

Alaska State Vocational Rehabilitation Committee

2014 Annual Report



Committee Members

Mary Ann Pruitt

CHAIR
Anchorage
Business
Representative

Teresa Sarabia

Juneau
Tribal Vocational
Rehabilitation

Dave Berube

Anchorage
Client Assistance
Program

Sam Jordan

Juneau
Alaska Dept. of
Education &
Early Development

John Cannon

Wasilla
Alaska Workforce
Investment Board

Dan Elstad

Juneau
Consumer Advocate

Margie Medeiros

Juneau
Consumer
Representative

Barrie Brent

Anchorage
Business
Representative

Kenneth Shoenlein

Willow
Consumer
Representative

Bob Purvis

VICE CHAIR
Sitka
Community Rehabilitation
Program Representative

Cheryl Walsh

Juneau
Division of Vocational
Rehabilitation Director

Stacy Niwa

Anchorage
Rehabilitation Counselor

Mary Elam

Eagle River
Parent Training and
Information Center
Representative

Vacancies

State Independent Living
Council Representative

Business Representative

The Alaska State Vocational Rehabilitation Committee (SVRC) is composed of volunteers from around the state who are appointed by the Governor to both advise and partner with the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR). Members help shape policy by participating in strategic planning, needs assessment, consumer satisfaction surveys and ongoing program evaluation.

Members include people with disabilities, community rehabilitation program employees, representatives from independent living, special education and Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) programs, advocates, VR participants and business leaders.

The SVRC submits this report annually to the governor and to the Rehabilitation Services Administration on the status of the DVR program.

Prior SVRC members who served during this reporting period, but have completed their service terms or resigned are Nancy Russell, Kim McNamara, Miok Wolbers, Don Roberts, Kelly Behen and Rich Bull.

DVR Strategic Plan



Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Mission

To assist individuals with disabilities to prepare for, obtain and maintain employment.

The SVRC and DVR continuously work to improve the delivery of vocational rehabilitation services to Alaskans who are in need of, and who are receiving, vocational rehabilitation services. A keystone of this work is an ongoing three-year strategic planning process which was initiated by DVR and SVRC leadership. The strategic planning team includes the DVR management team, SVRC members, the Client Assistance Program, Tribal VR programs and the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC).

The four goals listed below were identified during the 2013-2015 planning cycle and provide the organizational foundation for the work of both DVR and the SVRC.

Goal 1: Provide High Quality Services

DVR will deliver high-quality vocational rehabilitation services to people with disabilities to assist them to obtain employment consistent with their career goals. This goal reflects DVR's continued focus on improving the VR service delivery system with the objectives and strategies identified by the triennial Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA). The CSNA can be found at: www.labor.state.ak.us/dvr/about_us/Comprehensive-Needs-Assessment-FY2013.pdf

Goal 2: Provide Highly Skilled Staff

DVR will recruit, employ, retain and train the most qualified and highly skilled rehabilitation staff. This goal reflects the value DVR places on well-trained staff and the serious need for succession planning with the anticipated loss of key staff in the near future.

Goal 3: Improve Organizational Systems

DVR will maintain/improve the efficiency and effectiveness of organizational systems. This will include implementing advancements in technology as resources allow, analyzing current business practices to improve service delivery system and ensuring critical applications/systems are current.

Goal 4: Provide Leadership in the Workforce System

This goal is intended to strengthen our connection to other programs that serve individuals with disabilities. DVR will continue to collaborate with other agencies to improve the delivery of VR services and represent the needs of people with disabilities.

New Federal Law Has Large Impact on Vocational Rehabilitation

With the passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) this year, Congress reauthorized programs under the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) and amended the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 through fiscal year 2020. WIOA makes significant changes and key improvements to the nation's workforce and adult education development system. Among the many changes, state vocational rehabilitation (VR) programs will have new performance standards, including some related to employer engagement. VR also has a much larger role in the transition of students with disabilities from school to adult life. Under WIOA, a percentage of federal funds must be dedicated to the provision of pre-employment transition services as defined in the act.

The amendments to the Rehabilitation Act in title IV of WIOA took effect when the law was signed on July 22, 2014, prompting the Alaska Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) to take immediate action. Although draft

regulations are not due to be released until mid-January 2015, DVR staff and SVRC members are already studying the bill and prioritizing the work that will be necessary for successful, orderly implementation. Business practices have been revised to preserve grant funding. Innovative ideas are being discussed about how to quickly engage youth and provide opportunities for them to practice and improve their workplace

skills, to consider their career interests, and to get real world work experience.

