



Commission to Study the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS)

Meeting Session #7

March 6, 2023

Maryland State Department of Education
Division of Rehabilitation Services





Overview of Commission Responsibilities

1. Overview of Commission Responsibilities
2. Overview of DORS History and Structure
3. Current MSDE Initiatives Supporting DORS
4. Community-Based Services
5. MSDE's Continued and Future Initiatives Supporting DORS
6. Topic #10: Additional Recommendations to Improve DORS
7. Review of Interim Recommendations

The important role of Commission members, discussions, and recommendations.

Legislative Context

- The Maryland General Assembly has set the following expectations:
 - The Maryland General Assembly passed HB 660 in Spring 2022.
 - HB 660 requires that a “Commission to Study the Division of Rehabilitation Services” be established.
 - The new Commission is to meet at least 5 times and discuss a set of 10 different topics.
 - After the Commission evaluates and makes recommendation on each topic, the Commission is to submit a report to the General Assembly and Governor.
 - An interim report was submitted on December 15, 2022.
 - The final report is due by March 15, 2023.

Required Topics for Discussion for the Commission

1. Methods for improving stakeholder input on the Division of Rehabilitation Services' programs and services
2. Methods for improving the relationship and communication between transition professionals working at the Division of Rehabilitation Services and the Developmental Disabilities Administration
3. Methods for improving the amount of time it takes to provide vocational rehabilitation and transitional services
4. Methods for improving public-private partnerships to assist more Division of Rehabilitation Services' clients
5. Methods for improving accountability and transparency of the Division of Rehabilitation Services' programs and services
6. Whether the eligibility criteria for the Division of Rehabilitation Services' programs and services should be altered
7. Whether the Division of Rehabilitation Services should continue to be a division of the State Department of Education or should be transferred to another State agency
8. If the Commission determines that the Division of Rehabilitation Services should continue to be a division of the State Department of Education, whether the Division of Rehabilitation Services should have a governing board separate from the State Board of Education
9. Whether there are specific budgetary requests that could support the job training programs provided by the Division of Rehabilitation Services
10. Any other improvements to the Division of Rehabilitation Services' programs and services the Commission considers appropriate

Today's Focus Topics

Continued

- Commission Topic #7: Whether the Division of Rehabilitation Services should continue to be a division of the State Department of Education or should be transferred to another State agency.
- Commission Topic #8: If the Commission determines that the Division of Rehabilitation Services should continue to be a division of the State Department of Education, whether the Division of Rehabilitation Services should have a governing board separate from the State Board of Education.

New

- Commission Topic #10: Any other improvements to the Division of Rehabilitation Services' programs and services the Commission considers appropriate.



Overview of DORS History and Structure

1. Overview of Commission Responsibilities
2. Overview of DORS History and Structure
3. Current MSDE Initiatives Supporting DORS
4. Community-Based Services
5. MSDE's Continued and Future Initiatives Supporting DORS
6. Topic #10: Additional Recommendations to Improve DORS
7. Review of Interim Recommendations

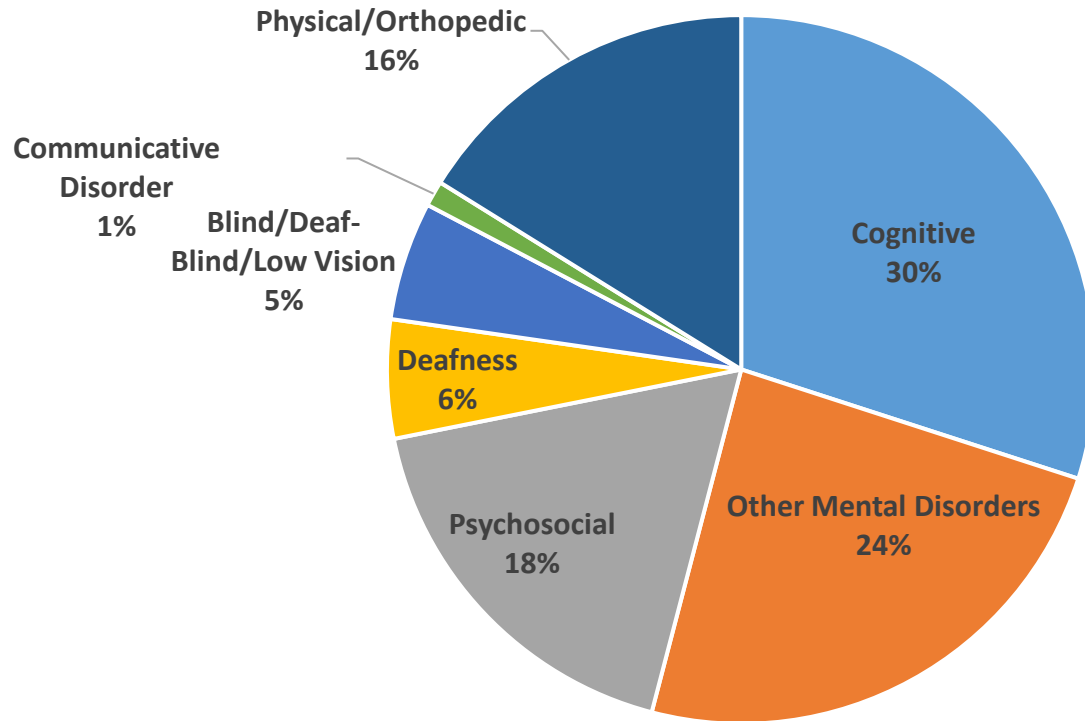
Reviewing the context and organization of the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS).

