

Virginia State Rehabilitation Council

8004 Franklin Farms Drive
Richmond, Virginia 23229

Virginia State Rehabilitation Council

Statement Before the Disability Commission

January 9, 2006

My name is Hiawatha Nicely and I am the Vice-Chairperson of the Virginia State Rehabilitation Council. The Council serves as an advisory body to the Department of Rehabilitative Services and advocates for appropriate services for Virginians with disabilities. The Council thanks you for all of the support that you have shown to enhance programs for individuals with disabilities in the Commonwealth of Virginia and hopes that you will be able to do even more during this legislative session.

During its November, 2005 meeting, the Council passed a unanimous motion to support certain budget initiatives that would enhance DRS' programs for Virginians with disabilities.

There are three budget initiatives that we would like you to consider:

(1) Funding to End Order of Selection

On July 1, 2004, DRS' vocational rehabilitation program entered into an order of selection. Order of selection is mandated by the federal Rehabilitation Act when there are not sufficient funds to serve all eligible individuals in the vocational rehabilitation program. Individuals are placed in pre-determined categories based on the significance of their disability and are "wait listed" if there are not enough funds to serve the category. With \$600,000 in additional funding in Fiscal Years 2007 and 2008, DRS would be able to open the final category of individuals who have not been served since the institution of order of selection in 2004. It is projected that DRS could serve about 630 persons who will be on the waiting list as of June 30, 2006. The number of non-significantly disabled individuals who could be served would eventually rise to 1200 per year, which is the historical average of non-significantly disabled individuals served by the program. By opening the final category, DRS would effectively end order of selection leading to an increase in the number of Virginians with disabilities who are successfully rehabilitated and enter employment.

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(2) Funding to Expand the Postsecondary Education Rehabilitation Transition (PERT) Program

The Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center operates the Postsecondary Education Rehabilitation Transition (PERT) Program which partners with youth and adult service providers to provide an integrated continuum of secondary to postsecondary transition services for youth with disabilities. The traditional PERT program, targeting 16-20 age high school students, offers a 9-10 day residential assessment of a youth's independent living, social, interpersonal, recreational, and vocational strengths and aptitudes to assist the local PERT teams in education/rehabilitation transition planning and implementation prior to graduation. Additional funding in the amount of \$490,000 in Fiscal Years 2007 and 2008 would address the increased demand for services of school systems not yet served by the program and the demand for an increased number of students to be served in the 114 school divisions currently in the program.

(3) Funding to Expand and Improve the Life Skills Transition Program

The Life Skills Transition Program at the Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center incorporates a holistic approach to assist youth between the ages of 18-22 with severe and/or complex disabilities who are either still in high school or who dropped out of high school. The desired outcome of the program is to assist these youth in reaching their employment and independent living goals through the development and refinement of pre-employment behaviors and social, interpersonal, and independent living skills over an 8 week period. Funding in the amount of \$440,000 for Fiscal Years 2007 and 2008 would be utilized to provide for full implementation of this program, with a target of serving 270 youth per year. Without the increased funding, only about 120 youth will be served.

The Council also would like to express its support for the items in the Governor's Budget that will enhance services to Virginians with disabilities through the Department of Rehabilitative Services. These items include \$763,550 each year for Long Term Employment Support Services (LTESS) and \$285,000 each year to expand brain injury services in Southwest Virginia.

Finally, the Council wishes to express our appreciation to the Commission members for their continuing support for the establishment and funding of a Medicaid Buy-In Program for working Virginians with disabilities. In addition, the Council asks for your continuing support of DRS' public vocational rehabilitation (VR) program. We continue to be impressed by the program's quality services that assist Virginians with disabilities in achieving employment in spite of the tight fiscal constraints plaguing the program. This is a testimony to the hard work, dedication and creativity of the VR staff. As the examination of workforce development programs in Virginia continues, we ask that you make every effort to ensure that the integrity of the VR program is preserved and that the citizens of Virginia with disabilities continue to have access to the specialized services they require to enter and maintain employment.

We thank you for your attention to these matters and congratulate you on your important achievements in advocating for improved services and programs for Virginians with disabilities.

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FY 2007-2008 Budget Request for Virginians with Disabilities

Item Title	FY 2007	FY 2008
Vocational Rehabilitation Program Order of Selection	\$600,000	\$600,000
Expansion of Postsecondary Education Rehabilitation Transition Program	\$490,000	\$490,000
Improvement of Life Skills Transition Program	\$444,000	\$444,000
Total	\$1,534,000	\$1,534,000