

DEPARTMENT OF AGING AND DISABILITY SERVICES

**BUREAU OF EDUCATION
AND SERVICES FOR THE
BLIND (BESB)**

**YOUR VOCATIONAL
REHABILITATION PROGRAM
AND SERVICES**

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VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM

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What does it mean to be eligible for services?

Congratulations! You have been found eligible for services through our Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program. The goal of our program is to help you to prepare for, obtain, retain, regain, or advance in employment that matches your unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, interests, capabilities, and informed choice. The determination that you are eligible for vocational rehabilitation services was based on your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor concluding that you have a disability that is an impediment to achieving your employment goal, but that with the provision of services from the Vocational Rehabilitation Program, you can achieve your goal.

There are many services that can be provided to make it possible for you to achieve your employment goal. Some of the more commonly provided services are described below. You can get more information about the various vocational services available to you by speaking with your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor.

Please be aware that by agreeing to accept services from the Vocational Rehabilitation Program, you are also agreeing to provide us with requested documentation that allows the bureau to fulfill our mandatory reporting requirements to the federal government on program participants. Some examples of required documentation include verification of your Social Security Number, transcripts and grades for programs that you attend through our sponsorship, wages earned and hours worked, degrees, credentials or certificates of completion that you obtain as a result of participation in services, and the amount of money that you may be receiving from Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

What happens next?

Your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor needs to review the challenges that you are experiencing in several areas of your life. These areas are referred to as “functional capacities” and they include mobility, communication, self-care, self-direction, interpersonal skills, work tolerance, and work skills. This review is used to determine your Priority for Services. There are three levels of Priority for Services. If you experience difficulties and challenges in four or more of the functional capacity categories, and you are expected to need multiple services over an extended period of time, you will be considered to have a “most significant disability” and will be placed into Priority for Services category 1.

If your level of independence in the functional capacity categories does not indicate that you have a “most significant disability” but you are experiencing difficulties and challenges in one, two, or three of the functional capacity categories and you are expected to require multiple services over an extended period of time, then your Priority for Services will be in level 2 which is referred to as having a “significant disability.”

Should the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor’s review find that you do not meet either of the first two Priority for Services categories, but you have met the eligibility criteria by having a disability that requires you to receive vocational rehabilitation services to prepare for, obtain, retain, regain, or advance in employment, then you will be assigned to level 3 of the Priority for Services categories.

Your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor will tell you which Priority for Services category applies to your circumstances.

IMPORTANT: If the Vocational Rehabilitation Program has enough funding to serve everyone who has been found eligible for services, you can receive services regardless of which Priority for Services category applies to your circumstances.

If there are not enough funds to serve everyone at the time that you are found eligible for services, then BESB is required by federal law to serve first those clients who were placed in Priority for Services category 1 using each person's date of eligibility to determine who is next on the waiting list to receive services. Only after everyone in Priority for Services category 1 is served can BESB begin to serve individuals in category 2 using the date of eligibility to determine who is next on the list for services. Once everyone in Priority for Services category 2 is receiving services, then individuals in category 3 can begin to receive services based on their date of eligibility.

If the bureau is serving eligible individuals using the Priority for Services categories, you may be able to still receive services that are necessary for you to remain employed in your current job regardless of what Priority for Services category would apply to your circumstances. However, if you lose the job it will be necessary for you to reapply for services if you wish to receive assistance in finding another job.

You are entitled to review the ratings that your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor assigned to each functional capacity category and to also appeal the Priority for Services category that you have been assigned to if you disagree. In the last section of this handbook, titled "Appeals Options," you will find a summary of all of the review and appeals choices that are available to you throughout the vocational rehabilitation process.

If you are placed on a waiting list for services, your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor will offer to refer you to other partner

programs within the workforce system that may be able to assist you with some of the services that you are in need of to achieve your employment goal.

When there is enough funding available to offer services to you, the next step in the process is the development of an Individualized Plan for Employment or (IPE).

What is an IPE?

The IPE is your Individualized Plan for Employment. This is a written document that describes your employment goal, the services that may be provided to help you reach your goal, as well as the anticipated timeframes for providing these services. The vendors and providers that will be delivering specific services will also be listed in the IPE. The IPE also explains our responsibilities to you and your responsibilities to the vocational rehabilitation process. Working in partnership with your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor is very important for the plan to be successful. Your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor will offer their expertise and experience to you so that you can make informed choices about your employment goal and the services, vendors, and providers that can help you to reach your goal.

