

The Legislature intends the Utah State Office of Rehabilitation (USOR), in conjunction with the Utah State Office of Education and the Utah State Board of Education, provide to the Office of the Legislative Fiscal Analyst no later than September 1, 2015: 8) Recommendations regarding the organizational placement of USOR and its subunits in order to provide proper oversight, management, and support

The mission of the Utah State Office of Rehabilitation is to assist eligible individuals in obtaining employment and increasing their independence. Although the Vocational Rehabilitation Program (VR), which serves clients age 14 and up, makes up a large part of USOR, programs within USOR serve individuals with disabilities from all age groups. In addition, although the end goal of the Vocational Rehabilitation program is to help individuals become employed, USOR achieves this goal through an individualized rehabilitation process, guided by nationally certified counselors and resulting in a large variety of competitive employment settings from traditional employment to self-employment to employment with long-term supports. USOR's mission is as unique as the clientele it serves.

USOR is committed to improving our management structure and increasing internal expertise. We have changed our leadership team, added key personnel, and have developed an agency plan that reflects needed corrections and will ensure long term success of the agency. We believe we can make necessary corrections and accomplish our goals in our current placement under the Utah State Office of Education (USOE) while decisions are made about the long-term placement of USOR.

USOR agrees that oversight and support has been inadequate in its current placement at USOE and we understand the concerns about adequate time and attention which have been raised. Regardless, USOR does see a mission overlap with USOE. USOR is, at its core, an education program with the goal of assisting clients to learn the skills and gain the services necessary to become more self-sufficient. USOR programs provide services to school age children and youth, a role which will only expand under the recently passed "Workforce Investment and Opportunities Act" with its emphasis on transition services. At least one study has shown that VR programs placed under Education agencies have better outcome placement rates. At the same time, USOR recognizes important differences between USOE and USOR. USOR serves individuals of all ages, not just youth, and there is a stronger emphasis on specific employment skills and employment placements. USOR also recognizes that the USOR budget represents a small piece of the large public education budget.

USOR's mission also partially aligns with the mission of the Department of Workforce Services (DWS). The VR program which emphasizes employment outcomes has the most overlap with the DWS mission and many USOR clients receive services from one or more DWS programs. However, not all USOR programs have a primary employment focus (i.e. Assistive Technology Programs, Independent Living, and Disability Determination Services) and those programs could prove more difficult to integrate into a DWS system.

USOR sees some overlap as well between the mission of USOR and the programs managed by the Department of Human Services (DHS). Some programs within DHS follow a rehabilitation model similar to the philosophy of USOR, and we see at DHS a similar culture of disability awareness and understanding which is crucial to the success of the programs within USOR. We also recognize that the strong employment focus within a large part of USOR is different than the focus of DHS programs.

USOR recognizes that both DWS and DHS have adapted their programs to fit their specific funding streams and to serve their particular clientele and that the costs and effort required to integrate USOR into any other agency would be significant.

USOR recognizes the potential value in USOR becoming an independent commission with more direct oversight by the Executive branch. This option would allow USOR to preserve its unique mission which balances employment and independence and serves individuals with disabilities across the life span. We understand this option presents challenges as well and would require USOR to significantly increase its capacity and infrastructure in certain areas to function independently.

USOR's programs are integrated, overlapping and collaborative and allow individuals with all types of disabilities (including multiple disabilities) across all ages to receive services under the umbrella of a single state agency. Regardless of the ultimate decision about the location of USOR to be made by the Legislature, USOR believes it is in the best interest of individuals with disabilities in Utah to leave USOR intact.

USOR is committed to carrying out its mission in an effective and efficient manner in any location. We appreciate the opportunity to submit these recommendations and look forward to assisting in any way possible as the Legislature considers this very complex decision.