

Vice-Chair Mayes confirmed the Biannual State Plan Subcommittee meeting is scheduled for July 9th of 2025. He asked if Mechelle Merrill or Drazen Elez knew if there were any Volunteers in preparation for the meeting.

N.S.R.C Liaison Richter confirmed that there has been a discussion held about volunteers for the subcommittee. Ms. Richter continued that Mr. Mayes had been appointed chair for the meeting and that a few members had volunteered to participate. She will follow up with the full list of confirmed volunteers.

Vice-Chair Mayes confirmed that he asked N.S.R.C Liaison Richter to have our current goals that were reached last year. In addition, Vice-Chair Mayes stated that the meeting would focus on reviewing the current state plan goals and examining

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data from the Annual Review to identify areas needing improvement, such as customer relations. He emphasized the importance of using this data to guide the development of updated and potentially new goals. Vice Chair Mayes also noted that Mr. Elez could assist with reviewing and interpreting the data. He concluded by expressing his anticipation for a productive discussion.

Chair O'Neill thanked Vice-Chair Mayes for his leadership and expressed appreciation for the ongoing improvement in the committee's goal-setting efforts, noting that each year's progress builds on the last and reflects stronger collaboration.

11. DIVISION REPORTS

Chair O'Neill opened the floor to Drazen Elez, Division Administrator, to discuss the division reports.

Mr. Elez expressed appreciation for State of Nevada employees in recognition of Employee Appreciation Week, emphasizing the dedication and teamwork required to deliver impactful services. Mr. Elez provided updates on federal developments, particularly regarding potential restructuring of the U.S. Department of Education, assuring that the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) and VR programs will remain intact regardless of future oversight changes. Mr. Elez reported a 3% increase in the final RSA grant allocation for the year, although full utilization is limited due to matching fund constraints. Despite broader state budget concerns, the agency's budget has been approved and is expected to remain unchanged, marking a historic biennium with increased funding and 60 new staff positions, including a new rehab manager for the Bureau of Services to the Blind and Visually Impaired (BSBVI). Mr. Elez also highlighted the growing demand for VR services—client numbers rose from 3,900 to over 7,300 in three years, emphasizing the need for greater efficiency moving forward.

Mr. Elez opened the floor for Ms. Merrill to provide program updates. She presented key performance metrics and indicators for the respective programs. BVR has a vacancy rate of 9.02% and BSBVI had a vacancy rate of 21.42%. The overall vacancy rate was 10.12%. Ms. Merrill expressed that these are smaller programs so higher vacancy rates can be thrown off by a single vacancy. Counselor caseloads averaged 86 clients in BVR and 65 clients in BSBVI. Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) served nearly 2,000 students in 2024, with over 1,200 already served in the current year, positioning the program to meet or exceed previous benchmarks. Supported employment consumer numbers have

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surpassed last year's totals, and participation from targeted disability groups continues to grow. There were also updates on the 700-hour program and fair hearing participation rates, which remain low at 0.07%.

Member Kincaid clarified that Goal 4 refers to the number of open supported employment cases, not closures. She also pointed out a discrepancy in the reported caseload numbers whether the total was 81 or 86 cases which NSRC Liaison Richter committed to verifying.

No other questions from the council were asked allowing Chair O'Neill to move to the next agenda item.

12. COMMENTS BY THE COUNCIL

Chair O'Neill opened the floor for the opportunity to discuss anything that the Council would like to see on future agendas or any updates, resources, or anything that anybody has to offer from the Council.

Council Member Kincaid requested an update regarding the accessibility of the newly launched Nevada TRIP website, referencing concerns raised during public comments.

Mr. Elez responded that the Nevada TRIP website is fully compliant with federal accessibility standards, including the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 508. However, he acknowledged that while the site meets legal requirements, continued efforts are underway to accommodate individual user preferences and enhance overall accessibility. It was agreed that a status update on the Nevada TRIP website would be included as a dedicated agenda item for a future meeting.

Mechelle Merrill requested a report from Council member Jennifer Kane, on her recent attendance at the NTACTION CBI (Capacity Building Institute) conference. The Council expressed interest in learning about developments related to transition services and the current state of technical assistance centers, particularly considering recent federal impacts.

Member Kincaid also suggested including an update on the Summer Youth Internship Program, which was well received. Mr. Elez indicated that updates on budget allocations and project progress such as the Payment Card Program could either be presented as part of the division update or as a separate agenda item, depending on the availability of finalized information by September.

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Lastly, Member Kincaid inquired whether additional information or action items remained outstanding from the recent survey conducted by Market Decisions Research.

