

Louisiana Developmental Disabilities Council
Education and Employment Committee
January 29, 2025

RENODA WASHINGTON: Good afternoon everyone. It is now 2:25 and I would like to call the meeting to order. Stephanie, would you mind doing the roll call please.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: Sure. Melissa Bayham.

MELISSA BAYHAM: Here.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: Jamar Ennis. Christi Gonzales. Meredith Jordan.

MEREDITH JORDAN: Here.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: Tony Piontek. Erick Taylor.

ERICK TAYLOR: Here.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: Renoda Washington.

RENODA WASHINGTON: Here.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: Vivienne Webb.

VIVIENNE WEBB: Here.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: And Phil Wilson. You have six you. You have a quorum.

RENODA WASHINGTON: Thank you Stephanie. Before we get started I just want to remind you all of a few rules. For committee members and members of the public attending in person please raise your hand to speak and wait to be recognized by the chair before speaking. To help the meeting run smoothly please keep side conversations to a minimum and comments related to the topic you are discussing. For those committee members who are attending virtually remember you must be on camera and have your first and last name showing to be counted towards our quorum. Please keep microphones muted unless called upon by the chair. Electronically raise your hand to request to speak and wait to be called on by the chair. For attendees electronically raise your hand to request to speak. Once recognized by the chair your microphone will be turned on. After speaking the microphone will be returned to mute. Also the Q and A is to only be used by those needing ADA accommodations to participate in the meeting. Public comment will not be accepted via the Q and A except for those individuals who requested the accommodation.

As per order committee members in person and virtually will be allowed to speak first. Public members in person will then be called on followed by public participating

virtually who have their hands raised. As with all hybrid meetings it can be difficult to keep track of all of those wanting to speak in person and virtually so please be patient. All comments and questions from committee members and the public may be limited should we run into time constraints so please keep that in mind. Also comments about a person's character will not be allowed. Finally, members of the public will have the opportunity to provide public comment before each vote and during designated public comment periods. Public members will be given one opportunity to speak for each agenda item and will be limited to two minutes. The chair may also use their discretion to determine if comments will be accepted outside of those times.

Everyone should have reviewed the October meeting summary which is linked in the agenda you received via email. There's also a copy in your committee packet. I need a motion to accept the minutes.

ERICK TAYLOR: I motion to accept the minutes. Erick.

VIVIENNE WEBB: I second.

RENODA WASHINGTON: Erick, you motioned and Vivienne seconded.

All right. Due to the new regulations on open meetings law we will need to do a roll call vote. Stephanie, can you please take the roll call vote.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: Yes. Ms. Bayham.

MELISSA BAYHAM: Yes.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: I'm sorry. A vote for yes is to accept the October meeting minutes.

MELISSA BAYHAM: Yes.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: Mr. Ennis. Ms. Gonzales.

CHRISTI GONZALES: Yes.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: Ms. Gonzales, yes. Ms. Jordan.

MEREDITH JORDAN: Yes.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: Ms. Jordan, yes. Mr. Piontek.
Mr. Taylor.

ERICK TAYLOR: Yes.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: Mr. Taylor, yes. Ms. Webb.

VIVIENNE WEBB: Yes.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: Ms. Webb, yes. Dr. Wilson. And you have five yeses, zero nays so the motion passes.

RENODA WASHINGTON: Thank you Stephanie. The October meeting summary is passed by unanimous consent.

First on the agenda is an update on LRS. We will have

Melissa Bayham from Louisiana Rehabilitation Services get us started. Melissa, could you start by giving us an update on third-party cooperative arrangement.

MELISSA BAYHAM: Sure. And that's primarily what I wanted to speak to you all about today since I know that's what this particular committee is very interested in. And just for anyone who is new, third-party corroborative arrangements are agreements that we enter into with school districts and in these arrangements the school districts are able to hire their own transition specialists that are funded with vocational rehabilitation funds. The only caveat is they have to contribute the state matching funds which is 21.3 percent. So whatever that budget is for that particular transition specialist the school district has to contribute 21.3 percent of those funds.

And so right now we have 19 third-party cooperative arrangements and that includes some charter schools as well. But the update I wanted to give, because I mentioned that in the last meeting, is that we are in the planning process. That means that you don't have an executed contract but we're in contract negotiations with three additional school districts that we're anticipating hopefully starting in August of 2025. And those include Lincoln Parish, Lafayette Parish and Catahoula Parish. So we're actively working with these three school districts.

In terms of the numbers that y'all have requested, we are currently providing preemployment transition services to about 625 students with disabilities through the third-party cooperative arrangement. It's over about 4,000 total but in terms of students that we're serving strictly under these contracts is about 625. And about half of those students or about 300 of those are participating in at least one work-based learning experience. And that's the hands-on work experiences that-- there's five preemployment transition services and they're all important but it has been found that workplace learning experiences have the highest predictor of helping an individual succeed in full-time employment once they graduate. So we're excited that we have half of our third-party cooperative arrangement students able to participate in those work-based learning experiences. And in most of those situations those are paid work experiences.

I also mentioned in the last meeting that we were

reviewing preemployment transition services vendor applications. We had decided to go ahead and have all of our vendors to renew or to reapply just to make sure that the curriculums that they were all using were consistent or at least consistent in terms of the quality. So we are in the process of reviewing those vendor applications and curriculums to ensure that they meet our standards because we want to make sure that all of our students are not just receiving these services, but they're quality services that are going to enhance their education and their ability to gain employment once they exit the school system. So those are my updates on pre-employment transition services. Does anybody have any questions?