Implementing WIOA will be complex and involved, but is providing an unprecedented

opportunity for workforce and educational partners to collaborate. This collaboration can align programs to help job seekers, including those with disabilities, to access employment, education, training, and support services to succeed in the labor market and to match employers with the skilled workers they need to compete in the global economy.

"Because of the program at DVR I've gotten a job much more to my liking and skill set. I have no problem letting the world know how satisfied I am with DVR services."

- DVR Participant

SVRC Activities



In partnership with DVR, the SVRC engages in a variety of activities to help ensure the quality of services provided to Alaskans with disabilities to assist them to get and keep good jobs. Activities conducted by the SVRC in federal fiscal year 2014 from October 1, 2013 to September 30, 2014, include:

- Convened quarterly meetings in Juneau, Kodiak, Fairbanks and Anchorage. Heard public testimony at each meeting from DVR participants and partners on their experiences with the DVR program.
- Toured the Access Alaska Assistive Technology Reuse Center, Kodiak Job Center and Assistive Technologies of Alaska offices.
- Heard presentations from the Fairbanks Northstar Borough Mayor's office, Fairbanks Economic Development Center, the Kodiak City Mayor, the Kodiak Island Native Association, the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, the Alaska Center for the Blind and the University of Alaska Anchorage's post-secondary transition Tapestry Program.
- Assisted in the preparation and updating of the DVR State Plan and the State Plan for Assistive Technology.

“They know where to look for jobs, training, schools and grants. They have sources I cannot even begin to imagine, and they are always on the lookout for more, as well as open to suggestions from their clients.” - *DVR Participant*



From left to right back row: SVRC members Nancy Russell, Teresa Sarabia, Kelly Behen, Bob Purvis, Cheryl Walsh, Kodiak Mayor Pat Branson, SVRC Chair Mary Ann Pruitt. Bottom row: SVRC Members Dan Elstad, Dave Berube and Kim McNamara.

SVRC Subcommittee Activities

The State Vocational Rehabilitation Committee (SVRC) has five standing subcommittees: Executive; Program Evaluation; Assistive Technology; Planning; Policy, Public Relations and Resources. The SVRC also formed an ad-hoc Business Recognition subcommittee this year. Below is a summary of each subcommittee's activities.

Executive

Chair: Mary Ann Pruitt

The executive subcommittee held monthly teleconferences where it reviewed the work of the other subcommittees and planned the SVRC's quarterly meetings.



From left to right: SVRC members Barrie Brent, Mary Ann Pruitt and Stacy Niwa.

Program Evaluation

Chair: David Berube

The program evaluation subcommittee reviewed DVR's three main customer feedback data sources. The largest source is the triennial comprehensive needs assessment survey (CSNA) which can be found at www.labor.state.ak.us/dvr/about_us/Comprehensive-Needs-Assessment-FY2013.pdf.

This year this subcommittee reviewed the CSNA survey questions, in addition to the survey responses, and determined that the survey was complete and appropriate.

This subcommittee also reviewed client responses to the "How Are We Doing" customer comment cards and found them to be an effective method of determining if consumers were treated professionally and with respect and if the DVR staff and services were helpful.

This year the subcommittee began reviewing transcripts of public testimony given at SVRC quarterly meetings to identify any themes between them and other customer feedback sources.



Assistive Technology

Chair: Bob Purvis

The assistive technology (AT) subcommittee’s purpose is to provide consumer input on Federal AT Act funds and to bring formal recommendations to the SVRC for action. AT Act funds are administered by DVR and passed to an implementing agency. Alaska’s current implementing agency is Assistive Technology of Alaska (ATLA), a non-profit agency based in Anchorage which provides services throughout Alaska.

The AT subcommittee holds monthly teleconferences with ATLA director Mystie Rail and DVR

AT Coordinator Jason Caputo to track grant progress, provide informal input to DVR and ATLA and bring issues to the attention of the full SVRC as needed.

The subcommittee also planned the annual meeting with the full SVRC, which focused on AT issues.

“Without the DVR program I would not have the means to improve my quality of life and frankly would not even know where to begin.”

