Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC)

MINUTES

The Statewide Independent Living Council held a meeting on November 5th and 6th, 2020 Zoom virtual conference meeting. Chairperson Danny Cottonham, presiding.

Present:

1. Ainsworth, Jamie (Day 1,2)
2. Baker, Kandy (Day 1,2)
3. Bristo, Rashad (Day1, 2)
4. Brossard, Daryn (Day 1,2)
5. Brown, Bernard (Day 1,2)
6. Cheramie, Shaely (Day 1,2)
7. Cottonham, Danny (Day 1,2)
8. Crane, Cheri (Day 1,2)
9. Duplechine, Jamie (Day 1,2)
10. Fuselier, Rocky (Day 1,2)
11. Garofalo, Claudia (Day 1,2)
12. Gradney, Charlene (Day 1,2)
13. Pattan, Anita (Day 1)
14. Granger, Mitch (Day 2)
15. Guillory, Michelle (Day 1,2)
16. Hennessey, Sharon (Day 1,2)
17. Nguyen, Steven (Day 1,2)
18. Taylor, Erick (Day 1,2)
19. Viltz, Rosezella (Day 1,2)
20. Whitlow, Stephen (Day 1,2)
21. Charlene Gradney-OBH (Day 1)
22. Jett, Ester (Day 1,2)
23. Jackson, Welma (Day 1)

Absent:

1. Granger, Mitch (Day 1)
2. Bottley, Jarrod (Day 1,2)
3. Wilson, Juon (Day 1,2)

SILC Staff Present

Lewis, Jessica (Executive Director, SILC)

Guest:

1. Melissa Bayham-LRS (Day 1)
2. Gale Dean-NHILC (Day 1)
3. Baker, Kandy-LRS (Day 1)
4. Alicia Garrison-RIL BR/NO (Day 1)

**CALL TO ORDER AND INTRODUCTIONS**

SILC Chairperson, Danny Cottonham, called the meeting to order at 1:05PM, and asked everyone to briefly introduce him or herself. Danny asked D. Broussard to call roll to determine if a quorum is present. A quorum was present.

The pledge of allegiance was led by Chairperson, Danny Cottonham will all in accompaniment.

The SILC mission statement was read by Stephen Nguyen on behalf of the Council.

**CHAIRPERSON COMMENTS**

The Chair welcomed all of our council members, staff, and guests to the fourth quarter meeting. The chairman took a moment to recognize secondary meetings regarding the SPIL prior to the quarterly meeting. He also took a moment to recognize the fact that Louisiana had been hit by two devastating hurricanes within a six-week time period and offered condolences and speedy recovery for those both directly and indirectly affected. The chair specifically took time to mention the efforts of @SLIC, which in spite of having their main offices rendered unusable by the hurricane still manage to serve all of their clientele, and see to the safety of their consumers and their employees while enduring personal loss and damage to their own home and property.

He also made note of the hardships and challenges which currently affect all as the Council, its members and the community continue to deal with Covid 19. The chair would also go on to praise the members of the Council for its continued commitment to service in these often difficult and uncertain times. The chairman also acknowledged that due to encourage safety practices endorsed by the disability community and the governor that many of the programs that are coordinated by the SILC during the course of the calendar year have had to be suspended or canceled. He encouraged members to share any possible ideas for events that may be held virtually in the event that 2021 does not see significant changes in allowances for safe community contact.

Chairman Cottonham also took a moment to recognize Rozella Viltz, was attending her final meeting as a member of the SILC and thanked her for service. He also recognized Ms. Anita Pattan, who was recently married.

Mr. Cottonham also took a moment to inquire if any members would be interested in attending the SILC Congress, which is to be held in April. Ultimately, it was decided that that decision would be delayed until the February 2021 meeting.

**MISSION STATEMENT**

The SILC mission statement was read by Stephen Nguyen on behalf of the Council.

Chairman Cottonham also took a moment to briefly remind councilmembers that Roberts rules of order would be followed wherever possible. The chairman also stated that should any member need to be recognized in order to speak would need to say their name and have the Chair recognize them. This step was being taken in order to make certain that councilmembers were given an opportunity to speak without being overlooked; given unique circumstances of the meeting being held virtually, as opposed to in person.

**APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA**

Danny Cottonham asked members to review the agenda for any corrections. ????? motioned, and Rosezella V. seconded to approve the agenda. There were no objections and the agenda was approved.

**APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES:**

The council reviewed the minutes from August 6 and 7, 2020. There was a motion to approve the minutes by Erick T. and seconded by Shaley C. The minutes were approved with corrections.