ERICK TAYLOR: I got a question and a concern. The people with disabilities do y'all have, do y'all sign a contract with them or how do y'all do that?

MELISSA BAYHAM: With the vendors?

ERICK TAYLOR: Yes.

MELISSA BAYHAM: That's a very good question. So there's two different ways that we do it. So when I talked about the third parties with the school districts those are contracts. Those are contracts that go through the whole contracting process through the Office of State Procurement. When we have vendors who are sometimes for profit or nonprofit organizations, community rehabilitation programs, we don't have what I would call a contract with them. We do have what we call fee for service agreements. So we do have, they have to sign a vendor compliance form and they get all of the rules and responsibilities. And they have to provide us in the application everything that you would normally have like a W9, direct deposit and verifying that they have insurance, all that good stuff, background checks. But we don't have a quote unquote contract. We have an agreement with them. And then as they provide services we are able to pay them through our case management system.

ERICK TAYLOR: So what happened if they don't go through y'all agreement?

MELISSA BAYHAM: If they're not doing what they're supposed to do?

ERICK TAYLOR: Yes.

MELISSA BAYHAM: If it's really bad, if it's really egregious we can deactivate them. But if it's, you know, something that we could possibly work with them with we will

do corrective action plans. Because right now we don't have enough vendors. But I certainly don't want a vendor out there representing us or helping our individuals who are not doing the work that we want them to do. So if a vendor we think is having some difficulties but we think that their heart is in the right place we will work with them to try to rectify that. Because some issues that we have with vendors could simply be they're not good with billing or they might be doing a good job working with students but their documentation and (inaudible) supports is not very good. So we try to work with vendors as much as we possibly can to retain them.

ERICK TAYLOR: One more question. With the finding jobs for people with disabilities can you get them on that type of job and then the person that give them the job say they ain't going to pay. We really just doing it but we really don't want to do it. We're just doing it to say we're doing it. How do y'all, are y'all aware of that?

MELISSA BAYHAM: I'm guessing what you're referring to is someone trying to do it for tax incentive?

ERICK TAYLOR: Yes.

MELISSA BAYHAM: Like whenever someone, when we place somebody into employment obviously the intention is that it's a permanent job placement. Sometimes we don't know the intentions of an employer. But if we knew the intentions of the employer and that they were not going to retain that employee or that person then we would obviously try to find them better employment.

ERICK TAYLOR: My last question. I have ran across someone that did get employment through you guys. (Inaudible) we can't use you.

MELISSA BAYHAM: That's unfortunate. If we have vendors or even we have our own job placement people, if they know an employer, it has to happen one time for us to know it, but we wouldn't go back to that employer again. You don't always know when you have those bad actors out there. Sometimes we don't know until you (inaudible). But if that does happen LRS does step in to help that person find a new job.

ERICK TAYLOR: Do you step in with LRS with that?

MELISSA BAYHAM: When we're made aware that that job isn't going to work out then we would help that client to find a new job.

ERICK TAYLOR: But even though if the employer is still

taking people from y'all and saying we can't use them. They get somebody from y'all and they're like okay, we can't use them. Looking at their disability. Say me in a wheelchair. Already in their mind they're looking at em and we can't use him. They're looking for certain ones and you see in that bunch that they're looking for certain ones but they still (inaudible) from y'all looking to see who they want. If I'm making sense.

MELISSA BAYHAM: I mean, if we see an employer that is not doing the right thing we're not going to try to place people at that particular employer. Does that make sense?

ERICK TAYLOR: I need to talk to you then.

RENODA WASHINGTON: I have a question. How do you guys know that the employer is not, so like who is going to the jobs? Because I'm aware of someone with LRS services where the employers are not giving them hours. I don't know what you guys call them but they're never on the job site. So how are they determining that they're treated right if no one ever comes to the job site? Like how do they know?

MELISSA BAYHAM: Well, I'm going to tell you how it's supposed to happen. We have really large caseloads but there should be constant communication between that client and that rehabilitation counselor. And so that counselor should be checking up on that client. We have a lot of different service at LRS. One service that I think you're referring to is supported employment where there's an actual job coach. But that job coach does fade. But that vendor is responsible for checking up with that client to make sure things are going okay. And then they're supposed to provide that information in progress reports. And that's also another way that we know what's going on with the client is through those progress reports. Best case scenario when you have a really good vendor, I used to be a rehabilitation counselor, what typically happens like I was constantly talking to my vendors. So if something was going on with a particular client, things were not working out or they weren't getting hours or whatever, we were talking. And so really it's a collaboration between the rehabilitation counselor, the vendor and the client.

RENODA WASHINGTON: (Inaudible).

MELISSA BAYHAM: Are you talking about the employer or the vendor? Employers are tricky because as y'all know we're with the Workforce Commission and we'll have people complain about different things with employers but there's

really not a lot of things that the Workforce Commission, they don't have that authority to go in and tell an employer that you need to be giving an employee more hours.

RENODA WASHINGTON: So they can't advocate as far as (inaudible), but are they really willing to give the individual a chance. They may give other employees 20 hours but the one with disabilities is getting six.

MELISSA BAYHAM: Right. I understand what you're saying. And so because I'm going to use the word authority, is more with the vendor than with the employer. What we would want to happen is that vendor to find a more suitable employer because we can't change the behavior. We can try, we can educate, but we can't change their behavior. But the vendors are accountable to us. And I know that the communication is not where we would like it to be, and I won't go off on this tangent too much, but we have a significant staffing and retention problem in LRS. And it's a problem. When I was a rehabilitation counselor I had an average caseload of 120 and now our caseloads can go up to 200. And you're talking about-- and the reporting requirements, I've been out of the field for a long time, the reporting requirements that we have are a lot more significant after the passage of the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act. The data elements and the things that our counselors are having to input into the system. There's a lot more case management. There's a lot more things that we're having to collect. There's a lot more work and there's more clients and less counselors.

