



Governor Chris Sununu
Office of the Governor
State House
107 North Main Street
Concord, NH 03301

June 29, 2018

Dear Governor Sununu,

The undersigned groups, advocates for people with disabilities in New Hampshire, have serious concerns with the recent implementation of an order of selection for New Hampshire Vocational Rehabilitation and we are writing today to request that you end the Order of Selection so that people with disabilities can access the supports they need to become successfully employed.

With the implementation of this order of selection, NH Vocational Rehabilitation will provide services only to people who had an Individualized Plan for Employment before the Order of Selection went into effect. The agency will not serve anyone else, even people who were in the process of being evaluated for services.

NH Vocational Rehabilitation estimates that 1455 willing workers will be placed on a waiting list in 2018 and 1699 in 2019. None of these individuals will receive the supports and services they need to become employed. With the lowest unemployment rates in the country, New Hampshire should be doing everything possible to increase the pool of qualified employees, not reducing it by excluding people with disabilities. Instead, NH Vocational Rehabilitation is limiting its services and we have heard estimates that this restriction may continue for a year or more, impacting thousands of people.

We have a number of additional concerns about this decision and the process used by NH Vocational Rehabilitation to implement these changes.

First, opportunities for consumer input have been limited and have mostly been ignored. NH Vocational Rehabilitation held one public meeting, lasting one and a half hours to receive input regarding the change. The announcement of the public meeting was made only a few days in advance. Many people with disabilities have significant transportation barriers and cannot arrange to attend the meeting with such short notice, if they were even aware it was occurring.

In addition, the written comment period was similarly brief, open only 5 days from April 30 to May 4th at 3:00 pm, further limiting the opportunities for the agency to receive input. As NH Vocational Rehabilitation submitted its state plan amendment to the US Department of Education on May 5th and implemented the Order of Selection on May 7th, it is unclear if public comments were even considered.

We are also concerned that NH Vocational Rehabilitation did not involve the State Rehabilitation Council in discussions of the financial difficulties or the plan to implement an Order of Selection until recently, even though leadership at NH Vocational Rehabilitation has been aware of this problem for months. NH Vocational Rehabilitation ignored its obligation, under federal regulation, to regularly consult with the State Rehabilitation Council regarding the development, implementation, and revision of State policies and procedures of general applicability pertaining to the provision of vocational rehabilitation services.

Secondly, we are concerned about financial management at NH Vocational Rehabilitation. It is unclear why NH Vocational Rehabilitation was forced to implement such drastic restrictions in services so quickly. We have questions whether the grant was being managed properly over the past few years and whether it is being managed properly now. We also have questions about whether NH Vocational Rehabilitation has reviewed its internal processes, procedures or expenses to attempt to address this deficit prior to restricting services. We believe that implementing an order of selection should be the last resort.

Finally, we are concerned about how this issue is being communicated to clients and whether NH Vocational Rehabilitation is keeping a waiting list of consumers who are interested in NH Vocational Rehabilitation services. We have heard that an individual called for help last week and was told only that no services are available. There was no communication regarding a waiting list. The individual did not receive any information about an eligibility determination or evaluation of priority level. In another instance, we heard that the parent of a teenager was told that the child would not receive transition services, as required by the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act, due to the implementation of the Order of Selection.

Thank you for your attention to these issues. We hope that you will take action to restore employment supports and services to people with disabilities as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Patrick, Executive Director
Disability Rights Center

Isadora Rodriguez-Legendre, Executive Director
New Hampshire Council on Developmental Disabilities

Lisa D. Beaudoin, Executive Director
ABLE – NH

Cathy Spinney, Chair
NH Developmental Disabilities and Acquired Brain Disorders Quality Council

David Morgan, President & CEO
Future In Sight

Jill K. Gravink, Executive Director
Northeast Passage

Ken Norton, Executive Director
NAMI NH -The National Alliance On Mental Illness

CC:

Commissioner Frank Edelblut, New Hampshire Department of Education, 101 Pleasant Street, Concord, NH 03301-3860

Ms. Lisa Hinson Hatz, Director, State Director, NH Vocational Rehabilitation, 21 South Fruit Street, Suite 20, Concord, NH 03301 NH Vocational Rehabilitation

Ms. Carol Dobak, Acting Commissioner, Rehabilitation Services Administration via email: carol.dobak@ed.gov

Ms. Tonya Stellar, Vocational Rehabilitation State Liaison, US Department of Education via email: tonya.stellar@ed.gov