Review of DORS Organization

- The Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) was established by **Senate Bill 174 in 1929** as a division of the Maryland State Department of Education.
- The Maryland State Department of Education is overseen by the State Board of Education. The State Board has **fourteen members that are appointed by the Governor and approved by the Senate**. The **State Superintendent of Schools is appointed** by the State Board.
- The **State Rehabilitation Council is appointed by the Governor** to review, analyze and advise on the VR agency's overall performance.
- In addition to the Vocational Rehabilitation program, DORS is responsible for the:
 - Disability Determination Services
 - Independent Living Older Blind program
 - Independent Living program
 - Randolph Sheppard program

Review of Clients Served by DORS

Individuals with a cognitive disability is the largest group served by DORS during PY 2017-2021.



Disability Type	Clients Served
Cognitive	8,475
Other Mental Disorders	6,805
Psychosocial	5,028
Deafness	1,531
Blind/Deaf-Blind/Low Vision	1,530
Communicative Disorder	327
Physical/Orthopedic	4,565

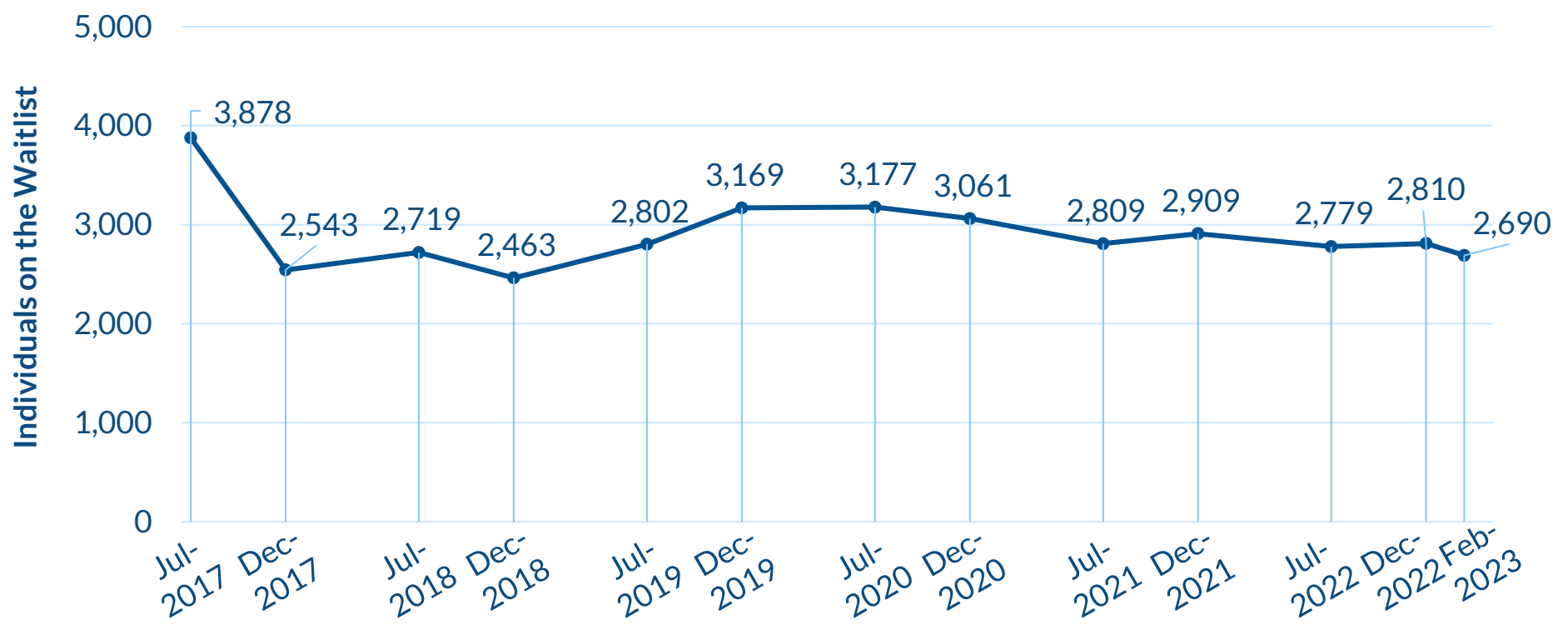
DORS Transitioning Workload

- DORS serves **10,838** individuals who are **between the ages of 14 and 25 years old**
 - 5,777 in Pre-Employment Transitioning Services program.
 - 5,061 in the Vocational Rehabilitation program.
 - Students and youth with a disability represent **53% of DORS active VR cases.**
 - DORS waitlist currently has 2,690 people, and of those individuals, **1,109** are **between the ages of 14 and 25 years old.**
- A **Student with a Disability** is anyone between the ages of 14 and 21, is enrolled in school, and has a documented disability.
 - A **Youth with a Disability** is anyone between the age of 14 and 25, who may or may not be enrolled in school.