Should you prefer to develop your IPE with assistance from someone other than your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, we can give you the names of other providers who can be of assistance and also provide the form that will need to be completed. Once it is filled out, you would then meet with your BESB Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor to discuss your employment goal and services.

If you are receiving services through an Individualized Education Program or Section 504 Accommodation Plan, your Vocational

Rehabilitation Counselor will want to consider your education goals as a part of the process for determining with you and your parents or guardians your anticipated employment goal and the services that will be included in your IPE to assist you in making the transition from high school to the world of work. There is a wide range of services that can be offered to help in your career exploration activities so be sure to discuss these options with your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor.

After you and your BESB Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor agree to the contents of the IPE, you will each sign it. The Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor will need to approve the IPE by signing it as well if you are working with a Vocational Rehabilitation Assistant Counselor, or if graduate school is listed on your IPE as a service. Your Counselor will give you a copy of your approved IPE form after all required signatures have been obtained. At that time, we can begin to provide and coordinate the services listed in your plan. Once you have an approved IPE, even if the program determines that there is not enough funding to serve new applicants for services, your IPE will remain in place and your services will not be interrupted.

Please be aware that the Vocational Rehabilitation Program is required by federal law to have the IPE developed within 90 days of the date of your eligibility for services unless you agree in writing to an extension to a new date. Therefore, it is very important that you are available to participate in discussions that will allow for the timely development of your IPE.

What if I need additional services or want a new employment goal?

Your Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) will be reviewed with you at least once every year. You may request additional

reviews at any time by calling your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor. If you and your Counselor agree that your IPE no longer reflects your employment goal, or if you mutually agree that additional services or vendors are needed for you to achieve your employment goal, then the IPE can be amended. You and your Counselor will sign the IPE Amendment form after agreeing to the additions or changes. The Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor will also need to approve the IPE Amendment by signing it if you are working with a Vocational Rehabilitation Assistant Counselor or if graduate school is being added as a new service. Your Counselor will give you a copy of your approved IPE Amendment form after all required signatures have been obtained. At that time, we can begin to provide and coordinate the services listed in your amended plan.

What if I don't agree with the IPE or IPE Amendment?

It is important that you and your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor reach an agreement on your employment goal and the services and vendors that are included in the plan. If a disagreement occurs, your Counselor will explain his or her concerns and offer some ideas on how to resolve the differences. Sometimes, evaluations or testing may be helpful to learn more about your abilities. We encourage you to work with your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor when additional information is required to help with planning for your employment future.

If you feel that you and your Counselor are unable to work out a disagreement, you may call the Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor at (860)602-4032 or toll free at 1(800)842-4510 extension 4032 to discuss your situation. A meeting with the Supervisor and your Counselor together may help resolve these situations. You may also contact the Client Assistance Program

to speak with an advocate if you prefer. Their telephone number is (860)297-4300 in the Hartford area or (800)842-7303 toll free. In the last section of this handbook, titled “Appeals Options,” you will find a summary of all of the review and appeals choices that are available to you throughout the vocational rehabilitation process.

Sampling of available services

There are many services available to you as a participant in the Vocational Rehabilitation Program. As you progress through the vocational rehabilitation process, new services may be identified as beneficial based on what you and your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor have learned from your participation in assessments and training opportunities. The following examples provide a broad overview of some of the more commonly provided services. Please speak with your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor to discuss the full scope of available services. It is very important to understand that the services provided under an IPE must be necessary for you to work toward achievement of your employment goal. Services that are not relevant to your employment goal cannot be provided by the Vocational Rehabilitation Program.

Counseling and Guidance

Your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor will provide you with counseling and guidance to help you continue to make informed choices about your employment goal, the services being provided, and the vendors and providers of these services. Your Counselor will share with you the results of the evaluations or trainings that you attended and will explain the next steps that will help to bring about employment success.

Counseling and guidance does not include therapy or psychological services, nor does it include prescribing or dispensing of medications.

If you feel that you are in need of counseling assistance to help with depression or other emotional conditions, please let your Counselor know. We can refer you to professionals who can help, including Social Workers, Psychologists, and Psychiatrists. In many situations, we can pay for these services if they are necessary to help you achieve your employment goal. If you have insurance coverage we can assist you in coordinating your benefits to help with the cost of these services.