ERICK TAYLOR: How often do your counselors have to report (inaudible)?

MELISSA BAYHAM: We have probably five to six if not more counselors assigned to one supervisor. So you're talking 800 cases for one supervisor. So they're not reporting directly to their supervisor on each particular case. But we do have caseload reports. Like one thing that's really significant in terms of compliance is we have 60 days to determine an individual eligible for services and we have 90 days to write their initial individualized plan for employment. And so we have reports that the supervisors, or counselors as well, but the supervisors are supposed to run weekly. And so if counselors aren't meeting those targets then they are meeting with them on a weekly basis to meet those targets. So there are reports that the supervisors can run to see if that caseload is

running efficiently and can meet with that counselor to discuss.

And we have recruitment and retention challenges so we have a lot of new counselors, which is good but they're new so they're still learning their jobs. In VR we have, I don't know off the top of my head, 20 or 30 services. We have a lot of services within LRS. And when we were fully staffed counselors had specialties. Like my specialty was developmental disabilities. I worked specifically with the developmental disability population. I never did a home modification or vehicle modification when I was a rehabilitation counselor. These are very complex things. Now my counselors have to know how to do everything because we don't have enough counselors to have counselors with specialties. So that's also contributing to a counselor not becoming competent in a specific area because they're having to do everything. One more number I'm going to give y'all because I think it helps kind of paint the picture. When I became a counselor back in 2005 we had 36 counselors in the Baton Rouge region alone. Right now I might have 14. So that kind of gives you just a comparison. But we have just as many if not more people who need services so that kind of gives you an idea of our capacity.

SPEAKER: So it seems like to get better oversight of who hires people with disabilities we need more counselors. So we don't have enough counselors because we don't have enough money. Hire more counselors or we need to educate on these opportunities so people can go into that area. What is the bottleneck? What is the issue of having the counselors? Because people's lives are getting affected and hurt. They aren't getting enough hours. They need full-time. And people are getting hurt.

MELISSA BAYHAM: Right. We still definitely have vacancies within LRS but we've had to actually slow down our hiring because every vocational rehabilitation agency is allocated a certain amount of funds by the federal government. So our VR agency in Louisiana is allocated about 74 million-dollars. But we have to match that with state general funds. So that's a 21.3 percent match. So for every dollar we get state general funds we can draw \$3.69 in federal funds. So you have 74 million-dollars allocated to Louisiana. Generally, since I have been director, which is six years, we've only been able to draw down about 30 million give or take every year. But we only

get about half of our federal allocation because we don't have the state general funds to draw down our full amount. So essentially we are running a full vocational rehabilitation program with half the money.

CHRISTI GONZALES: Is there anything that we can do because since Covid your case managers have decreased but your clients, the number of clients have increased. Is there anything that we can do to help facilitate that? Because I know they're not hiring a lot right now but we definitely need it for the students and the adults going into employment, specifically what was mentioned earlier, and I feel that's a major gap.

MELISSA BAYHAM: What we should be looking at right now, and I'll tell you why I'm hesitant to do it, when agencies, VR agencies get to this point you're supposed to do what you call close order of selections. Which essentially means you're supposed to have a waiting list. But then how is that helpful for new people who need to come into the system. So it's a catch 22. But at this point my options are limited because of our funding. We've done a contract before for staffing. We mainly used that contract for preemployment transition services counselors. But at this point I don't have enough funding to even commit to those contracts.

CHRISTI GONZALES: Is there something we can do to help facilitate that because I know it's been an ongoing problem for years?

MELISSA BAYHAM: It's funding.

ERICK TAYLOR: So it's nothing that we can do?

BRENTON ANDRUS: You can do advocacy for funding for LRS specifically. I do know the Arc of Louisiana one of their agenda items this year is to advocate for I think it's 19 million to draw down that full federal allotment. So that is something they're doing to get that type of funding. I'm sure that would help with a lot of problems. Because I think you mentioned it before. But a lot of that funding we don't have it so other states grab it. They're going to be advocating for those additional dollars. And the council has done some advocacy around that many years ago. Not in recent times. But I do know that organization is doing some advocacy.

ERICK TAYLOR: Do we need to open that up and advocate to try to start bringing down some of that funding?

BRENTON ANDRUS: That's a council, committee decision

y'all can make.

ERICK TAYLOR: I understand that but this is my concern. LRS is doing their part but when we go out looking for these jobs I want to say owners, oh, sure we'll take them just to get a write-off or whatever they call them and then they'll push them out the door after they got where they need to be at. And that's a concern to me. Don't put them in a spot saying hey, I got you a job and then all of a sudden when you done got where you need to be you drop them down and say I don't need them. That's just not right.

MELISSA BAYHAM: I understand what you're saying. So VR agencies, the funding, they have like business relation departments. VR agencies have all these departments but I have like one person doing like five different departments. Like at this point we're drinking from the firehoses. We're doing referrals and we're seeing people as quickly as we can. We're not doing all the extra things. We're not doing outreach. We're not able to go and talk to employers and educate employers. I'm going to call it extra but it's important. But we're not able to do those things because we're already overwhelmed just with the clients that need our services.

ERICK TAYLOR: Right. I understand. And my thing is-- and I'm through after this. One of them say okay, as long as I'm meeting my quota. I hired this person and I hired this type of person and I did this. I'm where I need to be.