DORS's Waitlist Over Time

The number of individuals on DORS's waitlist has varied over the past six years. Most recently – over the past year and a half – the **waitlist has decreased**. This decrease **aligns with the increased salaries for VR counselors and decrease in staff vacancies**. As a result, the **waitlist has remained stable**.

DORS's Waitlist from July 2017 to February 2023



In 2023, Students and Youth with Disabilities represent 41% of the individuals who are on the DORS's waitlist.



Current MSDE Initiatives Supporting DORS

1. Overview of Commission Responsibilities
2. Overview of DORS History and Structure
3. **Current MSDE Initiatives Supporting DORS**
4. Community-Based Services
5. MSDE's Continued and Future Initiatives Supporting DORS
6. Topic #10: Additional Recommendations to Improve DORS
7. Review of Interim Recommendations

MSDE and DORS operate as one State agency and integration brings better outcomes to the Division of Rehabilitation Services.

VR Counselor Vacancies

- On June 30, 2022, DORS had **40 VR counselor and supervisor vacancies** in the Vocational Rehabilitation Program and **59 claims examiner and supervisor vacancies** in the Disability Determination Services program.
- In Fall 2021, MSDE undertook an **extensive salary review of the VR counselor series** to address the high level of VR counselor vacancies, which led to the salary increase.
- **On July 1, 2022, the starting salaries increased from \$42,035 to \$54,665. Currently the starting salary is \$57,125.**
 - **Existing VR Counselors and Supervisors received approximately a 20% salary increase, through a 2 grade and 4 step increase on the salary schedule.**
- As of March 1, 2023, DORS has only **9 VR counselor vacancies and 1 supervisor vacancy in the VR program and 7 claims examiner vacancies and NO supervisor vacancies in the Disability Determination Services.**
 - **With the support of the federal clearances, the number of vacancies is trending towards zero.**

MSDE Support for Pre-ETS (1 of 2)

- In September 2021, MSDE provided **approximately \$2 million** to pilot alternative methods to handle the workload of DORS and utilize the support of outside organizations.
- The pilot focused on how to build a **sustainable Fee-for-Service model** to handle the increased number of referrals for the Pre-Employment Transitioning Services (Pre-ETS).
- **MSDE/DORS entered into a grant agreement with the University of Maryland Center for Transitioning and Career Innovation (CTCI) for a two-year pilot project.**
 - The program **will study the best approaches to obtain the school or medical records** needed to qualify a student for Pre-ETS, as well as what communication methods work best with parents/guardians, students, and schools in attaining that information.
 - **CTCI will handle obtaining all the required records and signatures so the Eligibility Determination Unit (EDU) can qualify the student for Pre-ETS.**

MSDE Support for Pre-ETS (2 of 2)

- **Initial funding for the grant was \$1.6 million.** However, due to the increases in the number of Pre-ETS referrals from previous years, **MSDE provided an additional \$350,000 in funding to increase the number of staff at CTCI to support this initiative.**
- **CTCI is responsible for reaching out to the parents/guardians** of the students to review exactly what Pre-ETS is and is not, discuss what **documentation is required**, receive the **proper consent to obtain that documentation**, and collect signatures of the parents/guardians giving permission for the student participate in Pre-ETS.
- If the parents/guardians don't have the necessary documentation, **CTCI will reach out to the school system or medical provider** to obtain the required records.
- Once all necessary documentation and signatures are collected, the **information is transmitted to the DORS Eligibility Determination Unit to qualify the student for Pre-ETS.**
- DORS has already seen positive results as a result of this grant initiative, **with a higher percentage of Pre-ETS referrals being turned into open cases.**

Aligning MSDE Internal Resources To Support DORS

- The **MSDE Core Services Team** brings together MSDE operational staff to better support DORS’s management in delivering services.
- Each team consists of four members:

Core Services Team Role	Type of Support
Talent Partner	Human Resources
Information Technology Partner	Information Technology
Business Services Partner	Procurement and Contracts
Planning and Budget Analyst	Budget and Finance

- DORS’s **Talent Partner** meets with the program hiring managers **regularly to review current vacancies and provide updates on recruitment** for each vacancy and to identify any issues that need to be resolved.
- DORS’s **Business Services Partner** meets with the DORS Director of Administration and Finance on a **regular basis to discuss both current and upcoming procurements.**

DORS Office for Individual and Community Engagement

- Based on feedback from the **Commission and the Parent's Place of Maryland**, MSDE is supporting the creation of a **new office within DORS** called the **Office for Individual and Community Engagement** that will report to the Assistant State Superintendent.
- The role of this office is to **actively engage and seek feedback from the various disability communities** that DORS serves.
- The office will have a dedicated staff person whose **sole focus is continuous engagement with the community** to improve overall communications and to identify systemic issues that affect **individual or multiple communities**.
- The office will also serve as DORS's **Ombudsman for the VR and Independent Living Older Blind (ILOB)** consumers when issues arise.
- The office will also **collect data to improve DORS's overall services** through training, improved communications, or policy changes. Additionally, the office will **conduct research into best practices** that have been identified that will improve the overall services provided by DORS.



