

Dear Secretary Oleksiak, Secretary Danowski, Secretary Snead and Mr. Hyde:

The undersigned are writing to you regarding ongoing problems with OVR's capacity to provide to pre-employment transition services to students across the Commonwealth and the agency's recent unilateral decision to halt funding for these services until budget concerns can be addressed. This decision was made with little to no notice to the students receiving the services, their families, teachers and the providers of the service as well as business relationships developed for the Work Based Learning Experiences (WBLEs). We believe this decision has a significantly adverse impact on students with disabilities. In some cases, providers were not told until late December to cease providing services to students as of January and students and parents did not learn their services had been suspended until their return to school after the holidays. These students, their families, teachers, and the providers of service are looking for answers. At this time, there is only confusion as the OVR District Offices are giving contradictory information to the providers and customers.

Until this recent decision was announced, OVR staff have been strongly encouraging students to participate in PETS and asking providers to develop the service. Providers have hired and trained personnel, purchased curriculum and restructured their programs to incorporate these services. As mentioned in the 1/10/19 memo, the impact of PETS services is far reaching and will help our students be successful for the rest of their lives. A sudden stop to these services is detrimental to the students and needs to be reversed.

The following are only a few examples of the impact of this decision:

- Decreased likelihood of employment post-graduation from current Seniors (as the memo identifies WBLEs increase employment chances 2.5 times compared to students who have not had this experience)
- Loss of relationships with schools due to inability to follow through on promised commitments
- Loss of trust from students and families by denying them access to services that had been discussed and planned in advance through a collaborative transition planning process
- Loss of connections with businesses and employers with which WBLEs have been negotiated

Attached is a summary of some examples of how the administration of the program and the recent OVR memo have impacted students with disabilities, their families and stakeholders across the Commonwealth.

We respectfully request that services be continued for those students who have been receiving services. We also request to participate in a discussion with OVR and other stakeholders to learn about the concerns that led to this decision and to work toward more agreeable strategies to address whatever issues need to be considered. We also request a seat at the table should PETS services be reconfigured. As a group we are committed to serving the students of the Commonwealth in the best manner possible and strive to reach the goals set forth in WIOA to support students to become actively employed in their communities.

We request a reply to these requests and a meeting as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Julia Barol, President, PA APSE

Richard Edley, President and CEO, RCPA

Mark Davis, President and CEO, PAR

Steve Pennington, Executive Director, Pennsylvania Client Assistance Program

Peri Jude Radecic, Chief Executive Officer, Disability Rights Pennsylvania

Jeannine Brinkley, Executive Director, PEAL Center