MELISSA BAYHAM: Right. We can't change how employers act. We just can't. We can try. We can educate. But I can't change them.

SPEAKER: So there's a program at Delgado Community College. Are you familiar with that program?

MELISSA BAYHAM: I'm not sure which program.

SPEAKER: Where they train people with disabilities, and LSU as well, for a couple years.

MELISSA BAYHAM: Paycheck?

SPEAKER: Paycheck. Are those kind of programs are you referring to, the third-party?

MELISSA BAYHAM: We fund that program.

SPEAKER: Okay. All right.

MELISSA BAYHAM: That's another thing. Sometimes we fund things and people don't realize it and they just think it's other people and they don't realize LRS has been funding their program.

CHRISTI GONZALES: Is LRS the only vocational rehabilitation service based in Louisiana?

MELISSA BAYHAM: So every state has a public VR program and that's us. But you'll hear of private VR. That's workers compensation.

RENODA WASHINGTON: Any other updates? All right. Thank you. Any other questions for Melissa before we move on? All right. Let me reiterate when you're ready to speak the chair will recognize you before speaking. Next on the agenda is an update from Louisiana Department of Education. We will now have Meredith Jordan from LDOE give her update. Meredith, can you please start by giving an update on the legislative auditor reports.

MEREDITH JORDAN: Yes. Thank you. Do you mind if I start with something that is fresh off the press today? I'll start and then I'll make sure we move right into the audit report so we have plenty of time to talk through that. So I don't know, because I know we've had several committee meetings this morning, but I don't know if any of you have seen or heard or joined the joint press conference this morning with the governor's office and the Department of Education. And I wanted to-- and this is national data that is embargoed until it's released publicly. Meaning we at the department don't even see it until you all see it. So I was at my office this morning and watching the press release and I don't think I've ever gotten emotional here so I don't want to start today. But I did in my office this morning alone before I got back to work. And as I listened to that press release this was the press release on a press conference on the national state report card on how states are doing in education. It is sort of the gold standard national assessment that our students and students with disabilities take this assessment as well. It's given every two years.

And so our last assessment was in 2024 and the results came out this morning. And what we found it was so exciting. It's really unprecedented and we need to-- and I did not go to the press conference because I needed to be here. And so I think it's so fitting that I'm here and we get to celebrate. Louisiana moved from our 43rd ranking to 32nd. We climbed 11 spots, right. We took down, that sounds terrible, 11 other states across the country. That's not the best part. This morning I started getting calls, Jackie and I were talking about this, Maryland calls

me, I want to come meet with you. I got Louisiana stuff to do, okay. But that's not the best part. So there was also an Advocate article that came out that I read this morning as well and there was a national, she's from the National Center on Education Statistics and they're sort of the first to release all of the results. And she had a quote in there-- and I knew, we've talked here, our students with disabilities are growing. They're capable. We talked about this yesterday. We have people, individuals in front of us that are a testament to the capabilities, the abilities. This quote from this national educational statistics expert said students with disabilities and economically disadvantaged students in Louisiana improved their reading and math scores outperforming students with disabilities across the nation. We have never done that as a state.

And I mean when I think about the progress and I think about-- it's remarkable. And this is about our students, their families, our advocates, the people in this room. This congratulations to you, right. We have teachers in this room. Former educators in this room. And I remember this morning the Governor and Dr. Brumley the first people that they really thanked and they spoke directly to teachers and educators and the work that they do every single day and the belief that we have. And I told people this, I've told this council and this committee this before, I believe prior to three years ago we had been saying we were doing inclusion in our state and that we were including students alongside their nondisabled peers in our schools and we were not. I think the work we've done in the past three years in our inclusive practices that I brought to you all three years ago, my SEAP panel endorsed, Melissa was on there when we did that. You're still on.

But this has been a joint effort. We have to do this work together. And so I think as we talk through the rest of what we talk about today we'll think about what more can we do. But it's so fitting that I come to you all today. You're the first disability group, community that I shared this with. And I think it's very fitting and very appropriate. And I celebrated like for two minutes with my team this morning and was like all right, get back to work. You're in schools today. You're working on our federal reporting that's due Monday. And we have a lot more work to do. We're not satisfied. I'm not satisfied

with the 32 ranking. We started, when this administration came in we were 49th, okay. Our fourth graders are 16th. Fourth grade reading are 16th. We're ranked 16th.

JILL HANO: Y'all were 49?

MEREDITH JORDAN: Yes. We were at the bottom. We don't like to be at the bottom. And so but I think for me the biggest piece, and they talked about it at the press conference today and it's in a press release that I'll share with you all, it's very easy to find, that was released this morning. Like I said, I find out when the public finds out. But the abilities of our kids with disabilities we held them to far too low standards for far too long. And we have not included them for far too long and we're changing that. This shows that we're changing that. We got a lot more work to do and I know we're going to do it together.

And I talked to y'all yesterday. I mentioned green. I want to see green right now because I'm solution driven. And on our federal reporting I was telling somebody I haven't seen this much green on our federal reporting since I've been submitting that report for the past three years. And so I know you see these places where you see progress but then to hear this national recognition this morning for our students and for their families and our communities I thought was very fitting to start off today with.

So I want us to switch, right, and talk through the last LLA audit report. What are some things that we can do. I really want to hear from you all. I want to hear your concerns, your ideas. It's a public report. But I did print, the staff handed out a printed copy if you are a print lover that I tend to be as well. So you have an actual copy of that report. I don't know how many of you saw the presentation that we did. So we immediately brought this as well to the state board. I know a couple of people in the room were there. We certainly appreciated that support. And we kind of laid out the results of this report. This is the third and final report. The first one, and I know Ms. Washington, you asked if I could give like a brief where are we at with the other two.