**DIRECTOR’S REPORT SILC Director, Jessica Lewis**

SILC Dir. Jessica Lewis reported that this will be Rose last meeting on SILC and welcomed the new member Ms. Claudia. She then discussed the APRIL conference and what individuals would like to attend. This action will be postponed until next meeting. The ED introduced the new state agency members and goes as follows, Eleanor Murell LRS, Bernard Brown OCDD, and Sherry Crane GOEA. Also, due to Covid restrictions many activities that would normally be planned coordinated and executed by the Council with the assistance of the executive director have not occurred during our calendar year. The Director went on to give a brief summary of the email received from ACL regarding the rejection of the SPIL. She also discussed the correction of the SILC representation map. The Director did not go over any budgetary reports due to the fact that she had not received various reports from the Division of Administration.

**SPIL GOAL# 3: Objective 2: Activity 2: Continue partnering with other CILs and disability-related organizations to foster best practices.**

**Update from VA -Welma Jackson**

Mr. Jackson presented a report to the board regarding the activities of the Louisiana Department of Veterans Affairs specifically focusing on the activities of the capital area region. Specifically as it related to veterans with disabilities, their dependents, or survivors. Mr. Jackson gave a brief historical overview of the department and its mission. LD VA reported 2723 contacts and 10,088 service documents generated in the name of serving veterans and their families during the fiscal year ranging from July to September 2020. LDVA serves Louisiana veterans and their families through 76 offices in 64 parishes, separated into five distinct regions. He also spoke of the challenges of contacting families during the restrictions generated by Covid 19.

**Update from LHC- Juon Wilson**

No Report Was Provided Due To Absence or Illness

**Update from Office of Behavioral Health-Charlene Gradney**

Gave basic overview of services, departmental structure and highlighted several programs being spearheaded by the office throughout the state. Presenter took time to highlight various grants and programs designed to assist those living with mental illness and how to get access to care for various community programs and agencies. No specific figures were given in terms of services provided at this time, due to the fact that this was the presenter’s initial presentation to the Council.

**Louisiana vocational Rehabilitation Services-Melissa Bayham**

Presenter gave general updates, with the following highlights:

Received an award notice via The Louisiana Workforce Commission of award from ACL. A continuing resolution was passed providing $56,829 in part B funds designed to carry funding through December 11, 2020 when existing resolution expires. A new regional manager has been installed in the Lafayette office. Crystal Romain will be taking over due to the retirement of the former director. Presenter also mentioned that they are hiring for their REDS, (Rehabilitation Employment Development Specialist) Monroe and Baton Rouge area. Presenter also mentioned attempting to recruit new LRS counselors in the Alexandria and Houma regions. Also highlighted where new incursions into customizable employment and implementation throughout the state and highlighted joint training efforts with the University of South Florida and LSU in various areas of customizable employment. Presenter also spoke about the new challenges associated with providing transition services to students during the time of Covid. She spoke of gathering vendors and educators together to generate new ideas and providing transition services both in person and virtually where possible. Presenter also spoke of expanding the PRETS program throughout the state.

**Department of Elderly Affairs Cheri Crain**

Presenter gave basic overview of program highlighting its administration of the older Americans act and other services, along with the following highlights: in spite of dedicated meal sites being closed, and other restrictions associated with both Covid 19 and the recovery of hurricane Laura, statewide, DOE provided 3,425,026 home delivered meals; 472,957 needs for transportation; 131,913 homemaker services as of the end of June 2020. Other services include senior RX prescription assistance, the senior employment program etc.

**Motion for a 15 minute break made by D Broussard and seconded by E Taylor at 2:20 PM. Meeting resumed at approximately 2:35 PM CST. Meeting resumed as of 2:40PM**

**Updates from OCDD- Bernard Brown**

Presenter gave basic overview of services which provides home and community-based services to persons with developmental disabilities, and oversight various state run intermediate care facilities, t daycare facilities, and supported employment vocational services.

Many of their adult day care facilities have resumed limited operations. Those attending the daycare facilities are doing so voluntarily. Mandatory return to day programs has been delayed due to continuing Covid 19 restrictions and concerns. Efforts are also being focused on promoting receiving the flu shot in order to see to it that the population served and its employees are at less risk for contracting the flu. Presenter also mentioned making available information on upcoming town hall meetings open to the public in order to have questions answered over a myriad of topics that would affect their consumers, and shareholders.