- DVR Participant

Planning

Chair: John Cannon

The planning subcommittee works with DVR on the preparation and update of the DVR State Plan, the triennial comprehensive needs assessment and this SVRC annual report.

Policy, Public Relations and Resources

Chair: Teresa Sarabia

The policy and public relations subcommittee reviews changes to DVR policy and helps promote SVRC quarterly meetings to the communities where the meetings are held.

Business Recognition

Chair: Barrie Brent

The business recognition subcommittee is working to recognize businesses that offer work experiences and employment opportunities to DVR participants.

DVR at a Glance

"DVR is one of the best programs out there to give people hope."

- DVR Participant

The individuals who represent DVR's caseload are of all ages and from all walks of life. Although each person has his or her own unique story, looking at aggregate numbers provides an understanding of the overall scope of the vocational rehabilitation program in Alaska.

Vocational Rehabilitation Outcomes for State Fiscal Year 2014

- 3,747 individuals participated in the DVR program.
- 382 different Alaskan employers hired DVR participants.
- 607 individuals exited the DVR program employed at an average hourly wage of \$14.31.
- 84% were employed by the private sector, 11.7% by federal, state or local governments, including school districts, and 4.3% were self-employed.
- 1,635 individuals applied for VR services and an additional 1,251 individuals received information and referral services through DVR's orientation.
- 2,214 individuals received VR services under an Individualized Plan for Employment.

Who DVR Serves

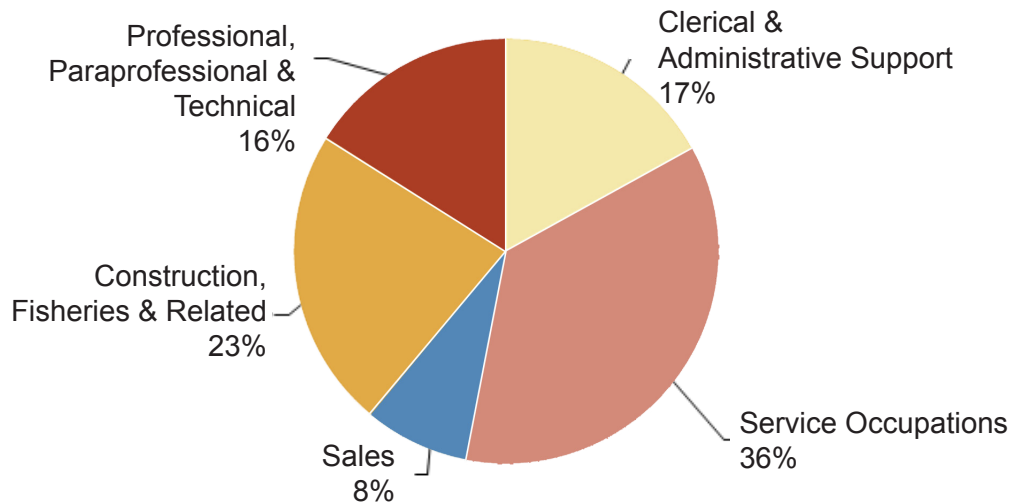
- 95% of DVR participants were considered to be significantly disabled with two or more functional limitations to employment.
- 73% were Caucasian; 22% were Alaska Native; 9% were Black; 3% were Asian and 2% were Pacific Islander or Native Hawaiian.
- 5% of the above identified themselves as Hispanic or Latino.
- 24% of the applicants were youth (age 24 and under).

For a more complete picture of DVR's participants, please see "The 2013 Comprehensive Needs Assessment" at: www.labor.state.ak.us/dvr/about_us/Comprehensive-Needs-Assessment-FY2013.pdf

"I am old school and it is difficult for me to accept help and I've never been on a government program. The DVR program is a program that I fully support because it helps people get on their feet and become independent again."