So the first report was on dispute resolution. Access for our dispute resolution processes for families. We have made a lot of progress since that first report. We have changed staff. We have talked a lot about our special education ombudsman. That was a brand-new position for us. A direct connection to families. Someone who can

actually help families, advise families, help them file complaints. Our family partners also do that. But that was a recommendation that came out of that that we did.

We updated our complaint policies and practices. We extended alongside-- that was also some things that happened in state legislation where parents can now file complaints for up to a two-year period verses one. So you have more time. So we've done a lot to improve our dispute resolution processes. We've heard a lot of positive feedback about that access. Like I said, changed some staff at the department. We are no longer turning away complaints because they don't have a parent signature. We can help, right. If it's a valid complaint let's get that signature and move forward with the investigation. So we've done a lot with that first report.

The second report was on monitoring, right. Monitoring and oversight. That ties to one of our activities for this particular council. And we heard a lot from stakeholders. The LLA in that particular report they went with us on site to do monitoring, some of the parent meetings and engagements we do on site monitoring. Essentially in that report they said we like on-site monitoring. We want you to do more. And before that report ever released Dr. Brumley and the team had asked the legislature for additional positions, right. In order to do more we have to have more capacity on our team. And we've doubled the size of our monitoring team. Those positions are almost all filled. We have six additional and so we will be able to increase, right. On any annual basis we are monitoring about a third of our 100 and 90ish LEAs between our school districts, our parishes and then our charter schools. And so we will certainly be able to increase that with additional capacity. And so that was a win.

Now I'm going to go into this particular report. So this one was unique. We talked a lot with BESE about this. And this particular report on seclusion, restraint and abuse, mistreatment of children with disabilities in public schools. You can see the reporting period or the scope of this audit was from 2015 to 2022 but they did pull in some data from 2023 and 22/23 and 23/24 so you'll see that within the report. I will make a note if you go to their appendix, it was not an LDOE chart, one of their charts has some errors on it. It just looks like when they

copied and pasted it into Excel something happened with the numbers. Our public reports on seclusion and restraint, if you want to make sure you have accurate seclusion and restraint numbers based on our public reporting those are on our website and I'm happy to share with staff. But I wanted to point that out that we noticed once it was published some of those charts and their appendix are different. But they did pull in some additional data.

This particular report is unique because it includes 11 matters for legislative consideration. So the report found, and we were appreciative, LLA was very clear in the report that we are following all current laws as written in terms of our (inaudible) for LDOE outlined in the seclusion and restraint law. What ends up happening is some of the recommendations and further action from LDEO will depend on updates to current statute. So there are 11 matters for legislative consideration included in this particular report. And so a lot of the results for LDOE will depend upon and our action will depend upon those matters for legislative consideration and what happens across the street, right. And any updates to those statutes.

And there were three particular statutes really included in this report. The seclusion and restraint statute is 17416. Someone asked me for that yesterday. So revised statute 17416 is what I call the seclusion and restraint law as it is currently written. There was a couple of recommendations around certification and what we do with individuals who are being investigated for abuse or for certain allegations and their certification and how all of that. Some of those recommendations will depend upon an update to revised statute 177. That's the certification statute quoted. And then of course the last one, there were a couple of recommendations and legislative considerations around the SPED camera law which is revised statute 171948. So that's kind of for our discussion purposes and anything that you might want to think about.

So let's go through, if you guys are okay with that, the matters for legislative consideration around seclusion and restraint. There was one consideration that the legislature may want to amend the seclusion and restraint law to give LDOE exclusive authority to monitor for seclusion and restraint, right. So LDOE does a lot of federal monitoring. We do a lot of desk, on site

monitoring. That was the topic of report two. That's IDEA monitoring. Seclusion and restraint is not a part of specifically IDEA. I would argue that the behavior components, the discipline monitoring that we do have to do as part of IDEA is certainly connected to this and understanding the antecedents of behaviors and why students display certain behaviors as part of their disability, right. Those are things that we have to monitor for discipline, compliance under IDEA. But seclusion and restraints specifically is not in IDEA. So that was one matter for legislative consideration is to give us the authority to go out and monitor seclusion and restraint. One thing for us to think about is that means after this incident has happened this will be an after the fact thing that department staff would go in, look at records, was it reported correctly. And so this is not an in the moment, right, what are the odds that we would be in a school when that would happen and we will be able to number one see, know of all details. It would be something that is done after the fact. Anything we can pull in the records on file.

The second matter for legislative consideration here was around requiring us to develop a process to verify the accuracy and number of incidences. We're good with that. That's actually not in law. We have a data verification process with seclusion and restraint. One of the things we talked about LLA with and I talked specifically with BESE about and said I'm on it. I too value accurate and transparency and data. And for school systems who are reporting zeros we have committed to staff time, resources to make some phone calls. We were doing a process, our current process so you all know is during the time where we're pulling this data we pull an initial run of seclusion and restraint incidences and our LEAs report that to us in our special education reporting system. We collect a lot of information. Who are the staff involved. How long did the incident take. Who was observing. Because those are things required in law for LEAs to do. When you're using these safe restraint techniques there are certain observation requirements, documentation, every so many minutes what's happening, how is the student.

And we pulled an initial run. We upload that data because it's sensitive, right. We upload that data to a secure portal for every LEA and we give them a time window,

go pull your seclusion and restraint data. Is it accurate. Are your staff missing incidences that they didn't put in. If so, here's your window, go put it in. When that window closes we go pull it and we do our public reporting. We have to send that report to the legislature, to BESE and we post it publicly. So we have a process. I'm certainly committed to doing more and making sure-- that was one of the pieces that came out of this report was well, is it really zero in this school system or this school system. So we'll make phone calls. We'll get a confirmation that yeah, we did not have any incidences. We're committed to doing more there.