Community-Based Services

1. Overview of Commission Responsibilities
2. Overview of DORS History and Structure
3. Current MSDE Initiatives Supporting DORS
4. **Community-Based Services**
5. MSDE's Continued and Future Initiatives Supporting DORS
6. Topic #10: Additional Recommendations to Improve DORS
7. Review of Interim Recommendations

DORS Programs and Services offered at the Workforce & Technology Center and across Maryland.

DORS Current Community-Based Services (1 of 2)

DORS provides a variety of **community-based services** through the **Workforce and Technology Center**, including:

- **Community College Pathways Autism** is a program with services being provided at four community colleges.
- **Virtual Autism College Mentoring Program** is a mentoring and support services for individuals who are not receiving services through the Pathways' program.
- **Autism Program Planning for Success** is a work readiness program that focuses on career goals, training needs, and behavioral and social skills. This program is offered in person and virtually several times throughout the year.
- **Driver Education** classroom course work is provided in person and virtually. Those students then complete their behind-the-wheel course work through a driver education school in their community.

DORS Current Community-Based Services (2 of 2)

DORS provides a variety of **community-based services** through the **Workforce and Technology Center**, including:

- **Work site assessment** is always done at the employer's business location.
- **Low-vision support group** is provided locally in the field offices or virtually.
- **Self advocacy support group** for Pre-ETS and transitioning students who are blind or low vision is provided virtually.
- **Apprenticeship Services Program** is provided in person and virtually.
- **Job placement and employment services** is in person and virtually.
- **Academic assessment and remediation** is available in person or virtually.
- **Pre-GED and GED training** is available in person or virtually.

Expansion of Community-Based Services

DORS is adding training and other services that are offered in communities across the state.

- **DORS' Workforce Services** working with CVS and has identified Prince Georges' County as an area of need.
 - The Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) is assisting the Prince George's County Community College (PGCC) in **setting up the curriculum for the CVS training**. The **training will take place at PGCC and is expected started date is in late spring 2023**.
- **DORS's Workforce Services is working in conjunction with CCBC** and will be holding the **Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) and Child Care training on CCBC's Catonsville campus**. The **Child Care training** will take place in the summer of 2023 and the CNA training will take place in the fall of 2023.
- **Autism Employment Job Club** will work with individuals who are **ready to start searching for a job**. The Job Clubs will be held in the local field offices.
- **Computer Skills Development Program** is to **teach basic computer skills**, the classes will be held in the local field offices.

Additional Future Expansion of Community-Based Services

- Currently being debated by the General Assembly, [HB 1222/SB 934](#) would appropriate 74 additional staff positions (PINs) to DORS. If this bill is enacted, 14 PINs would support community-based services and DORS would provide these trainings and services for the community:
 - **Expand employer-based training** with local business partners, similar to the Sephora and CVS partnerships.
 - **Expand customized training programs** such as Professional Animal Workers, Warehouse Technician, Child Care, and Certified Nursing Assistance with local community colleges.
 - **Expand Behavioral Health counseling** to provide virtual counseling.
 - **Expand Assistive Technology assessments** and training to be held in local field and regional offices.
 - For individuals who benefit from **in-person driver education classroom training**, **DORS will expand that training to local and regional offices**. This would include the required **behind-the-wheel training for special populations**, such as individuals who are deaf or autistic.



MSDE's Continued and Future Initiatives Supporting DORS

1. Overview of Commission Responsibilities
2. Overview of DORS History and Structure
3. Current MSDE Initiatives Supporting DORS
4. Community-Based Services
5. **MSDE's Continued and Future Initiatives Supporting DORS**
6. Topic #10: Additional Recommendations to Improve DORS
7. Review of Interim Recommendations

MSDE and DORS operate as one State agency and continued will bring increased outcomes to the Division of Rehabilitation Services.

Continuation of Current Priorities of DORS and the Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services (DEI/SES)

- DORS staff specialist for Transitioning Services and the DEI/SES's Transitioning Specialist **regularly collaborate on several statewide initiatives.**
- **Training is jointly offered for Local Education Agencies' Individual Education Program coordinators and chairs on the intersection of Special Education and DORS transitioning services.**
- DORS and DEI/SES collaboratively attend **State Transition Facilitator Steering Meetings** to inform and apprise steering committee facilitators of new DORS information.
- DORS participates in the **Special Education State Advisory Council (SESAC)**. SESAC is a committee of family members, individuals with disabilities and state agency representatives tasked with advising DEI/SES in administering, promoting, planning, coordinating and improving the delivery of special education and related services as directed by IDEA, Part B.