Orientation and Mobility Services

Orientation and mobility services teach an individual who is legally blind how to travel safely and independently in indoor and outdoor environments. Instruction in the use of a white cane is taught on a one-to-one basis. Information on how to access and utilize public and private transportation options is also provided by the Orientation and Mobility Instructors.

Low Vision Services

BESB works with specially trained eye doctors across the state that are familiar with eye diseases and the low vision aids that will help you to use your remaining vision. While there are no special glasses that can restore your vision fully, these doctors can often prescribe items that will make it easier for you to read with your remaining vision.

The Vocational Rehabilitation Program can cover the cost of glasses and magnifiers that are recommended by an agency-approved low vision doctor if they are needed to help you work

toward your employment goal or to perform job tasks. Examples of this would be situations where prescription glasses or magnifiers are needed for you to complete job assignments or to participate in vocational training programs. We are not able to pay for low vision aids or glasses for personal use such as recreational or leisure time activities.

After you select an eye doctor from our approved Low Vision Provider list, we will send an authorization request to the doctor's office. You will receive a letter in the mail from us asking you to contact the doctor to schedule an appointment. We can only pay for the low vision exam if your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor has authorized the service so it is very important that you wait for your Counselor to complete the authorization process before scheduling your appointment.

After the doctor completes the low vision exam, a list of recommendations will be sent to your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor. The Counselor will issue a purchase request to the doctor for the items that BESB will purchase for you. Once these items are ready, the doctor's office will call you so that you can make a follow up appointment to receive the items and training in their use.

Rehabilitation Technology and Adaptive Equipment

Advances in mainstream technologies such as smart phones and computers have opened up a world of employment possibilities for people with vision impairments. Careers that just a few short years ago were inaccessible to people with limited or no vision are now possible with adaptive technology.

Our Vocational Rehabilitation Program employs Rehabilitation Technologists who specialize in adaptive technology. They will be

able to evaluate your situation, review your vocational needs, and make recommendations for the types of products that will enable you to participate in vocational training programs and employment.

Your Counselor will speak to you about adaptive technology and how it can help you. If you agree with the need for this service, it will be included in your Individualized Plan for Employment. A Rehabilitation Technologist will meet with you to discuss your preferences. He or she will explain about Braille, speech output, and large print, and give you the opportunity to try out various adaptive products. You will be asked to discuss your preferences so that the Technologist can consider them when completing the evaluation and recommendation report.

Our policy is to provide the most effective but least expensive adaptive devices that will help you to participate in vocational training or employment. If there are two very similar products that can accomplish the same task for you, we will provide you with the least expensive of those products. Therefore, it is important that you work with the Rehabilitation Technologist to try out the products that are available so that we can provide the best possible match for your situation. If you are working and need the equipment to assist you with performing job tasks, we will ask your permission to speak with your employer about the adaptations that are recommended for you. Under the Americans with Disabilities Act, employers are required to provide reasonable accommodations to their employees who have disabilities. Your Counselor will ask your employer to assist with the cost of providing the equipment that you need for your job unless there are circumstances that would preclude us from discussing accommodations with your employer. We will provide adaptive equipment that the employer is not able to obtain or purchase if it is essential for your job. However, it is the employer's responsibility to provide you with standard business

equipment such as computers and printers that are provided to all other employees performing similar jobs to yours and BESB is not permitted to purchase these items.

After the Rehabilitation Technologist completes the evaluation, he or she will provide a recommendation report to your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor identifying the adaptive devices that can assist you in performing your employment or training tasks. If you would like a copy of this report, please ask the Rehabilitation Technologist during the meeting with you. Your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor will then place an order for the required equipment. If your employer will be purchasing some of the recommended equipment, your Counselor will provide information to your employer on how they can obtain those items for you.

Once the equipment is received at the bureau, we will arrange for it to be delivered to you. Installation and training will be provided by one of our Rehabilitation Technologists or Rehabilitation Teachers, or by one of the contracted vendors who offer this service. You will have an opportunity to participate in choosing the vendor who will provide you with training.

After the equipment is installed and you are shown that it is working properly, ownership of the equipment will transfer to you. You will be responsible for the maintenance and repair of the equipment from that point on. If the equipment is in need of repair, you may seek a reimbursement from the bureau after you pay for the repair. Your Counselor can provide you with information on vendors that repair adaptive equipment and provide you with additional information on how to seek reimbursement from the bureau for repair costs. Any equipment provided to you by your employer will not be subject to our policies for ownership or repair and you should discuss with your

employer directly what their policies are for ownership, maintenance, and repair.