They also suggested perhaps the legislature wants to require us to read and review LEA policies for alignment to the law. The current statute gives that authority to local governing boards right now. They pay individuals, they pay policy writers and people, attorneys to write their policies, adopt their policies at their board meetings. The law requires LDOE to collect. We're doing that. If it is the desire of anyone or the legislature that we also read 198 policies that would need to come within the legislature that there's another legislative consideration of course asking us to work with the legislature to consider additional staffing, additional funding. And resources that may be needed to do some of this additional work, right.

And so that's sort of the gist of the recommendations around seclusion and restraint. I'm wondering if I should go through the others and then I think we can maybe have some conversation. Because I think you all might have some really great ideas about other things maybe that aren't even recommendations here that might be helpful to update or add or require of either us or LEAs.

RENODA WASHINGTON: We can but we only have about 30 more minutes.

MEREDITH JORDAN: Do y'all want to stop, talk about seclusion and restraint? There was also a piece about special education cameras. But same thing, so there's a recommendation for the legislature possibly to update the camera law to say we need to read those policies as well. Along those same lines. We would need more staff, resources to read 198 camera policies.

JILL HANO: Can you hire me?

MEREDITH JORDAN: I'm going to need some open

positions.

RENODA WASHINGTON: Does the committee have any recommendations as far as that?

CHRISTI GONZALES: I just wanted to ask and give a recommendation. Who is responsible for giving and doing the reporting for restraint and seclusion?

MEREDITH JORDAN: It's really going to depend, Christi. Some schools, some LEAs have-- every LEA has a special education data entry person. Some of them may likely be gathering those reports and having a centralized person report it. Others may be having the case manager or the case lead entering that data into the server. That is going to depend on the LEA.

CHRISTI GONZALES: I would just recommend that we send this to like advocacy and just see if the committee would be interested in adding this to our advocacy agenda in regards to seclusion and restraints.

MEREDITH JORDAN: Christi, and I would ask too, even the SPED camera I didn't get to any of that data, but our LEAs are actually purchasing more cameras that are being requested by parents which is great. I would ask that we all, I know our family partners are helping me with this, continue to help us get the word out that parents have the right to request cameras in certain classrooms.

CHRISTI GONZALES: Is it just self-contained or resource too? They're telling us it's just self-contained.

MEREDITH JORDAN: It could be other settings. The law defines that special education classroom as a classroom that has majority students with disabilities and they spend their time in that location more than 50 percent of the day.

CHRISTI GONZALES: Very few resources.

MEREDITH JORDAN: It's mostly your self-contained, yes. And I think the first time we asked LEAs-- and look, this changes from year to year based on enrollment. We had about just over 2000 self-contained classrooms in our state and we've bought just over 900 cameras. Our LEAs have bought. So that's a large amount of cameras. Not almost, not quite half of those initial classrooms reported enough cameras to cover those.

CHRISTI GONZALES: So you're asking us so we can have similar methodology or vocabulary in the cameras because I know some parishes are hiding the camera issue. Because one I took three hours to find the information on it.

MEREDITH JORDAN: Yeah. We've had one parent, I think Jackie worked with them too and helped us who said hey, where are the forms I fill out and we help them find them. That's another recommendation in here as a matter to update the statute to require LEAs to post that information on their website.

CHRISTI GONZALES: Can we add that as an agenda item as well along with the agenda item for cameras in the classroom to have all forms posted?

EBONY HAVEN: You can make whatever recommendations you want to the full council.

BRENTON ANDRUS: It just needs to be very specific.

RENODA WASHINGTON: All right. So remember this is in your packet too. So there's recommendations for activities for goal three.

SPEAKER: I just wanted to add that I think it's important whenever parents are making these requests they have to be in writing and most school districts in region three are using Google forms online for that.

VIVIENNE WEBB: I'm excited to hear the wonderful news and excited we're making progress. I hate to nag you about this like I have been for the past three years.

MEREDITH JORDAN: You're good.

VIVIENNE WEBB: How is bulletin 1508 coming along?

MEREDITH JORDAN: We are bringing that so it should be at March SEAP. That is the last bulletin. So we've now, we've touched every single special education bulletin because we updated our VI criteria a couple years ago. But we're doing another round of updates to 1508 that should be going to SEAP in March and BESE before the end of the school year. Yes, it's coming.

VIVIENNE WEBB: Thank you.

BRENTON ANDRUS: Question. Like I know there was some legislation last year that LDEO brought. Has there been any discussion of like is the department actively going to try to get someone to bring a bill to address the audit? I'm also thinking of if the council is trying to add this to the agenda what sort of pushback is there going to be.

MEREDITH JORDAN: I know you guys were at BESE and I was so appreciative. There was a lot of positive conversation around this I think. And at the end of the day making sure-- because performance and growth is great but making sure our kids are safe too is a priority. At BESE it was mentioned that possibly the BESE legislative

committee would take this up as well. And so I'll keep y'all posted. I know Tory and I talked a little bit yesterday. I know there may be some interest there too. I think we can work together and certainly make some updates that could be helpful to the seclusion and restraint statute. And it seemed like the BESE legislative committee was more than willing and to certainly stand ready to do that.