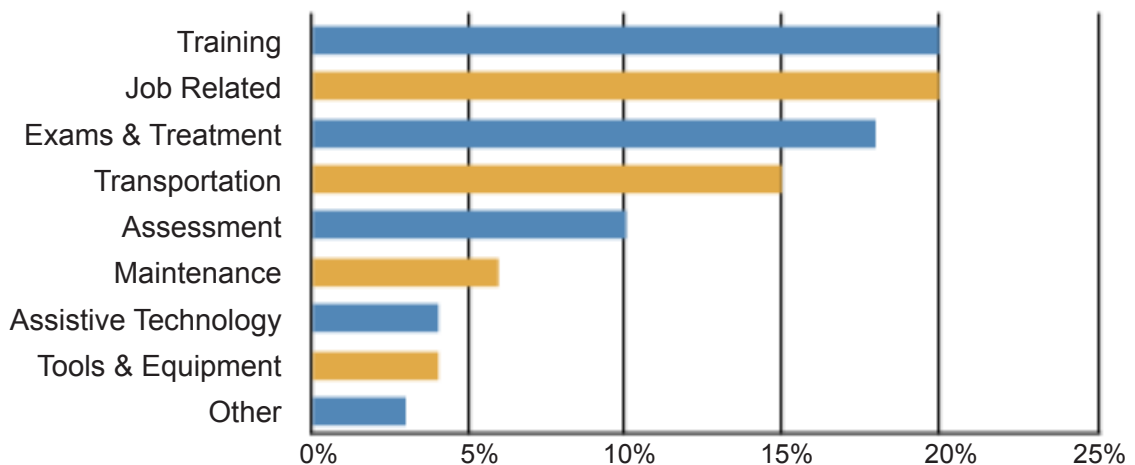
- DVR Participant

Occupations of DVR Participants

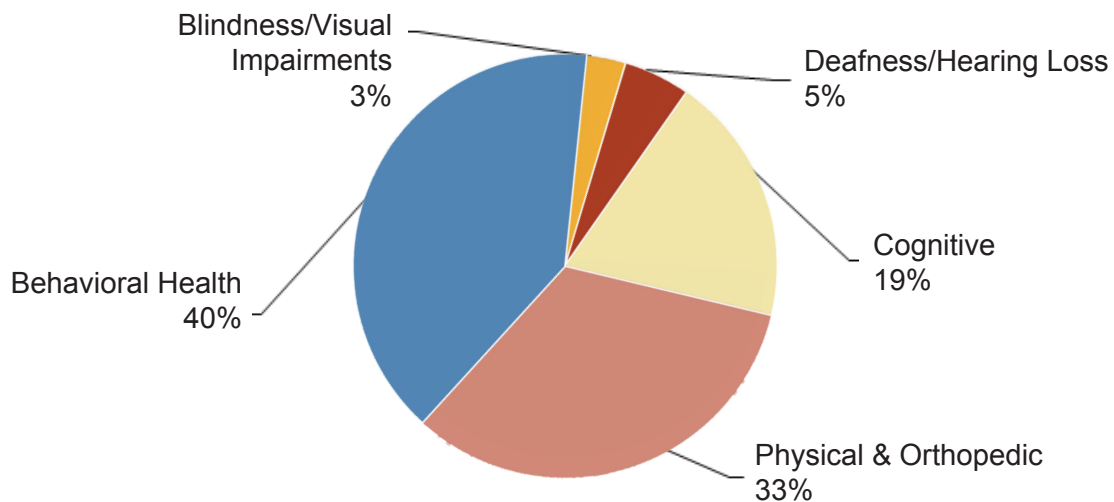


Purchased DVR Services

(\$5.5 million)



DVR Participants by Disability



Consumer Satisfaction

Survey of Participants Who Exit DVR Services

The SVRC collaborates with DVR to conduct an ongoing survey of DVR participants who exit DVR after an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) has been signed. The report is available at:

www.labor.alaska.gov/svrc/reports/consumer-satisfaction-survey-fy2013.pdf

Survey Highlights

DVR is a consumer-driven organization where a participant's self-involvement in the vocational rehabilitation process and informed consumer choice are important for success. To that end, in federal fiscal year 2013, 222 surveys were mailed out and 700 surveys were emailed.

- **Treating the Consumer with Respect**

Of those participants returning their survey responses, 91% felt they were treated respectfully. A similar percentage of respondents felt they had a good working relationship with their counselor, that DVR staff was available to help them when needed and that their phone calls were returned promptly.

- **Informed Consumer Choice and Involvement in the DVR Process**

90% of responders reported being involved in the development of their vocational goals. 78% felt that DVR services were instrumental in helping them get or keep a job.

- **Referral of Others**

Overall, 87% would refer a friend or family member to DVR for services. Many of DVR's referrals come from prior consumers. When participants do make referrals, it is important that they feel that their friends and family will be treated fairly and respectfully.

