

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 - 363

Total expenditures - \$84,140,839 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 provides a wide range of services to individuals with disabilities 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 SFY2017 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 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. For more information visit www.ct.gov/brs.

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 Interpreter Registry. 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 department also monitors and posts a statewide Interpreter Registry for all sign language interpreters working in Connecticut in accordance with state statute.
- 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 devices and training, braille and large print textbooks, and independent living training to children, as well as 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 Students with Visual Impairments 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 medical eligibility for the Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) programs. These programs provide cash benefits and medical insurance 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:

Commissioner's Office:

The Commissioner's Office includes Staff Attorney, Strategic Planning and Operational Readiness, Legislative Office, Communications Office, Human Resources and Affirmative Action.

- The Staff Attorney acts as in-house counsel to the agency on a wide range of issues involving every aspect of the department's work; researches, interprets, analyzes and applies complex and conflicting laws and regulations. The staff attorney acts as a hearing officer and represents DORS in formal administrative and public proceedings. The staff attorney also acts as the primary contact for all Freedom of Information requests.
- Strategic Planning and Operational Readiness works with agency leadership to develop and support the DORS strategic plan, helping to develop strategies and objectives for the achievement of agency mission and goals. They also prepare and update the agency's Continuity of Operations Plan, ensure the agency is in compliance with FEMA and similar training requirements in the state, as well as working with senior DORS staff for appropriate agency responses to emergency situations.
- The Legislative Liaison advises on and coordinates legislative proposals. They also provide advocacy and representation at the General Assembly on behalf of DORS. The Legislative Liaison currently serves as the Ethic Liaison for the agency as well.

- The Communications Office acts as the Public Information Officer for the agency and is the contact for media inquiries. The Communications Office is also responsible for website and social media development and management.
- 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.
- DORS has a memorandum of agreement for all Affirmative Action and Equal Employment Opportunity (AA/EEO) programs and services. Affirmative Action and Equal Employment Opportunity (AA/EEO) programs and services. 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.

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.

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 2016-2017:

Live: Individuals have increased their ability to live independently

- 1,093 Older Blind clients (55 and over) received Independent Living services.*
- 4,522 Independent Living services were provided to those Older Blind clients (55 and over).*
- 226 Adult Blind clients (under age 55) received independent Living Services.*

- 722 Independent Living Services were provided to those Adult Blind clients (under age 55).*
- 49 clients received Deafblind Community Inclusion grant services.*
- 99 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 Camp Abilities adapted sports summer program.
- *41,104 Social Security disability claims were adjudicated during SFY 2017.
- There were 486 Deaf and Hard of Hearing Counseling Services performed during SFY2017 ranging from mid-August 2016- June 30, 2017 (which may include multiple referrals and services during one session). These include counseling, consultation, education and advocacy, case coordination. 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. This number also represents collaboration with other state agencies to provide culturally competent services and to exchange referrals.
- 324 clients were served under the Driver's Training Program during SFY2017. Of these 158 clients completed driver's training (some of which included vehicle adaptations), 61 were actively receiving services and 105 had requested services, pending evaluations.
- 1,984 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.*
- 410 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

- 999 clients were served under BESB's Vocational Rehabilitation Program. Of these, 899 were served under an individualized employment plan and 105 clients achieved employment.*
- Average hourly wages for consumers under the BESB Vocational Rehabilitation Program were \$20.87.*
- 8,637 consumers were assisted in the BRS Vocational Rehabilitation Program. Of these 6,200 were served under an individualized employment plan and 1,583 achieved employment.*
- Average hourly wages for consumers under the BRS Vocational Rehabilitation Program were \$19.24.*
- 551 Initial Interviews were completed in the Workers' Rehabilitation Services program. Of these 356 clients achieved employment.

- 49 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.
- 577 new consumers met with the Connect to Work Project benefits specialists. 697 individuals received benefits analysis services and 1,327 follow ups were completed. There were also 110 presentations and other outreach activities targeting underserved populations, especially youth in transition.

**Please note, these numbers were captured under Federal Fiscal Year reporting, which ran from October 2015 to September 2016.*