And I don't know if we have time or if we want to keep thinking. I know session is coming fast. But to think about for you, like I want to know what our stakeholders, what our students, our parents think about what will help keep our students safe. So a lot of states, there are several states who say they are banned states for restraint. Meaning in state law they say you can't do it. However, if you go look at those there will be these emergencies, except for emergency. If you look at our seclusion and restraint law, not saying they're perfect, in 2016 there was a huge update to it and that was really the intent. Our law is already written to say you have to have exhausted all other behavior measures, all other attempts. There has to be eminent harm to the child, themselves or to others. And so there's kind of those-- but if there's an emergency it's supposed to be already be very rarely used and in an emergency if there's a threat of harm, if someone is harming themselves. But think about ways that we could, what could we add to that current law that would make it ensure safety of our kids.

JILL HANO: There was something language wise, I'm never going to find it, but when I was skimming, for example it limits seclusion and restraint to be used as a last result and for behaviors that present a threat of eminent harm. Like why even a last resort. Like why are we using restraint. Well, I think it's more of a preventative measure. Like my basic thought was why is even that an option. Like if someone's harming others in a regular ed class or presents danger in a regular class you wouldn't even fathom a restraint or seclusion. So why are we fathoming, why is it used in SPED ed when regular ed-- it's a last resort in a SPED class but it's a legal issue in a regular ed class. And I get the danger but it just, again, another way that the field is unlevel.

MEREDITH JORDAN: And remember, our state too already outlaws, we already have no mechanical. We're talking an

approved hold.

RENODA WASHINGTON: Anything else Ms. Meredith? We have to wrap it up guys. We'll try to get those questions. We're just probably going to have to have a committee meeting later to discuss adding agenda items. But we will try to get those questions and talk a little bit after. But we have to move on to the recommendations for activities for the federal fiscal year 2026 action plan. Everyone should have reviewed the federal fiscal year 2025 action plan. You received an email. There's also a copy in your packet. This committee is responsible for goal three in the current five-year plan. As a reminder if you have any recommendations for goal one or two that can be discussed at the full council meeting tomorrow. Are there any recommendations for activities for goal three of the council plan?

CHRISTI GONZALES: I want to add for the advocacy agenda that we advocate for more vocational rehabilitation services due to their high caseloads. They need some more counselors. You know, handle all the clients that are there for their safety and what not.

EBONY HAVEN: So Christi, are you asking for that to become an activity in the FY26 plan?

CHRISTI GONZALES: Or make a recommendation.

EBONY HAVEN: Are you asking for that to be added to the FY26 plan as an activity?

CHRISTI GONZALES: Yes.

BRENTON ANDRUS: Ebony beat me to it but I was trying to get clarity when you said advocacy agenda I didn't know if that was something you were trying to advocate for this coming session as in beginning in April or if you were trying to come up with an activity to begin next year on how to address funding shortages.

CHRISTI GONZALES: I don't think we could do it by April. It would be very fast so we can probably do it-- what do y'all think?

BRENTON ANDRUS: We had mentioned earlier I think Arc of Louisiana is advocating on that. You could sign on, if you will, if they are willing, to show your support of their agenda item is one way you could tackle it by the April timeframe. You can do whatever you want next year as well. Those are the options you have on the table. It sounded like y'all wanted to try to also do an advocacy agenda item beginning in April on education. You can add things all

you want but you also have to understand we have roundtables that start in two weeks. Your agenda seems like it might be fluid over the next few months. So just clarity on our part of what you're trying to do and when you're trying to do that I guess.

VIVIENNE WEBB: So seclusion and restraint I would maybe suggest to support Meredith and LDOE on this one. I understand Jill's concerns but this is as a very last resort when the student is causing immediate harm to themselves or those around them. Which is often times unintentional especially if it's during a meltdown. But we do need to keep the student or the other students safe. But this is implying that all other resources have been exhausted like exiting the classroom, using coping skills or a walk to try and calm the student down. The seclusion and restraint thing it is incredibly important that we do follow through on this because it is a necessary thing. But also in the packet I saw that it said follow-up with like the numbers and everything about the seclusion and restraint. And also to conduct interviews with teachers to double check on that and see if there were any unreported incidents. I think that is an excellent way to handle it and two to make sure the student stays safe.

JILL HANO: That's what I kind of did want the clarity on so thank you.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: I just have a quick question. I'm sorry. Is this what you're recommending to support LDOE with respect to seclusion and restraint like on?

VIVIENNE WEBB: Everything in the packet.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: Recommendations?

VIVIENNE WEBB: There's a slide slow. I can pull it up on my phone. But they had a few things that concurred with that they wanted to do in terms of seclusion and restraint. Such as LDOE should determine if additional staff and funding is needed to monitor seclusion and restraint and work with the legislature to determine how to meet the staffing needs. LDOE should review the education departments 15 principals and guidance provided by other states and update the seclusion and restraint policy and procedure guidance provided to school systems. And LDOE should continue to work with school systems to help ensure that all mandatory reports and school systems are aware that they are required to report abuse perpetrated by (inaudible) caregivers by law enforcement. LDOE should

develop a process to monitor school systems use of seclusion and restraint of students with disabilities. LDOE should approve its process to verify the accuracy of--

MEREDITH JORDAN: Of responsive actions to the audit report with respect to seclusions and restraint.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: Got you. Thank you.

RENODA WASHINGTON: Thank you Ms. Webb. Mr. Taylor.

ERICK TAYLOR: Yes, I think that we should sign on with LRS and help in that area and try to get that rolling. I think that's some very concerning.

BRENTON ANDRUS: The Arc of Louisiana, they had a meeting, them and some other groups earlier this week to talk about what each organization was doing on their agenda and they are the ones that have LRS. I think it's 19 million they're advocating for this year.