We provide adaptive equipment so that you can participate in vocational training needed to work towards your employment goal and for your use on the job. We are not able to provide equipment for personal or recreational purposes.

Personal Adjustment Training

This service is offered to people who desire to learn new ways to perform daily activities after experiencing vision loss. Rehabilitation Teachers and Orientation and Mobility Instructors from the bureau are available to teach you how to live independently within your home and to travel safely in the community. On occasion, the level of training that is required for a person to achieve independence is greater than what our staff can provide. In these circumstances, more intensive training in an out-of-state residential program may be beneficial. The bureau can provide some time-limited funding so you can attend one of these residential programs, including the cost for room and board at the training centers. Discuss these options with your Counselor to determine what option may be best for your situation.

Vocational Training

BESB can provide short-term training through community rehabilitation providers to enable you to get the skills needed to achieve your employment goal or to retain your current employment. Services may include job seeking skills classes, computer training, and work assessments in actual job situations. We may also work with these providers to help identify employers who are hiring people with the types of skills that you have.

Through internships and on-the-job training experiences, you can have the opportunity to try out a job situation. These assessments give you and your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor information about your current skills. Job offers may also result from these assessments on occasion. Some vocational training programs are located out-of-state. If you and your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor agree to participation at one of these provider locations, then the bureau will cover the cost of the program and room and board at the training center while you are there.

Post-Secondary Education Training

In certain situations, we are able to provide some funding if you are interested in a career that requires post-secondary education training. Post-secondary education refers to coursework and programs of study that you take at accredited colleges, universities, trade schools, or approved certificate programs in order to obtain a degree or credential that qualifies you for a particular career. These programs are found at accredited or certified public and private schools within the state as well as out-of-state. You will have the opportunity to participate in choosing the accredited or certified program location that interests you. However, it is important to understand that if there is a comparable program of study or transferrable course credits that can be obtained through the Connecticut State College and University System, the bureau's level of funding will be based on that rate.

The level of training needed will depend on your employment goal. For instance, if your employment goal is Psychologist, you may be eligible to receive some funding from us to attain a Bachelor's and a Master's degree in Psychology. However, the schooling needs to be required for your employment goal in order

to be eligible for funding from the bureau. The level of funding that we can offer will vary from person to person based on individual circumstances. You will need to apply for financial aid through the school that you desire to attend. We will assist you with connecting to the right person at the school to begin this process, but much of the work will need to be completed by you.

We will not be able to tell you what our level of funding support will be until you complete the financial aid application process with the school that you plan to attend. In addition to the funding level restrictions based on the applicable Connecticut State College and University System rate, the bureau cannot exceed a dollar calculation that is called the “unmet need.” The unmet need is the difference between the costs associated with your attending the school and the dollar value of all financial resources that are available to you for school. You are not required to accept student loans that are available to you to put towards the cost of attending school but, if you do accept the student loan, it could lower the amount of funding the bureau can put towards the cost of schooling in certain situations. If you are considering taking a student loan, it is recommended that you discuss the implications of this with your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor before accepting the student loan so that you can make an informed decision. You can also discuss the amount of available funding with your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor to decide how to best allocate the unmet need in your situation.

When you are in school, you will need to have an overall grade point average of 2.0 or higher to be eligible for continued financial support from the bureau. Full-time participation (4 classes or more each semester) is required unless you and your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor agree that your unique circumstances make that impractical. If your Individualized Plan for Employment includes higher education training, please speak to your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor to get more information on

your responsibilities and the process for obtaining funding from the bureau.

Room and Board for Post-Secondary Education

If you decide to pursue your certificate or degree program at a location away from your primary residence, then the bureau may be able to cover some of the cost of room and board. The actual amount of funding will depend on the results of your financial aid application process. The level of funding available will not be greater than the cost of room and board at a Connecticut State College and University System location if a comparable program of study is available there. We are not able to cover the cost of rent for your primary home or apartment while you are attending school. Room and board funding can only cover part of the cost of a secondary, temporary residence away from your home so that you can participate in training. Please speak to your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor to get more information about funding for this service.