"I wanted to express my wholehearted gratitude to you for all the help with the conversion on my brand-new van. It is the most amazing, liberating feeling as a disabled woman to own my own vehicle that is accessible and comfortable and all mine. Thank you very much for all your help. DVR is so wonderful to me, and I'm just incredibly humbled and grateful."

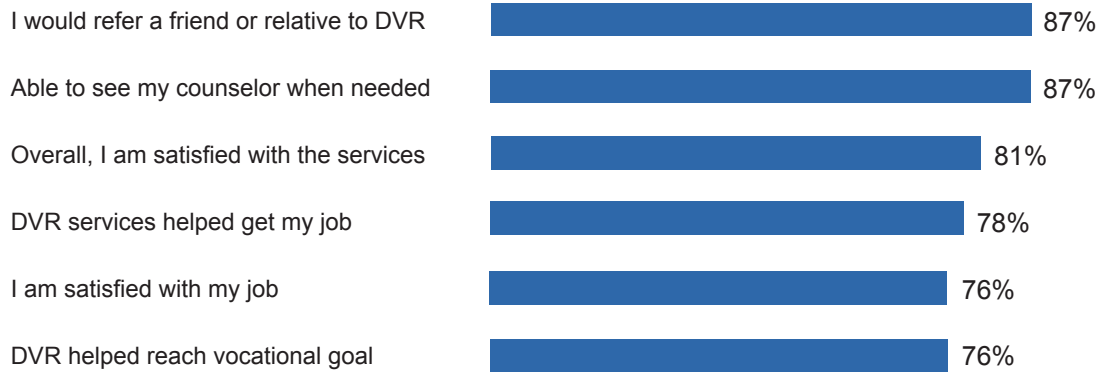
- DVR Participant

"I was a raft guide for many years. I had a stroke one day, just suddenly. My life completely changed. Both of my counselors have been wonderful. DVR helped me kind of refocus where my direction will be in the future and I've really appreciated that." - DVR Participant