**SPIL GOAL #2: Objective 2: Activity 2: Advocate for improvement on transportation issues that affect individuals with disabilities- Jamie Ainsworth.**

Presenter opened stating that Covid 19 was still having an effect on persons with disabilities and the ability to effectively access transportation. Due to the pandemic, those participating in the transportation programs are currently at 67% of those accessing services compared to one year ago. Weather-related events such as Hurricane Laura also had an impact on transportation related services, however specific numbers have not been provided at this time. General public services are still operating at this time in 38 parishes. 63 additional agencies are receiving handicap accessible vehicles for general transit service. The continuation of service was largely due to stimulus funding resulting from the CARES Act of 2020. Funding received in March allowed them to continue operations and maintain staff. These funds are anticipated to continue through June 2022. Ms. Ainsworth also took a moment to promote a program sponsored by DOTD, for providing various nonprofit, public and community organizations with access to accessible transportation. This could be possible via an 85% federal funding and 15% local/organizational funding. She encouraged those attending the meeting to reach out for information and help promote this program to various local/community organizations in their area.

**SPIL GOAL #1: Objective 1: Activity 1: CILs provide updates at each SILC meeting**

**Update from @Southwest Louisiana Independence Center (@SLIC)-Rocky Fuselier**

Presenter began by thanking all of those individuals who came in provided support in the Lake Charles area for the center. Presenter noted that everyone in Lake Charles was affected by the hurricane. The Lake Charles and Leesville offices were heavily affected by the hurricane. The Lake Charles office interior was in the process of being rebuilt due to significant and severe storm damage.

Mr. Fuselier noted that the 704 report is produced each year from their office. He asked the ED to share this report with the SILC. This report provided a statistical snapshot of services provided in the past year prior to the hurricane. He mentioned that including consumers, staff and DSW’s, @SLIC successfully evacuated approximately 40 individuals from Lake Charles to the Leesville area in order to make sure that they were saved from the hurricane. Bringing these individuals from Lake Charles to Leesville, and then to Baton Rouge; out of the path of the hurricane. Mr. Fuselier stated that @SLIC was temporarily operating out of the Leesville office, due to the fact that it sustained less damage than the Lake Charles office. The main office number is being routed to cell phones and most Internet is currently being provided via hotspots. The Lake Charles office is currently open and being rebuilt. The Lake Charles office is operating out of a small annex near the primary office structure that is being rebuilt.

The presenter also took a moment to highlight the fact that both transportation and telecommunication services have resumed and are picking up steam.

**Update from New Horizons Independent Living Center (NHILC) –Gale Dean**

Presenter began her quarterly report by offering thoughts and prayers to the staff and consumers from @SILC. She also talked about the modernization of the website for New Horizons Independent Living Center. The web address is: [www.nhilc.org](http://www.nhilc.org). Ms. Dean reported that new horizons had been affected by the hurricane Laura, inasmuch as it lost power for several days. New horizons also provided personal care services for evacuees of hurricane Laura, with functional disabilities since late August at the Alexandria Louisiana mega shelter. As a result of contracts with EMDAC and the Department of children and family services. New horizons was able to provide masks, and free cell phones as a result of a donation by a managed care organization. New horizons was also able to provide durable medical equipment and clothing to some consumers.

Ms. Dean also spoke of the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program. Reported that it was ongoing, but in the process of taking a break in order to prepare for the upcoming tax season. NHILC in collaboration with AARP assisted over 500 individuals with tax-preparation’s, many of them thanks to a new virtual tax-preparation system, as a result of Covid 19.

Ms. Dean soon noted that much of this quarter we spent addressing the needs of people

with disabilities who have been affected by Covid- 19 through the use of the CARES

funding. NHILC Initially received $300,721‑dollars from ACL. But as of September 30th,

2020 a balance of just 97,952‑dollars. Preliminary numbers of the program

performance report or the 704 reported providing 205 consumers with 654 various

services with the CARES funding. NHILC purchased masks, gloves, cleaning supplies for

staff and also for over 100 BOA consumers living in their own apartments. As of this

report, the current CARES funding balance is 81,582.18 and NHILC will have until

September 30th of 2021 to spend the balance. Preliminary numbers on our regular

independent living program performance report show that 669 consumers with 2,577

documented services received. The preliminary report also shows that consumers

achieved 494 goals. This year we had five parishes underserved. That means the

number of consumers served in those parishes which were less than five. And those

underserved parishes are Claiborne, Madison, Red River, Tenaha and East Carol. This

totaled five Parises out of total of 29 parishes in their service area. Mrs. Dean also stated

that a great deal of we spent on the SPIL committee working towards an approvable

version of the state plan. Mrs. Dean stated that she would highlight the work and

suggestions from them plan during the following day’s meeting. She also made note of

the fact that only seven states in the nation had their SPIL approved.