New and Upcoming Priorities between DORS and the Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services (DEI/SES)

- **DEI/SES and DORS will jointly hold professional learning opportunities for LEAs that will focus on the following four topic areas:**
 - **Unpacking the DORS services and supports for students and youth.**
 - **Understanding the process for the Vocational Rehabilitation and Pre-Employment Transitioning Services programs.**
 - **Support services for special populations.**
 - **Coordination and collaboration between DEI/SES, DORS, and local education agencies.**
- **DORS and DEI/SES will hold an annual joint training conference for VR transitioning counselors, LEA transitioning professionals, and other transitioning professionals.**
 - **This conference will focus on best practices in Maryland and around the country.**

Improving Data Use and Information Sharing for DORS and LEAs

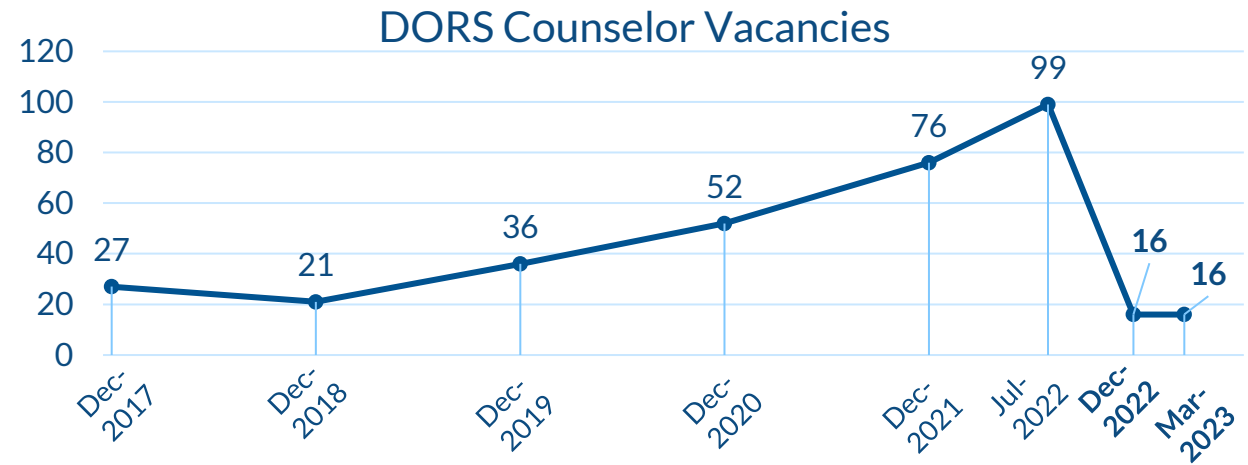
- The Blueprint for Maryland's Future directs MSDE, in collaboration with the Accountability and Implementation Board, to **develop and implement a new financial management system and student data system** capable of tracking and analyzing minimum school funding requirements and integrating LEA data.
- **MSDE will leverage the data communication components of this system to include DORS data.**
- The system will, **to the extent possible**, enable DORS to:
 - **Increase data availability and transmission** with local education agencies.
 - **Provide information to the LEAs about the services** that are being provided by DORS, including Indicator 14, which tracks students who had an IEP, and what they are doing one year after they left secondary school.
 - **Receive student information from the LEAs** to enable DORS to make **decisions at a student who has applied for services.**
- If successful, non-manual data transmission will **increase the speed of determination of services.**

Pre-ETS AI Screening Pilot Program

- MSDE plans to leverage new and expanded high-quality **artificial intelligence technologies to increase the provision of high-quality customer service** across multiple Divisions and Offices.
- MSDE is exploring the **creation of a new Pre-ETS AI screening pilot program** through fiscal year 2025 that would leverage AI to **reduce the manual human capital investment required for screening – redeploying human capital to service delivery – rapidly move applicants through the process.**
- This program would be a **first-in-the-nation approach** and MSDE is eager to **pilot, validate, and evaluate the program for a potential full-scale adoption.**

The Impact of DORS Integration within MSDE

- On July 1, 2022, VR and DDS had 99 VR counselor, claims examiner, and supervisor vacancies.
 - On March 1, 2023, those programs have only 16 VR counselor, claims examiner, and supervisor vacancies.
- DORS is expanding training and other services that are offered in communities across the state.
- Currently being debated by the General Assembly, [HB 1222/SB 934](#) would appropriate 74 additional staff positions (PINs) to DORS and guarantee the State can maintain its federal match every year.
- DORS has moved 165 individuals off the waitlist from 2017 and 188 from 2018, stabilizing the waitlist.
- DORS reopened Category 2 in September 2022 for the first time since 2018.
- MSDE and DORS, by operating together, synergize around providing high-quality services (and achieving related outcomes) for students and individuals with significant disabilities.
- MSDE and DORS already actively work to break down barriers between the State and LEAs, and DORS operates as an essential partner in the Department's work with local education agencies.



Questions?

Topic #7: What are your recommendations concerning moving the Division of Rehabilitation Services to another agency?