MELISSA BAYHAM: I just want to provide one other fact. Louisiana returned more federal funds for vocational rehab than any other state last year. And I only keep reiterating that because, I'm not sure what this document is that talks about LRS accountability, and it's just my staff is working really hard but we don't have enough people. And so I think sometimes we get a bad rap and, you know, our reputation is not that good but it's not because our people are not working hard, it's just there's not enough.

RENODA WASHINGTON: Mr. Taylor, are you recommending that we sign on with the Arc?

SPEAKER: Just trying to get clarity.

ERICK TAYLOR: Yeah. I recommend that we sign on with the Arc and add to the thing. We can do that to help, right?

BRENTON ANDRUS: It's not anything that's going to help in deciding if you want to put that or do something with it. What it is going to help with is if there is something that your committee wants on our agenda this year starting in April I personally as your staff member expect you as committee members of education and employment to be at the capitol, to respond to alerts, to show up at roundtables, yellow shirt days, provide testimony. Because if you're saying this is important to you, someone on this committee has been impacted by these issues and you have to get to the capitol to talk about it. Because if you're not willing to do that, in this room, don't worry about the public that's not in this room. In this room if you're not willing to do that do not put it on your agenda. That's

what you need to think about.

CHRISTI GONZALES: I would like to add what Meredith had said about the cameras in the classroom about getting the forms posted on parish websites. And maybe also adding dates for SEAP meetings at the beginning of the year because they don't let us know when they are.

RENODA WASHINGTON: Just a little bit more clarity.

CHRISTI GONZALES: Supporting LDOE in providing the forms on local websites.

MEREDITH JORDAN: So I can't advocate for a law either but what I can do is information. There is a SPED camera-- no. Sorry. You're talking about local special education advisory council. That is covered in, I need to look up the revised statute. It could be something that you want-- so like that's not in current law that LEAs have to post, you know, whatever you want, a year in advance, their dates for their local SEAPs. So that's a particular revised statute. And you also said something about their SPED camera processes. So that would be an update to that particular revised statute.

I have one thing too. So something that I would just in line with thinking about what we're doing and where we want to go, I was talking to a couple of folks, there's this Vanderbilt article, white paper that's coming out from a professor that is going to talk about, we've been talking our national calls, that is going to talk about not necessarily that inclusive setting in education resulting in higher outcomes for students. And we need to be as national-- and with other state directors we are watching that white paper and that reaction because that is the opposite of what our mission is and my belief about what our students can do. There is a continuum of placement. We should have certain placements when they are appropriate. But as much as possible in that general education setting as inclusive as possible. I think all the work we've done is because we've been communicating that and pushing that. So perhaps something that we may want to look at is not necessarily an advocacy piece, but what activity could we do because I'm saying it, we're saying it but how do we help continue to get the message out there that Louisiana believes in inclusive settings for our students. We believe in their ability to achieve. What can we do from a council perspective whether that is developing a short series. I don't know, what could we do,

right, to help promote inclusion in education.

RENODA WASHINGTON: Guys, I hate to do this but we have run out of time. There is one public. You have the committee packet. Please read over it and let me know if there are any questions you have. But unfortunately we can't move on because we have come to that time. If we could just think about these things that we have discussed. We always have a good discussion in our committee meeting. So we are going to have to get recommendations from the full council tomorrow on concepts for the five-year plan because we have run out of time.

Also there are some committee members that would like to talk after. We can probably do that and then just come in tomorrow prepared to discuss. Is everybody okay with that? All right. We need a motion to approve the recommendation, send the recommendations to the full council.

CHRISTI GONZALES: I make a motion to approve the recommendations.

VIVIENNE WEBB: I second.

RENODA WASHINGTON: Okay. Thank you Christi and Ms. Webb. I'm so sorry. I hate to run but we are out of time. Is there any discussion?

SPEAKER: I have a question for Ms. Meredith. So you said we're 32nd in education?

MEREDITH JORDAN: Yes.

SPEAKER: Wow.

RENODA WASHINGTON: Just to reiterate we have to move on guys. We're so excited though. Is there any public comment? Any objections? Any abstentions?

STEPHANIE CARMONA: I have to do a roll call really quick. A vote for yes is to send the recommendations to the full council. Ms. Bayham.

MELISSA BAYHAM: Abstain.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: Ms. Bayham abstains. Mr. Ennis. Ms. Gonzales.

CHRISTI GONZALES: Yes.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: Ms. Jordan.

MEREDITH JORDAN: Abstain.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: Mr. Piontek.

EBONY HAVEN: Tony, you have to unmute.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: Tony, we can't hear you. Mr. Taylor.

ERICK TAYLOR: Yes.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: Ms. Webb.

VIVIENNE WEBB: Yes.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: Dr. Wilson. And Mr. Piontek.

EBONY HAVEN: Tony, can you give me a thumbs up if you can hear me. Can you try to talk?

BRENTON ANDRUS: What I think it is is the microphone on his end may not be set to his computer mike. Maybe it defaulted to a different mike.

VIVIENNE WEBB: Can he type in the chat?

BRENTON ANDRUS: He can call in. We can have him on speaker phone and on camera. Visual and verbal.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: Mr. Piontek.

TONY PIONTEK: Yes.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: I have four yeas, two abstentions and the motion passes.

RENODA WASHINGTON: Stephanie, the motion to recommend the fiscal year 26 activities to the full council has passed. Contractual updates are included in the status report in your council packet. And we are out of time. There should be no additional questions. We can move to announcements. Tomorrow's full council meeting will begin at 8:30. I hereby adjourn this meeting at 3:51. Thank you guys so much.