**Update from Resources on Independent Living (RIL) - Alicia Garrison**

Ms. Garrison began by stating that she did not have the authority to provide report at this time,

she would provide a summary of activities and events to the best of her ability.

Resources for Independent Living continue to provide core services to those who contacted

them. They also received PPE’s thanks to assistance from Bambi P. at the Governor’s Office

of Disability Affairs. She also briefly spoke about their annual back to school event in

partnership with Healthy Blue. Mentioning the thing figured out how to complete the event

using safe social distancing practices successfully, in spite of several prior cancellations. The

center also assisted consumers in completing mail in election balance, absentee voting and

registration to vote.

Also mentioned was assistance provided to those in need in the Lake Charles area affected by

hurricane Laura. Specifically highlighted was the donation of nonperishable food items.

**New Business**

The chairman took a moment to discuss the executive director evaluations, and address questions/complications regarding the survey platform. He also took a moment to recognize Rosezella Viltz, who was attending her last meeting that allowed her to briefly speak about her next steps and what she may be pursuing outside of the Council. Chairman Cottonham made a point to remind members of the importance of day to of the council’s work as we continue to address the SPIL.

Motion for recess was made by Daryn Broussard and seconded by Rashad Bristo.–

4:00pm Recess

DAY 2

**CALL TO ORDER-** Chairman Danny Cottonham called the meeting to order at 9:15 am. Roll call was conducted by Secretary Daryn Broussard. A quorum was established. Guest introduced themselves.

The chairman thanked all that are in attendance and thanked the new state agency members for giving reports that normally we would not hear.

**SPIL GOAL #1: Objective 1: Activity 8: Partnerships with other advocacy groups by including reports from other groups or presentations from other groups**

**15 mins 9:15- 9:30**

Bambi gave a short report on GODA**.** She stated that at this time they are responding to three hurricanes and collaborating with the Emergency Management and Disability and Aging Coalition to get things done. She has also been working with the governor’s policy team in regards to disability-related issues that will be potentially on the legislative agenda for next year. She mentioned the deadline change for the Governor’s Outstanding Leadership in Disabilities, GOLD awards to Monday. She posted the link and stated that submission of nominations can be emailed to [disabilityaffairs@la.gov](mailto:disabilityaffairs@la.gov). The awards that need more nominations are the Patsy Barret award, the Veteran’s award, and the Service Animal of the year. She questioned the SILC to ask if anyone would like to be on the committee that selects the recipients and if so, send to Jamar at jamar.ennis.la.gov that you want to participate.

**Update of SPIL**

Vote on SPIL amendments.

Chairman Danny Cottonham updated everyone yesterday that this part of the meeting will come today. He mentioned the SPIL not being approved, and the work that the SPIL committee has been working on regarding the issue. Ann M. Stated the SILC should be aware that 49 states got the same conditional approval that we did with a list of corrections to be made. There were only six state plans approved. Chairman Danny Cottonham asked the ED to share screen the document and state aloud each correction recommendation. Jessica described what the SILC will see as they go along. Chairman Danny Cottonham also described the makeup of the SPIL committee and the reason why a new appointment. Discussion of the SPIL corrections started- refer to meeting caption for precise corrections. It was mentioned that if we put any dates and cannot meet them, the SILC can always do amendments to restructure. Chairman Danny Cottonham asked Ann option regarding the matter. She stated, “a work plan specifically for the SILC and the centers to work toward achieving the objective to do specific action steps would be her recommendation.” Vice Chairman Sharron Hennessy suggested making the objectives S.M.A.R.T. goals, specific, measurable, accountable, and realistic as stated in the SPIL instructions. Further discussions took place regarding the work plan and its structure. Chairman Danny Cottonham discussed, to clear up any confusion, that Ms. Blye stated that there are 4 federally recognized CIL’s with 3 center directors and the plan should reflect such. A SILC member also stated that if a CIL does not report at SILC meetings, it could affect consideration of future part B funding. The discussion digressed to speak about more corrections to the first part of the SPIL. A motion was made by Secretary Daryn Broussard to do a roll call vote to separate from the Governor’s Office. Rocky seconded. Anita G., Member- at- Large Erick Taylor, Rosezella V. voted Nye. A roll call vote was done thereafter.