Books and Supplies

The bureau is able to pay up to \$100 per higher education course for required textbooks and school supplies. Your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor will tell you the amount of funding that is being authorized and send a letter to the bookstore informing them of the funding level as well so that an account can be established for the books to be charged. If you have a financial hardship that prevents you from covering the cost of textbooks beyond the amount that the bureau is planning to fund, you can request additional funding by writing a letter to the Bureau Director explaining your financial hardship. The Director will advise you in writing if additional funding can be provided for

books based on your individual circumstances and the availability of unmet need that was not put toward other services.

However, please do not assume that the bureau will be able to cover additional amounts that have not been preauthorized by a bureau letter sent to the bookstore. You will be responsible for covering any additional costs beyond the authorized amount, so it is very important to discuss your situation with your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor before making purchases at the bookstore.

If you need to have textbooks and classroom materials converted into Braille, large print, electronic, or audio format for your course work, these costs will not be counted against the \$100 per course amount. These types of adaptations are handled through a discussion between your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor and the Disability Services Coordinator at the institution of higher education so that a cost sharing arrangement between our bureau and the school can be achieved.

Reader Services

The bureau is able to provide some funding for you to hire a reader to assist you with homework assignments and studying. The amount of reader service will depend on your individual situation, but will not exceed 250 hours per semester unless there are very unusual circumstances. The bureau will send a funding commitment letter to you listing the total number of hours authorized and the amount of funding. We are able to reimburse you at the state minimum wage for the cost of hiring a reader. You will receive a set of blank receipts with the letter of authorization from the bureau. After you interview and hire your reader, he or she will need to complete and sign the receipts for the hours of services they provide to you. You can seek reimbursement from

the bureau for the cost of the reader by sending these signed and dated receipts to the bureau along with a completed billing invoice that will be provided to you. The bureau can only pay for the specific number of hours authorized on the letter that we send to you, so please do not go beyond that level unless you are going to pay for the cost of the additional hours. If you find that additional hours may be needed to complete your schoolwork, contact your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor as early in the semester as possible to discuss options. Under the Americans with Disabilities Act, all colleges, universities, and institutions of higher education are required to provide reasonable accommodations. We will ask that you contact the school's Disability Services office to request accommodations that are available to you. This will include reader services for the time that you need while in the classroom or while participating in school-sponsored events. Reader services can also be provided on a time-limited basis when needed at your job. Your employer may be able to cover some or all of the cost of reader services as a reasonable accommodation. However, the bureau may also be able to cover some of the cost on a time-limited basis using the same process as described above.

Transportation to Participate in IPE Services

The bureau can provide time-limited funding for transportation to enable you to participate in vocational rehabilitation services that are listed in your IPE, or for when you begin the job that is your IPE employment goal. All transportation services must be authorized in writing in advance to be eligible for funding consideration.

The following are basic guidelines regarding transportation:

The bureau may cover the cost of bus, train, or airfare for you to attend an out-of-state vocational training program. We must coordinate these travel arrangements through the State of Connecticut's travel service. Funding is provided for one round trip ticket although the bureau may also pay for the cost of your round trip travel fare to return home when the program is officially shut down for holidays while you are there. However, if you choose to travel home from an out-of-state residential program more frequently, then you will need to pay for these additional trips.

If you are attending a vocational training program that is within daily commuting distance of your home, the bureau can provide bus passes or ADA trip tickets in an amount that is sufficient for your participation. The bureau will send the bus passes or travel tickets to you directly if you are choosing to use a bus or ADA Paratransit.

If you will be using a transportation service, the bureau will send a funding letter directly to them setting up an account for you to use.

Sometimes, there are no buses, ADA vans, or state-contracted transportation services in your area and the only option for you to commute to and from a vocational training program is to find a volunteer or paid driver. Our Volunteer Program Coordinator may be able to assist you with finding a person in your area who can provide transportation. If that is not possible, then we may be able to provide funding at the state minimum wage level for you to hire a driver. Mileage reimbursement funds at the state fee rate would also be made available in these situations. The bureau will issue a funding commitment letter to you listing the total number of driver hours at the minimum wage rate and the number of total miles that are eligible for reimbursement.

If you prefer to utilize rideshare options such as Lyft, Uber, or a similar arrangement, then an authorization letter will be issued to you to cover the specific number of trips that can be paid for.

You will need to pay for the driver or rideshare services up front and then submit receipts to the bureau for the trips taken in order to obtain reimbursement. You can only be reimbursed for the specific number of driver hours, miles, or rideshare trips that are noted on the authorization letter that is sent to you in advance by the bureau.

