

Department of Rehabilitation Services



At a Glance

AMY L. PORTER, Commissioner

Established - 2011

Statutory authority - Public Act 11-44

Central office - 55 Farmington Avenue, Hartford CT 06105

Web address - www.ct.gov/dors

Total employees - 432

Total expenditures - \$81,500,000 with approximately 70% federal and 30% state funding.

Mission

Maximizing opportunities for people in Connecticut with disabilities to live, learn and work independently.

Statutory Responsibility

The Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) provides a wide range of services to individuals with disabilities, children and families who need assistance in maintaining or achieving their full potential for self-direction, self-reliance and independent living. The primary customers of the agency are individuals with disabilities, and in our employment-based programs we also have business/employers as a dual customer.

The agency structure for SFY2015 includes administrative functions and four major bureaus:

1. The Bureau of Rehabilitation Services
2. The Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind
3. The Bureau of Organizational Support
4. The Bureau of Disability Determination

Our programs, policies and practices are designed to promote employment, independence, equal access, and self-sufficiency.

About the Bureaus:

Bureau of Rehabilitation Services

The Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (www.ct.gov/brs) strives to create opportunities that enable individuals with significant disabilities to work competitively and live independently. Staff works to provide individualized services, develop effective partnerships, and share sufficient information so that consumers and their families may make informed choices about the rehabilitation process and employment options.

The Bureau hosts a number of programs:

- The Vocational Rehabilitation Program is designed to help individuals with disabilities to prepare for, obtain, maintain or advance in employment.
- The Connect-Ability program is designed to connect employers with qualified job seekers. BRS Employment Consultants are strategically located across the state and can review the needs of businesses, offer qualified candidates and assist in developing training plans before the new trainee/employee starts working.
- The Connect to Work Project allows individuals who receive Social Security disability benefits to work while maintaining some or all of their benefits. Benefits Counseling is available to assist individuals to assess the impact returning to work will have on their disability benefits.
- The Connecticut Tech Act Project increases independence and improves the lives of people with disabilities by making assistive technology more accessible for work, school and community living.
- The Employment Opportunities Program enables individuals with the most significant disabilities to engage in competitive employment by providing funding for long-term supports in order to maintain competitive employment.
- The Independent Living Program provides comprehensive independent living services to persons with significant disabilities through contracts with Connecticut's five community-based independent living centers.
- The Driver Training Program provides evaluation and training for individuals with disabilities who seek to be licensed using a modified vehicle in the state of Connecticut.
- The Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services includes the Counseling Program and the DORS Interpreting Unit. The Counseling Program provides counseling related to special language, communication and socioeconomic problems unique to individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing and their families. The DORS Interpreting Unit provides Certified Interpreting Services for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing in situations involving legal rights, health, safety, employment, educational opportunities and personal needs.
- The Workers' Rehabilitation Program assists individuals with work-related injuries to return to the workforce.

Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind

The Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) is the state's lead Bureau for the coordination and provision of services to all Connecticut residents who are legally blind, or have significant visual impairments. Founded in 1893, BESB was among the first state programs in the nation for people who are blind.

BESB has four separate service programs which provide a full range of services to clients of all ages who are legally blind or have significant visual impairments:

- The Adult Services Program serves as the central intake for clients and provides independent living training to adults to assist them with maintaining independence within the home and the community.
- The Children's Services Program provides Braille instruction, mobility instruction, adaptive technology training and independent living training to children and professional development training and technical assistance to school districts.
- The Vocational Rehabilitation Program provides school-to-work transition services to youth and assists adults to obtain and retain employment. The Program also provides technical assistance and job candidate referral services to employers across the state.
- The Business Enterprise Program offers entrepreneurial opportunities to people who are blind to manage their own food service and gift store businesses at public facilities.

BESB operates under the authority of Chapter 174 of the Connecticut General Statutes and maintains a confidential registry of people who are blind in Connecticut as required by statute. BESB provides comprehensive independent living services, adaptive aids and devices and volunteer supports, among other rehabilitative services, to individuals of all ages who are legally blind, deaf-blind or visually impaired with a goal of maximizing independence and community inclusion.

Under the provisions of Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-295, the Bureau provides to any school district upon written request the services of Teachers of the Visually Impaired to address the vision-related developmental needs of students who are blind, deaf-blind or visually impaired. For more information visit www.ct.gov/besb.

Bureau of Disability Determination Services:

The Bureau's Disability Determination Services (DDS) unit is responsible for deciding eligibility for the Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) programs. These programs provide cash benefits to individuals who are unable to maintain employment due to the severity of their disabilities.

Individuals with disabilities can apply for benefits or inquire about the status of their application by visiting <http://www.ssa.gov/>.

Bureau of Organizational Support:

The consolidation of programs created opportunities for the creation of a centralized business services unit to support all of the department's programs. DORS has been able to assume full responsibility for all fiscal functions, and is also supporting the State Department on Aging's fiscal functions.

The Bureau of Organizational Support provides programmatic support in the following areas:

- Budget Preparation and Monitoring
- General and Federal Fund Accounting
- Vendor Set Up and Maintenance
- Contract Monitoring
- Procurement
- Accounts Payable
- Billing and Accounts Receivable
- Federal Reporting
- Facilities and Operations
- Asset Management
- Information Technology

Additional Organizational Components:

Human Resources Division:

The agency has been responsible for its own administrative functions, including human resources, since July 1, 2013. The Human Resources Division is responsible for providing technical guidance and support for all the employees of the agency. HR staff are involved in addressing issues which impact human resource management for the agency as a whole, through coordination of policy issues, involvement in labor relations activity and, in general, with the objective of ensuring that the quality of human resource service throughout the department remains consistent. The Human Resources Division also supports the State Department on Aging's HR responsibilities.

