

# 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](http://www.ct.gov/dors)***

***Total employees - 433***

***Total expenditures - \$89,000,000 with approximately 75% federal and 25% 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 SFY2016 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](http://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 staffing 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 better understand 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 Centers for Independent Living.
- 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.
- Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services include 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. [Please note, as of July 15, 2016, the department is no longer a direct provider of sign language interpreting services.
- 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 obtain, retain and advance in 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](http://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:**

This centralized business services unit supports all of the department's programs. In addition to responsibility for all fiscal and IT functions, this DORS bureau is also supporting the State Department on Aging.

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 Human Resources Division is responsible for providing technical guidance and support for all the employees of the agency. HR staff is 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 2015-2016:

**Live: Individuals have increased their ability to live independently**

- 967 Older Blind clients (55 and over) received Independent Living services.\*
- 3,622 Independent Living services were provided to those Older Blind clients (55 and over).\*
- 229 Adult Blind clients (under age 55) received independent Living Services.\*
- 592 Independent Living Services were provided to those Adult Blind clients (under age 55).\*
- 68 clients received Deafblind Community Inclusion grant services.\*
- 87 students who are blind or visually impaired took part in BESB's extra-curricular programs - including Camp LIFE college experience, Skills for Life Mobility Camp and "Teen Escape" transition program.
- \*47,531 disability claims were processed during SFY2016.
- There were 947 Deaf and Hard of Hearing Counseling Services performed during SFY2016, 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 11,744 sign language interpreter assignments, totaling just over 46,073 hours.
- 270 clients were served under the Driver Training Program during SFY2016. Of these 119 clients completed driver's training (some of which included vehicle adaptations), 42 were actively receiving services and 109 had requested services, pending evaluations.
- 647 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.
- 167 Independent Living (IL) Part B clients were served.\*

**Learn: Individuals have increased their ability to learn independently**

- 1,224 clients received education and training within BESB programs, including preschool services, Braille instruction and expanded core curriculum training for children, and vocational skills training, including post-secondary education for adult clients.\*
- 159 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**

- 1,047 clients were served under BESB's Vocational Rehabilitation Program. Of these, 881 were served under an individualized employment plan and 115 clients achieved employment.\*
- Average hourly wages for consumers under the BESB Vocational Rehabilitation Program were \$20.53.\*
- 8,669 consumers were assisted in the BRS Vocational Rehabilitation Program. Of these 5,592 were served under an individualized employment plan and 1,460 achieved employment.\*
- Average hourly wages for consumers under the BRS Vocational Rehabilitation Program were \$18.23.\*

- 959 clients were served within the Workers' Rehabilitation Program. Of these 366 clients achieved employment.
- 31 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.
- 804 new consumers met with the Connect to Work Center benefits specialists. 623 individuals received full benefits analysis services and 2039 follow ups were completed.

*\*Please note, these numbers were captured under Federal Fiscal Year reporting, which ran from October 2014 to September 2015*

## **Information Reported as Required by State Statute**

### **Affirmative Action:**

DORS entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Administrative Services agreeing to their management of Affirmative Action and Equal Employment Opportunity (AA/EEO) programs and services in March 2016. DAS became responsible for all AA/EEO related activities at that time. DORS 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.