If you find that additional transportation funding is needed, please contact your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor as soon as possible to find out if that option is available to you. Transportation funding will only be provided for your use while you are attending the vocational services or programs that are listed in your IPE.

If you need funding for transportation to participate in post-secondary education, the amount available to you is directly related to the unmet need calculation for your attendance at the program. Your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor can discuss with you the options that are available so that you can make an informed decision about how much of the unmet need you wish to apply towards transportation costs.

After you obtain employment in your chosen field that is written in your IPE, funding for transportation can be provided if needed until you receive your second paycheck or complete your first month of employment, whichever comes first. All of the transportation options described above are available to you including bus fare, ADA Paratransit fare, rideshare services, or hiring a driver.

Since transportation funding for your job is time-limited, it is very important that you make other arrangements to cover your transportation needs after bureau funding ends. Possibilities can include car-pooling with coworkers or utilizing a rideshare program.

Personal Care Assistants

Personal Care Assistants (PCA) are people who provide assistance to a person with a disability who cannot independently perform daily living activities such as eating, drinking, dressing, or using a bathroom. The bureau can cover the cost of PCA services at the prevailing hourly rate to enable you to participate in vocational rehabilitation services identified in your Individualized Plan for Employment.

If you have a disability that makes it difficult for you to personally attend to your self-care, then ask your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor about these services. Funding is usually provided to an organization that is on state contract to provide this service using a fee-for-service hourly rate. The bureau will provide a written authorization to the organization to cover the number of hours that will be needed for you to participate in vocational rehabilitation services. If you have insurance coverage, we will ask for permission to contact the insurance company to find out if any other funds are available to pay for a portion of these costs before bureau funds are used.

You may also request an arrangement where you directly hire and pay the PCA at the prevailing hourly rate and seek reimbursement from the bureau. In this situation, the bureau would issue a funding commitment letter to you in advance that lists the number of hours authorized and the hourly rate approved. To obtain reimbursement for the wages you directly pay the PCA, you

would complete the billing invoice sent to you by the bureau and have your PCA sign the forms to acknowledge the days and hours of service.

When a Personal Care Assistant is needed in an employment situation, the bureau can provide short-term funding for the first month of employment or until you receive your second paycheck, whichever comes first. The bureau is not able to cover Personal Care Assistant costs on a long-term basis, so it is very important to discuss options with your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor if you anticipate the need for long-term personal care assistance in your career.

Small Business Ventures

The bureau offers two options if self-employment interests you:

First, through the Business Enterprise Program, you can enter into a partnership with the bureau to manage a food service, gift shop, or newsstand operation at a public property location. The bureau has opportunities at locations around the state, some in large, full service cafeterias with many employees and others in small, one-person operations. All candidates enter into a training program and need to demonstrate the skills and abilities to become entrepreneurs before earning a license to operate a location. The Business Enterprise Program offers promotional opportunities based on seniority for advancement into locations with higher earning.

There is no cost to you for entering the program and the bureau pays for all training. Your start up inventory will be provided so that you will have everything you need to open the business or take over an existing location when an opportunity arises. Best of all, you get to keep all the profits from the location that you

manage. Of course, there are other responsibilities that go along with managing a Business Enterprise location. You will have to pay all taxes and cover the cost of all additional products and services needed in your business. The initial inventory that you are given will be sold to customers quickly and you will need to use the profits from these sales to buy more products. If your operation is larger, you will also need to use some of the profit to pay the salaries of the staff that you hire. If you decide to leave the business location, you will have to leave the location with the same level of inventory as when you took it over. There are many positive aspects of business management through the bureau's Business Enterprise Program. A retirement plan and health insurance coverage are available and successful entrepreneurs can earn high salaries. Ask your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor for more information.

The second option for self-employment offered by the bureau is for people who want to own a business but who do not wish to enter into the bureau's Business Enterprise Program. To be considered for funding under this option, you will need to develop a business plan proposal and submit it to the Vocational Rehabilitation Business Advisory Committee.

Business plans are comprehensive documents that contain details about the products or services that you want to sell, the locations where you will sell them from, the customers who you anticipate will buy them, and the profits that you anticipate making. There are certain restrictions on the types of businesses and funding that can be provided by the bureau. For instance, the bureau is not able to buy or lease a building for your business or substantially alter an existing building. The bureau cannot purchase a franchise such as a fast food restaurant or convenience store. Businesses that sell alcohol, tobacco, firearms, pornographic material, or drug paraphernalia are not eligible for funding from the bureau. The bureau will not purchase

or lease motor vehicles, aircraft, or boats for your business venture. There are also restrictions on the length of time that bureau funding can be provided. For example, initial inventory and rent can only be provided for up to the first six months of the operation. Finally, clients submitting a business plan requesting funds for either a new or existing business are required to provide an equity contribution into the business before bureau funding will be committed. The size and composition of the required equity contributions are based on the amount of funding that you are requesting.