Topic #8: What are your recommendations concerning creating a separate Board for the Division of Rehabilitation Services?



Topic #10: Additional Recommendations to Improve DORS

1. Overview of Commission Responsibilities
2. Overview of DORS History and Structure
3. Current MSDE Initiatives Supporting DORS
4. Community-Based Services
5. MSDE's Continued and Future Initiatives Supporting DORS
6. **Topic #10: Additional Recommendations to Improve DORS**
7. Review of Interim Recommendations

Are there any other recommendations that should be considered?

Topic #10 Additional Recommendations

- The last discussion topic for the Commission is to **recommend any other improvements to DORS programs and services** the Commission considers appropriate.
- One possible recommendation that has been received is to **move the Client Assistance Program from under DORS to a different governance structure.**
 - For the discussion on this recommendation, the Commission was asked to review **data from the following states:**
 - Maine
 - South Carolina
 - Wisconsin
 - Missouri
 - Maryland

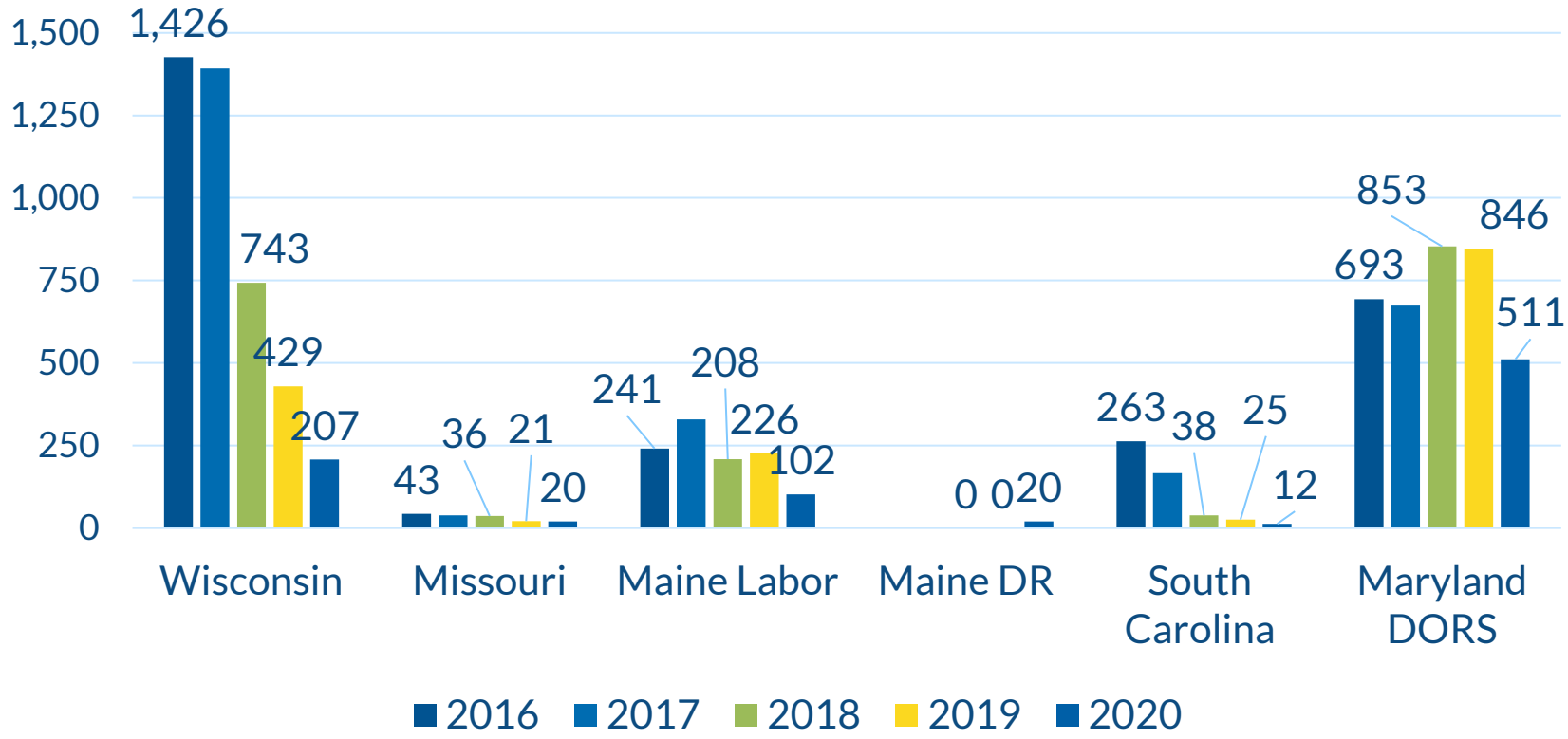
National Overview of Client Assistance Programs

Across the country, state Client Assistance Programs (CAP) are under the authority of different state agencies.