Functions of the Human Resource Division include: providing general personnel services to all staff; coordination and administration of information related to personnel data collection; the development and dissemination of agency policies and procedures; participation in labor relations activities with respect to contract administration and negotiation, and the grievance process; administration of medical insurance and other benefits; and implementation of health and safety programs and workers' compensation. The Payroll Unit, as part of this division, is responsible for processing payroll and benefits in accordance with bargaining unit contracts and State Personnel Regulations.

Public Service

While each program has its own legislative requirements and program effectiveness standards, DORS as a whole focuses on continuous improvement.

We continue to work toward building a full complement of metrics to share in this annual report, focusing on our mission of *maximizing opportunities for people in Connecticut with disabilities to live, learn and work independently*.

To demonstrate this mission, the Department has had the following Improvements/Achievements for 2014-2015:

Live: Individuals have increased their ability to live independently

- 906 Older Blind clients (55 and over) received Independent Living services.*
- 3,692 Independent Living services were provided to those Older Blind clients (55 and over).*
- 231 Adult Blind clients (under age 55) received independent Living Services.*
- 615 Independent Living Services were provided to those Adult Blind clients (under age 55).*
- 64 clients received Deafblind Community Inclusion grant services.*
- 91 students who are blind or visually impaired took part in BESB's extra-curricular programs - including Camp Abilities, Sports Adventure Weekend and College Day.*
- 43,339 disability claims were processed during SFY2015.
- There were 2,053 Deaf and Hard of Hearing Counseling Services performed during SFY2015, which may include multiple referrals and services during one session. These include counseling, consultation, education and advocacy. Also in this number are referrals to partner agencies, and information on resources regarding Deaf culture, hearing loss, limited hearing aid funding, and assistive technology.
- There were 12,382 sign language interpreter assignments, totaling just over 49,321 hours.
- 277 clients were served under the Driver's Training Program during SFY2015. Of these 101 clients completed driver's training (some of which included vehicle adaptations), 57 were actively receiving services and 119 had requested services, pending evaluations.
- 588 individuals received Assistive Technology services for the purposes of community living, including alternate financing, Deaf Blind telecommunications equipment, recycling and reuse of devices, device loans and device demonstrations.
- 144 Independent Living (IL) Part B clients served.*

Learn: Individuals have increased their ability to learn independently

- 1,165 clients received education and training within BESB programs, including Children's Services, Job Readiness and Post-Secondary Training.*
- 862 clients received education and training within BRS programs, including Job Readiness and Occupational Skills training.*
- 120 individuals received Assistive Technology services for the purposes of education, including alternate financing, Deaf Blind telecommunications equipment, recycling and reuse of devices, device loans and device demonstrations.

Work: Individuals have increased their ability to work independently

- 1,016 clients were served under BESB's Vocational Rehabilitation Program. Of these, 816 were served under an individualized employment plan and 114 clients achieved employment.*
- Average hourly wages for consumers under the BESB Vocational Rehabilitation Program were \$20.10.*
- 8,574 consumers were assisted in the BRS Vocational Rehabilitation Program. Of these 4,976 were served under an individualized employment plan and 1,407 achieved employment.*
- Average hourly wages for consumers under the BRS Vocational Rehabilitation Program were \$17.85.*
- 1,863 clients were served within the Workers' Rehabilitation Program. Of these 345 clients achieved employment.
- 55 individuals received Assistive Technology services for the purposes of employment, including alternate financing, Deaf Blind telecommunications equipment, recycling and reuse of devices, device loans and device demonstrations.
- 815 new consumers met with the Connect to Work Center benefits specialists. 623 individuals received full benefits analysis services and 1929 follow ups were completed.

**Please note, these numbers were captured under Federal Fiscal Year reporting, which ran from October 2013 to September 2014*

Information Reported as Required by State Statute

Affirmative Action:

The DORS Affirmative Action Office was responsible for all Affirmative Action related activities. The Department of Rehabilitation Services is committed to a policy of equal opportunity/affirmative action for all qualified persons. The department does not discriminate in any employment practice, education program, or educational activity on the basis of race, color, religious creed, sex, age, national origin, ancestry, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability (including, but not limited to, intellectual disability, past or present history of mental disorder, physical disability or learning disability), genetic information, or any other basis prohibited by Connecticut state and/or federal nondiscrimination laws.

The Department of Rehabilitation Services does not unlawfully discriminate in employment and licensing against qualified persons with a prior criminal conviction. Under the direction of the Commissioner, the agency is responsible for ensuring compliance with a wide variety of federal and state laws and department policies that address equal employment and education. Activities related to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act include investigating grievances as well as determining and documenting reasonable accommodations, and visiting work sites. The agency also investigates complaints in the areas of employment practice, sexual harassment, disability, and age/sex under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act.

During the Affirmative Action reporting period, DORS has successfully achieved a significant percentage of its goals in many of the categories/classifications, thereby upholding its commitment toward achieving parity in the workforce. The department supports affirmative action and diversity in the workplace and actively seeks applicants from all sectors of the population, and takes seriously the commitment to develop a workforce that reflects the diversity of the client population it serves.