Once your business plan is ready for review, the Vocational Rehabilitation Business Advisory Committee will receive and review your proposal. This committee is made up of three current and/or former members of the State Rehabilitation Council who serve or have served in the appointment categories of business, industry, labor, or in the appointment category of recipient of services if the committee member currently owns and operates a business.

All three members of the committee will need to approve the business plan before it can be funded. If they find the plan cannot be approved, then you will receive a written report telling you what is needed so that you can decide if you want to adjust your proposal and resubmit your business plan.

Ask your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor for more information on the process if you are considering business ownership or improving on your current business to make it profitable. Your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor can provide you with a handbook that includes a business plan template and describes in greater detail the bureau's policies pertaining to business ventures. He or she can also put you in contact with resources that can offer advice, guidance, and possible

alternative funding to people who want to open or expand a business.

Becoming an entrepreneur can be a wonderfully rewarding experience. If this type of challenge sounds exciting to you, then meet with your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor to learn more about the process.

Achieving Success

Active participation in your vocational rehabilitation program and services is the key to your success. While your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor truly wants to spend as much time with you as possible to help you to achieve your employment goal, each of our Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors has many other clients that they are working with. The efforts that you put into exploring careers that interest you and then applying for jobs will greatly increase your opportunity for success.

We have staff available to train you in how to use career exploration and job search tools that are on the internet. One particular product, known as Career Index Plus, is specifically designed for vocational rehabilitation clients and it can be found at the following website:

https://www.thecareerindex.com/dsp_intro.cfm . Career Index Plus includes an interest inventory so you can research the types of jobs that match the things that you enjoy. It also features an interactive job search tool that you can customize by zip code, job title, and other attributes.

Keep your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor informed of your self-directed activities and always feel free to reach out to your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor to get updates on his or her efforts to coordinate your services.

Your Rights and Responsibilities

- 1. As a client of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program, you have the right to the following information, actions, and activities:**
 - a) The right to receive information and documents from this bureau in your preferred accessible format and language;**
 - b) The right to an evaluation of your eligibility for services;**
 - c) The right to be notified of the eligibility decision;**
 - d) If eligible, the right to participate in the development of the IPE and any amendment or changes in your rehabilitation program;**
 - e) The right to an annual review of the IPE;**
 - f) The right to review and challenge the contents in your case record of services;**
 - g) The right to confidentiality (unless sharing of information is necessary to protect you or another person from possible physical harm or violence; we are ordered to share the information by a court order or subpoena; or the information is required by mandatory reporting laws);**
 - h) The right to appeal bureau actions concerning the provision or denial of services;**
 - i) The right to appeal to the Superior Court under Section 4-183 of the Connecticut General Statutes;**

j) The right to be informed of the availability of the Client Assistance Program;

k) The right to non-discrimination;

l) The right to a clear explanation of policies and procedures;

m) The right to request a change of your assigned Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor;

2. Your responsibilities include the following as applicable:

a) Assist in obtaining information needed to determine eligibility and develop the IPE;

b) Carry out your role in the development and implementation of the IPE;

c) Attend scheduled appointments, training sessions, and other authorized services;

d) Not to promise bureau funding for services from a third party vendor without prior authorization by the bureau;

e) Attain acceptable grades or ratings at training programs and other applicable activities;

f) Carry forth medical or other professional instructions as applicable to your rehabilitation program;

g) Notify your assigned Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor of changes in your address, email, or telephone numbers;

- h) Discuss with your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor any problems or changes that may occur during your participation in vocational rehabilitation services;**
- i) Provide required documentation as requested by the bureau to fulfill federal reporting requirements.**

The Client Assistance Program may assist in explaining your rights and responsibilities.

Failure to assume these responsibilities may result in delays in the provision of services.

Client Assistance Program (CAP)

If you have questions about the vocational rehabilitation system or need help solving a problem with the Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB), CAP focuses on providing consultation and advocacy services to protect the rights of applicants and recipients of vocational services in Connecticut. The Client Assistance Program is a federally mandated, independent program and is part of Disability Rights Connecticut. Services are free and confidential.