- **Maine:** Prior to 2020, the Client Assistance Program was located in the Maine Department of Labor, and the program transferred to Disabilities Rights Maine during FY 2020.
- **South Carolina:** CAP was located in the Department of Administration until 2017 and was then relocated to the Protection and Advocacy for People with Disabilities Inc. in 2018.
- **Wisconsin:** CAP is located in the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection.
- **Missouri:** CAP is located in the Missouri Protection and Advocacy Services.
- **Maryland:** CAP is located in the Maryland State Department of Education/ Division of Rehabilitation Services.

Client Assistance Program Data Review (1 of 2)

Client Assistance Program Information and Referrals 2016 to 2020

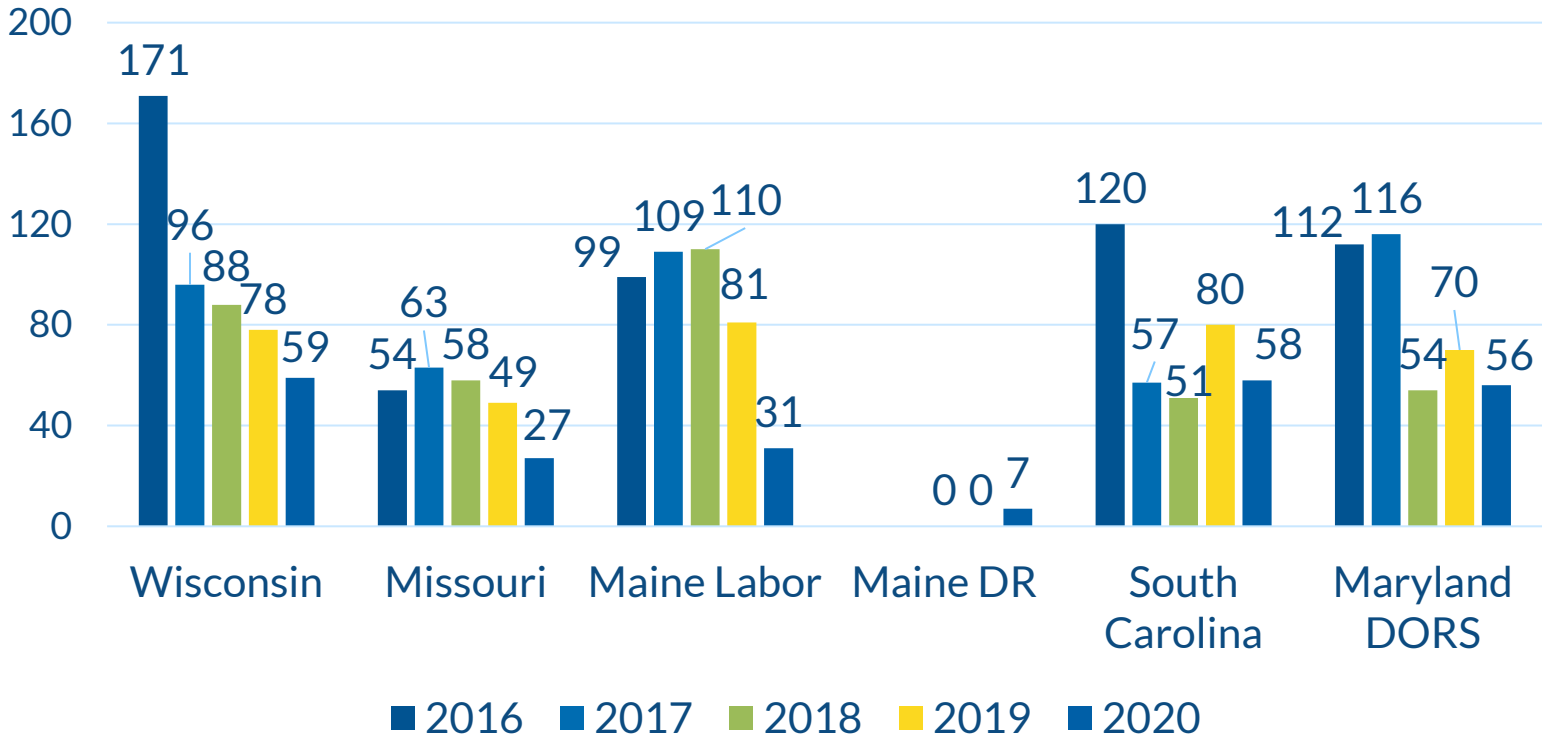


DORS's Client Assistance Program has maintained a high level of providing information and referrals.

Source: RSA 227 Client Assistance Program Annual Report

Client Assistance Program Data Review (2 of 2)

**Client Assistance Program Client Cases
2016 to 2020**



The number of individual clients that DORS's Client Assistance Program serve is comparable to the other States' programs.

Source: RSA 227 Client Assistance Program Annual Report

Topic #10 Additional Recommendations

Are there any other recommendations
for improving DORS?



Review of Interim Recommendations

1. Overview of Commission Responsibilities
2. Overview of DORS History and Structure
3. Current MSDE Initiatives Supporting DORS
4. Community-Based Services
5. MSDE's Continued and Future Initiatives Supporting DORS
6. Topic #10: Additional Recommendations to Improve DORS
7. Review of Interim Recommendations

Discussion and feedback on the recommendations to be included in the Commission report.