Shaeley Cheramie. My vote is to split. I vote in favor of the law.

Antoinette Harrell. No.

Treasurer Steven Nguyen. Yes.

Anita Gray. No.

Jamie Duplechain.Yes.

Ester Marshal. Yes.

Stephen Whitlow. Yes.

Claudia Garofalo.Yes.

Darren Broussard. Yes.

Vice Chairman Sharron Hennessy. Yes.

Mitch Granger. Yes.

Rocky Fusilier Yes.

Rosezella Viltz.No.

Jared Bottley. Not Available

Member- at- Large Erick Taylor. No.

Rashad Bristo. Yes

Twelve yeses. Four noes. Vote passes that SILC will separate from the Governor's office.

Gale then described what this means regarding separation from the Governor’s Office. The ED then asked questions regarding the process of separation as it relates to the ED position, to be transparent about what can take place. Melissa also asked some additional questions to fully understand what must happen regarding contractual agreements to report to her supervisor. Further discussion took place regarding the reasoning behind some members say no to the vote to separate. It was also stated that SILC is not required to have a 5013C status, and the SILC can continue as an autonomous council of the state. Which means you elect your officers and make independent decisions. SILC can operate without taking on that tax-exempt status. Stephen W. described what a 501c3 status is and requires. Suggestions were given from Sha regarding finical agent duties. Discussions went on to talk about different fiscal agents.

Recess motioned by???? and seconded by Rose. Start meeting again at 11:25 a.m.

Two committees came out of the discussion. Committee one. SILC member??? motioned to establish a committee that will begin the research process on finding the best fiscal agent for SILC. Rashad seconded the motion. The committee consists of Steven Nguyen as the chair, Rashad, Erick, Daryn, and Ester. Committee two pertains to the executive director position as it relates to an evaluation process, pay scale, applications, interviewing, and hiring. This committee will be handled by the executive committee and Rashad. Concerning the date of Jul1 taken out of the SPIL, Chairman Danny Cottonham stated hard dates were not necessarily needed. Chairman Danny Cottonham restated the conversation with Ms. Blye. She indicated that wasn't necessarily what she was looking for but she did want to see our actions move in a direction where we eventually achieve autonomy. Also, she stated that she didn't want to see the SILC tie ourselves into any dates that may jeopardize us for not being in compliance at some point. Vice Chairman Sharron Hennessy made a motion to develop a work plan to help guide us and set goals to decide where we are going and how we are going to do it. Secretary Daryn Broussard seconded the motion. The executive committee will have the description and pay scale for a permanent SILC director by June 1st, 2021 and hire the executive director by July 1, 2021. It was recommended that the SILC should not do multiple amendments so taking out the date would be better. The new date should reflect, when agreed, LRS having the proper 6 months to change contracts from the current fiscal agent. Melissa made the council mindful that if the SILC has not selected soon how logistics will operate and approve who the fiscal agent is going to be, the contract can't be in place by July 1 and you can't make the full separation by July 1. Gale stated New Horizons and SLIC have agreed to serve as the fiscal agent as a center at the SILC pleasure. Ann stated if you don’t meet the timelines suggested, then you will need to explain in your PPR that you weren't able to achieve that deadline because of the delay on the contract. It was also mentioned if the dates were to be pushed back it would have to be pushed back by one year for the interagency agreement to end at the end of a fiscal year. The motion regarding the work plan was brought back up at this time. Rose object. Motion still passes.

All corrections were stated throughout the document with SILC committee recommendations and will be reflected in the new SPIL. The Chair asked for the ED to make arrangements to set up a conference call with the executive committee and Rashad as it relates to the executive director position. The Chair asked for this to be done by November 20th. The ED will make the necessary corrections to the SPIL document and send it out next week for everyone to review. Rose to move that we accept the SPIL for the next three years with the necessary corrections as SILC has discussed. Member- at- Large Erick Taylor Seconded. Motion pass. Rose had the opportunity to make some farewell comments to our council since this is her last meeting.

**SPIL GOAL #3: Objective 2: Activity 1: Participating in webinars, conference calls, and training from national groups**

Report was tabled.

**SPIL GOAL #1: Objective 1: Activity 7: Plans for the next annual meeting at a Center for Independent Living**

The ED gave an update for the next virtual meeting which will be February 4th and 5th.

**Other Business and Closing Comments**

**11:05 -12:00pm**

**Adjournment**

Motion from Member- at- Large Erick Taylor and seconded by Secretary Daryn Broussard.