NSRC Liaison Richter confirmed that a presentation from Candace Walsh, Research Manager at Market Decisions Research, would be requested if the data is ready and offered to seek clarification on any unresolved action items. These updates will be considered for inclusion in the September agenda.

13. SECOND PUBLIC COMMENTS

Chair O'Neill opened the floor for public comments from attendees participating online, by phone, or in person. NSRC Liaison Richter and representatives from both the Las Vegas and Reno offices confirmed there were no verbal comments from the public. However, Ms. Richter noted that a written public comment had been submitted by Mr. Cohen, who was present at the time of this agenda item. Mr. Cohen confirmed he did not wish to make additional verbal comments and that his written submission should stand as his public input. To read the full comment please refer to [Exhibit 1](#) at the end of the document.

Ms. Kincaid then raised a question during the public comment period regarding the absence of a report from the Client Assistance Program (CAP) for this meeting. She inquired whether it would be possible to request a written report from NDALC (Nevada Disability Advocacy Law Center) to be shared with the Council before the next meeting, especially in cases where no representative is available to present.

Chair O'Neill echoed the sentiment and asked for legal clarification on whether such a request could be formally made. Joseph Ostunio, Deputy Attorney General, advised that, since the item was not agendaized, the Council should not take any formal action on the request. Instead, he recommended that the agency—not the Council as a whole—could follow up with NDALC outside the meeting, and that a report or presentation could be formally added to the agenda for the next meeting. Member Kincaid acknowledged the guidance and added clarification that the CAP, as designated by the Governor to collaborate with Vocational Rehabilitation, plays an important role. She emphasized the value of receiving updates from the CAP, even if a representative cannot attend the meeting in person.

Chair O'Neill agreed and indicated that a formal CAP report would be requested for the September 16th meeting. Chair O'Neill concluded the meeting by thanking participants for their engagement, reminding members of the upcoming State

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Planning meeting on July 9th, and confirming that the next full Council meeting is scheduled for September 16th.

14. ADJOURNMENT

Chair O'Neill announced that this meeting of the NSRC is officially adjourned at 2:39 PM.

Minutes submitted by: Uriah Carter
Edited By: Jenny Richter Livia

Jenny Richter Livia

09/23/2025

Jenny Richter Livia, N.S.R.C. Liaison

Approved By:

Raquel O'Neill

09/23/2025

Raquel O'Neill, Chair

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EXHIBIT 1



Steven Cohen

Steven.Cohen@Alumni.UNLV.edu

April 8, 2025

Via E-mail

To Jenny Richter Livia, Council Liaison
For the attention of:
Nevada State Rehabilitation Council

Re: Public Comment

As the state agency tasked with assisting individuals with disabilities in obtaining and maintaining competitive, integrated employment, this Agency has consistently fallen short of its mission. It is long past time for this Council, as the Agency's supervisor, to take a firm stance against the obstructive and counterproductive practices that the Agency continues to employ.

Despite two recent audits – one by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) and the other by the Legislative Auditor – this Agency remains more focused on finding ways to appease regulators, Council Members, clients, their families, and the public than on genuinely addressing the audit recommendations. For nearly 18 years, I have been a client of this Agency, and I have witnessed firsthand its persistent failure to engage in meaningful, collaborative efforts to improve services for the community.

For example, a recent friendly request to include the Agency as part of a bill, Assembly Bill (AB) 539 which would benefit the Agency's K-12 transition activities, as well as a high level of overview of the spending and reversion of these activities in furtherance of ensuring the Agency

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could actually implement the activities requested by the bill as they would specifically apply to the disability community, was aggressively rebuffed.

Even during these unprecedented times, I strongly urge you to engage with your Legislators, both State and Federal, to ensure that the Agency's funding is reduced to \$1 per year of the State biennium, which would effectively deplete its ability to receive its Federal grant. The Agency's obstructive and counterproductive activities would be worth toilet paper \$, below \$0, were each budget process permissive of the same.

In skeletal form, I've raised these concerns before this Council every quarter, and though I may no longer be a client soon, I remain committed to being part of the solution. If there is an opportunity to help bring about meaningful change, I am more than willing to contribute. However, this Agency seems unwilling to do so, which is gut-wrenching for the cumulative population it is entirely charged with representing to the community-at-large.

If finances were permissive, I would gladly be pursuing non-exploitative employment in my home state of New Jersey, as they have their toilet paper together. Knowing everything I know today about Nevada's cumulative service array for people with disabilities, I sincerely wish I'd never followed my folks to this awful State as I began adulthood.

Thank you for your time, and I stand ready for questions.