All Respondents - Survey Categories

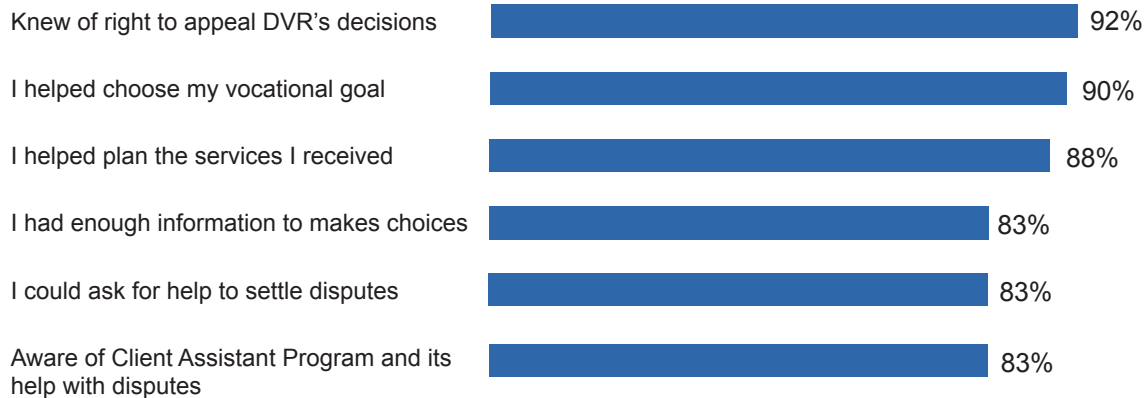
1. Program Satisfaction



2. Program Information



3. Consumer Involvement



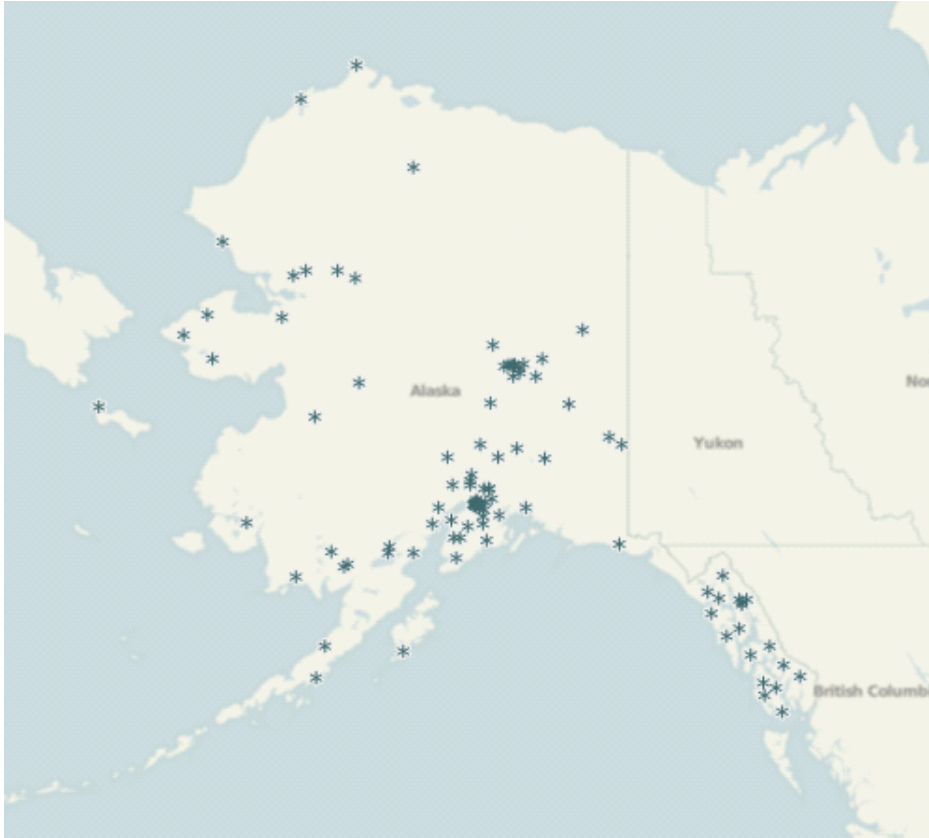
4. Consumer and Staff Interaction



DVR Participants

Geographic Location of Alaskans Served by DVR

Source: DVR Management Information System



The map above shows where DVR services were delivered throughout Alaska in federal fiscal year 2014, from October 1, 2013 through September 30, 2014. DVR has offices in Anchorage, Eagle River, Fairbanks, Juneau, Kenai, Ketchikan, Kodiak, Sitka and Wasilla, and serves rural Alaska using traveling counselors.

"I'm not too good with crowds and speaking out but I felt that DVR helped me kind of refocus. I needed to be here. DVR has really been patient, they are always encouraging. I mean always. Even when I hadn't believed in myself and I'd kind of lost faith and didn't think I could accomplish anything they were always there. For every step sometimes I would take a step back and they'd say that's okay you've just got to move forward. DVR will help you to reach the goals that you want." - DVR Participant

The Committee Seeks Your Input

The State Vocational Rehabilitation Committee invites you to:

Apply for Membership

If you care about issues pertaining to disability and employment, the SVRC encourages you to apply for a seat on this committee.

You may apply online at: <http://gov.alaska.gov/Walker/services/boards-commissions/apply-info.html>.

You may also apply by sending a completed Boards and Commissions application, resume and a brief letter explaining your desire to serve the State of Alaska, to:

Office of Governor Bill Walker

Attention: Karen Gillis, Director of Boards and Commissions
550 West 7th Avenue Suite 1700, Anchorage, AK 99501

Contact the Boards and Commissions office:

Call: 907-269-7450

Fax: 907-269-7461

E-mail: Boards@Alaska.Gov

Attend a Meeting or Public Forum

All State Vocational Rehabilitation Committee meetings and forums are open to the public. Meeting dates are available at labor.alaska.gov/svrc/calendar.htm. Notification of meeting times and agenda are posted 30 days prior to meetings at aws.state.ak.us/OnlinePublicNotices/.

More information about the SVRC is available at labor.alaska.gov/svrc, including minutes from previous meetings, and DVR participant and stakeholder public testimony.

Share Your Thoughts and Ideas with SVRC

Call: Voice/TDD 907-465-2814 or 1-800-478-2815

Write: Chair, State Vocational Rehabilitation Committee
Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
801 West 10th Street, Suite A
Juneau, AK 99801-9981

Fax: 907-465-2856

E-mail: Jason.Caputo@Alaska.Gov

Alaska State Vocational Rehabilitation Committee

2014 Annual Report

Bill Walker, Governor

Heidi Drygas, Commissioner of Labor and Workforce Development

Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

801 West 10th Street, Suite A

Juneau, AK 99801-1894