



# Colorado Department of Labor and Employment



## Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AUGUST - OCTOBER 2015  
OUTCOMES AND OPPORTUNITIES



**COLORADO**  
Department of  
Labor and Employment



**COLORADO**  
Office of Community  
Access & Independence  
Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

In getting more persons with disabilities into individualized, integrated employment, there is an opportunity to do even more by placing these vocational rehabilitation programs within the department of labor and employment, where employment, training, and skill development and connecting available workers and employers are primary areas of focus for the entire department...

SB15-239

## OVERVIEW

On Friday, May 8, 2015, Governor John Hickenlooper signed SB15-239 transferring the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) to the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment (CDLE) no later than July 1, 2016. The transfer of DVR will be accomplished in two phases through two separate pieces of legislation. The first phase transfers DVR staff and programs to CDLE and the second phase, through a bill that will be introduced in the 2016 legislative session, will address program administration, alignment of services and compliance with state and federal rules and regulations and other potential outstanding items.

SB15-239 directed CDLE to "engage, involve and seek the advice of DVR's many interested stakeholders, including the state rehabilitation council, in developing detailed programmatic and budget recommendations and plans for a smooth and effective transfer of vocational rehabilitation programs and functions to the department of labor and employment."

## STAKEHOLDER OUTREACH GOALS:

- Engage stakeholders with an open, honest and transparent approach and commitment to building a strong foundation within DVR as it moves to CDLE.
- Create a strategy that includes as many advocates, service providers, staff and clients as possible.
- Provide multiple opportunities and methods for input.
- Establish trusted relationships with stakeholders for an ongoing dialogue on potential improvements, modifications, corrections, etc. to DVR even after the July, 2016 transfer is completed.

## TIMELINE

July 22<sup>nd</sup> Stakeholder Outreach Steering Committee created

Aug 4<sup>th</sup> First stakeholder meeting held at Atlantis Community Independent Living Center

Sept 21<sup>st</sup> First report to Joint Budget Committee, including update on stakeholder outreach

Oct 21<sup>st</sup> Outreach wrap-up reception

## OUTCOMES

More than 200 DVR stakeholders including clients, vendors, staff and advocates attended a total of 10 in-person meetings across Colorado. Additionally, an electronic (and fully accessible) feedback form was created and deployed to capture feedback from stakeholders who were unable to attend an in-person meeting.

From Ft. Collins to Pueblo and Sterling to Grand Junction, while we did hear of some issues unique to rural Colorado and some of our smaller communities, there were a number of issues and themes that were fairly consistent.

*We identified six main areas for improvement as result of our stakeholder feedback:*

### 1) Training

- How are we training our staff and what are some ways we can add to their skillset?
- Better knowledge of applicable regulations, assistive technology were just a couple of the areas identified.
- Understanding federal funding intricacies, including School to Work Alliance Program (SWAP) and "110 funds"

### 2) Wait times

- Lengthy wait-times for services

### 3) Youth transition services

- Not offered early enough (in high school for example)
- Inadequate skills training for entering the workforce

### 4) Blind services

- Possible independent blind services program and/or stakeholder input process
- And, vendor programs generally and Blind Enterprise Program (BEP) in particular

### 5) Alignment between DVR field offices and workforce centers

- Disparity in services and attention to Coloradans with disabilities through DVR vs. Workforce Centers

### 6) Independent Living Centers and where they fit in the overall transition

"While some common themes emerged, we also heard feedback unique to certain parts of our state. Our meeting in Sterling identified issues unique to rural Colorado and also highlighted the success of rural partnerships at the local level between education, workforce centers and DVR field offices."

*Ellen Golombek, Executive Director, CDLE*

## OPPORTUNITIES

While addressing all of the themes presented in our stakeholder outreach is the ultimate goal, we identified three key areas that we will begin addressing first as we move toward Phase II of the merger.

### KEY AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT:

#### Youth Transition Services

We commit to a identifying a better way to align DVR resources to ensure delivery of transition services that are more focused, provide the best leverage of DVR and Colorado Department of Education (CDE) resources associated with the School to Work Alliance Program (SWAP) and are fully compliant with the 15% set-aside mandated in Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). We expect this alignment to be in the form of a youth transition unit, reporting to the DVR director and implemented by January 2016.

#### Blind Services

In parallel with the Interim Committee on Vocational Rehabilitation Services for the Blind, and utilizing input from both stakeholder meetings and the committee hearings, the DVR and CDLE management team will align DVR resources to provide a dedicated services organization better structured to address the issues related to training of counselors, use of vendors, applications of assistive technologies, reduction of wait times . . . and ultimately, better service to those with blindness. This organization will be a new unit within DVR, reporting to the DVR director and is targeted for start-up in January 2016, with full implementation to be completed by the end of the first quarter of 2016.

#### Continuous Stakeholder Engagement

As required in SB15-239, and in alignment with CDLE's ongoing stakeholder engagement effort in place by every division within the department, CDLE and DVR will hold quarterly stakeholder meetings, with sub-stakeholder groups focused on specific client population needs. We will post meeting feedback and outcomes on our website and include as SMART goals and outcomes in CDLE's Strategic Plan.

As important as the feedback itself, is the follow up - and follow through - as a result of stakeholder engagement. Our commitment to our stakeholders as we progress on the merger path is to share plans for improvement and continue to gather feedback throughout each phase.

#### Training

Training for both staff and vendors was a consistent theme at nearly every stakeholder meeting. In addition to training DVR managers and supervisors through CDLE's current Leadership Development Program, CDLE and DVR will partner to inventory and assess training needs and areas for growth, create training plans and develop performance outcomes based on increased knowledge.

#### Process Review and Streamlining

CDLE actively utilizes the Lean process improvement methodology and we will identify opportunities and implement strategies to "Lean" DVRs processes where possible.

#### Contacts and more information

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