Topic #1: Methods For Improving Stakeholder Input on DORS Programs And Services (1 of 2)

To ensure **improved and enhanced stakeholder input** pertaining to the Division of Rehabilitation Services, the Division should:

- **Partner with the Disability Determination (DD) community** and provide information to the underserved populations of the State about DORS' services and programs;
- Utilize various **existing organizations, such as the State Agencies Transitioning Collaborative, the Maryland Department of Disabilities' Listserv, and Parent's Place of Maryland** to disseminate information to partner organizations, parents/guardians, and students;
- Disseminate transitioning information through the **Local Education Agencies (LEAs) Transition Coordinators and the Individual Education Program (IEP) chairs, and families.**

Topic #1: Methods For Improving Stakeholder Input on DORS Programs And Services (2 of 2)

To ensure **improved and enhanced stakeholder input** pertaining to the Division of Rehabilitation Services, the Division should:

- Develop **two-way communication at the LEA level about services that are being provided by DORS** with the school staff who are working with students and families;
- **Embed a survey link in the online DORS' referral form** to obtain additional information from individuals;
- Institute a **plain language review of documents** to assure that information being communicated to individuals **provide a clear understanding of what is being asked of them and solicit stakeholder feedback from various organizations** on the changes to the forms and documents; and
- **Conduct pre-IEP meetings** with individuals that possess **knowledge of the transitioning systems** and how they intersect.

Topic #2: Methods for Improving the Relationship and Communication Between Transition Professionals Working at DORS and DDA

To ensure the improvement of the relationship of communication professionals at DORS and DDA, the Division should:

- **Increase DORS' partnership with DDA and approved employment Community Rehabilitation Providers;**
- **Increase the number of referrals from DDA providers for individuals seeking to be employed in a competitive, integrated work setting;**
- **Enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with DDA that will enable DORS to access the necessary medical, psychological, and school documentation of DDA applicants who are seeking DORS services to expedite the eligibility process by DORS, thus creating a more rapid engagement for DORS services;**
- **Increase focus on joint trainings; and**
- **Conduct a deep dive into the documentation requirements for DORS and DDA to streamline the necessary supporting documentation of services.**

Topic #3: Methods for Improving the Amount of Time it takes to Provide Vocational Rehabilitation and Transitional Services

To improve the amount of time it takes to provide services, Maryland should:

- Continue to **explore enhancements** that will facilitate and encourage the number of **VR Counselors and Disability Claims Examiners that are hired and retained;**
- Investigate **additional partnerships that can be utilized** to assist DORS with transitioning services; and
- Work with the **Social Security Administration (SSA) to reduce time it takes to approve background checks** for VR Counselors.

Topic #4: Methods for Improving Public–Private Partnerships to Assist More DORS Clients

To ensure **public-private partnerships to assist more clients**, DORS should:

- Provide **links to resources for employers and individuals**;
- Explore **partnerships from across the State to increase community-based services and training** provided by DORS, including those in non-traditional settings such as the **arts, theater, and music**;
- Develop **partnerships between various employers** that align with the strengths and interests of individuals;
- Outline **processes so employers know about their ability to partner with DORS** for training and employment opportunities; and
- Expand **partnerships with organizations serving families**.

Topic #5: Methods for Improving Accountability And Transparency of DORS' Programs And Services

To ensure accountability and transparency of services, DORS should:

- Provide **information concerning performance** with all stakeholders and other agencies;
- Expand **outreach to families and organizations** about the requirements for eligibility for the VR program;
- Continue **meetings with the Community Rehabilitation Provider Advisory Committee** to provide information about DORS and discuss issues with the leadership of DORS; and
- **Provide meetings and opportunities for clients and stakeholders** to discuss DORS services.

Topic #6: Whether the Eligibility Criteria for DORS' Programs and Services Should be Altered

- **The criteria to determine eligibility to receive VR services is the same nationwide.** The specific criterion for eligibility is spelled out in federal regulations, [34 CFR 361.42](#). As such, **DORS, nor the State of Maryland, has the authority to change the criteria** used to determine eligibility for individuals who apply for VR services.
- For the DORS waitlist, DORS should **create an understanding within the disability community that the VR program is for individuals who are seeking employment in a competitive, integrated setting.**

Topic #9: Whether There are Specific Budgetary Requests that could Support the Job Training Programs Provided By DORS

To ensure the **necessary budgetary investment** needed by DORS to support the job training programs provided by the Division, DORS should:

- **Advocate for funding that will allow DORS to meet the federal VR grant Match requirements each year.**
- **Advocate for Statutory language that require the State to provide the necessary 21.3% Match and any additional funding that is needed to meet Maintenance of Effort requirements.**

Commission to Study the Division of Rehabilitation Services

Thank you all for your dedication to work of the
Commission!

Your time, thought provoking questions,
commentary on the issues, and recommendations
has been greatly appreciated.