The Client Assistance Program (CAP) can:

- a) Provide information on services available;**
- b) Help you understand a review of a decision made by vocational rehabilitation staff that affects the delivery of services;**
- c) Provide information and referral to other programs;**
- d) Review case files and advocate to resolve disagreements;**

- e) Provide representation at Informal Reviews, Mediation, and Fair Hearings within available resources; and,**
- f) Provide information on Title I (Employment) of the Americans with Disabilities Act.**

If you have been denied services or need guidance, contact CAP at:

Disability Rights Connecticut

846 Wethersfield Ave.

Hartford, CT 06114

Voice: (800)842-7303 (toll-free in CT) or (860)297-4300

Videophone: (860)509-4992

Website: <https://www.disrightsct.org/>

Email: info@disrightsct.org

Appeals Options

Should disagreements arise regarding your employment goal or your vocational services that you are unable to resolve with your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, you are encouraged to contact the Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor at (860)602-4032 or (800)842-4510, extension 4032 to discuss the situation. Most disagreements can be resolved using this process. The Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor will listen to your concerns, explain policies that may have relevance and then work with you and your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor to achieve a resolution.

Should you find that the supervisory review process has not resolved your concerns, or if you prefer to bypass that option and seek more formal ways to address your concerns, all of the following options are available to you:

a) Informal Dispute Resolution: You may seek an informal review of a decision by personnel of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program by sending a written request to the Bureau Director. This review will be conducted within forty-five days of receipt of the written request for such a review. This informal review will give you an opportunity to talk about your situation to try to resolve any disagreements.

b) Mediation: You may ask for a meeting with a third party mediator who does not work for BESB. This mediator may help settle a disagreement but has no power to make a decision on your situation. He or she will be selected at random or by mutual agreement from a group of individuals previously identified as knowledgeable about the Vocational Rehabilitation Program by the Bureau Director and the State Rehabilitation Council. Conversations that take place during these sessions are confidential and cannot be used by either you or BESB as evidence in any future situations or hearings. There are no costs to you for the mediation sessions. Mediation sessions will be scheduled within 45 days of your written request to the Bureau Director.

c) Formal Hearing Procedures: You may request a hearing before an impartial hearing officer to review decisions made by personnel of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program concerning services or the denial of services. The impartial hearing officer will be selected at random or by mutual agreement from a pool of knowledgeable individuals identified by the Bureau Director and the State Rehabilitation Council. You or an authorized representative will have an opportunity to present evidence, information, and witnesses at this hearing. While the bureau will not cover the cost of an attorney or advocate, you may be represented by either or both. You may examine all opposing evidence and ask questions of all witnesses. The hearing will be

scheduled within 45 days of your written request to the Bureau Director. The impartial hearing officer's written decision must be provided to you and to the Bureau Director no more than 30 days after the hearing ends.

If either of the parties to the impartial due process hearing is dissatisfied with the decision of the impartial hearing officer, the party may seek an impartial administrative review of the decision by the Commissioner of the Department of Aging and Disability Services. A request for this administrative review must be made within 20 days of the mailing of the impartial hearing officer's decision.

The Commissioner of the agency will make an independent, final decision following a review of the entire hearing record. He or she will also provide the decision in writing including a full report of the findings and the statutory, regulatory, or policy grounds for the decision to the applicant or eligible individual or, as appropriate, the individual's representative and to the bureau within 30 days of the request for administrative review.

d) Civil Action: Any of the parties who disagrees with the findings and decision of an impartial hearing officer or a subsequent determination by the Commissioner of the Department of Aging and Disability Services has a right to bring a civil action with respect to the matter in dispute. The action may be brought in any State court of competent jurisdiction or in a district court of the United States of competent jurisdiction without regard to the amount in controversy. In any action brought under this option, the court must receive the records related to the impartial due process hearing and the records related to the administrative review process, if applicable. The court will hear any additional evidence at the request of a party and base its decision on the preponderance of the evidence, granting the relief that the court determines to be appropriate.

If you would like to request a review of a decision made by personnel of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program, please contact:

**Carol Jenkins, Director of BESB
Department of Aging and Disability Services
Bureau of Education & Services for the Blind
184 Windsor Avenue
Windsor, CT 06095
Carol.Jenkins@ct.gov
(800)842-4510 (toll-free)
(860)602-4000**