

Joint SILC-SRC Meeting Minutes April 30, 2026 Hybrid Meeting

Attendees:

- SILC Members either present or online: Chris Johnsrud, Scott Williamson, June Hermanson, Jean Schroeder, Gina Lytle, Tami Hoar (CIL Director), Julie Williams
- SRC Members present or online: June Hermanson, Corinne Moore, Doug McElroy, Eva Balatski, Gabby Broere, Joleen Weatherwax, Rita Brandborg, Tara Barthel, Marty Nolen, Shannan Sproull, Brian Tocher, Leah Zins, Tammy Hickey, Josh McDowell,
- DETD Employees: Celina Cline, Tammy Hogen, Sarah Seltzer, Hannah Stokes, Lacey Conzelman, Julia Arnold, Chanda Hermanson, Anna Gibbs, Connor Frakes
- Guests either present or online: Margaret Keener (CIL Director)

Reports/Planning:

- Mission Statements read by a member of each council.
 - Corinne Morre gave the SRC update. She noted that the SRC currently has a full council. She shared updates regarding the Consumer Satisfaction Survey and upcoming meeting details. Chanda Hermanson noted that the next SRC meeting will be held virtually due to budget constraints. She also mentioned that, at this time, AI note-takers are not allowed in these meetings.
 - Chris Johnsrud gave the SILC updates. He shared that the SILC has been doing focused work to expand Montana's data and is encouraged by the progress at DPHHS in integrating the Olmstead Plan. He also shared that this included addressing transportation within the plan. He mentioned a meeting with Jane Gillette, a member of the House of Representatives, to discuss HB922. Additionally, he shared that June Hermanson won the 2025 April Advocacy Award. Final announcements included plans for the Symposium, to be held in Billings in August, as well as for the next State Plan for Independent Living, due in June.
- June Hermanson gave an update on the Olmstead Plan. She also shared HB922 and working with Representative Keenan. With the support of both the Governor and Rep. Keenan, the Olmstead bill was passed. Additional updates included meetings with the Department of Transportation and other legislators.
- Lacey Conzelman gave a report on the Town Hall meetings. The meetings were held virtually and in three different facilitator groups. The topics included Employment First, the State Plan for VR services, and the State Plan for Independent Living. She shared some feedback from those groups and some of the concerns of those who attended. Chanda Hermanson answered questions about Employment First, and Julie Williams spoke about feedback from the IL plan focus groups. Julie also shared the SPIL goals.
- Connor Frakes introduced himself as the new BLV Bureau Chief. He invited two VR consumers to share their experiences with us today.
- Chanda Hermanson provided some background on Employment First, along with some State and Federal updates. Montana's DETD continues to wait to hear about the Federal VR program and the future of Vocational Rehabilitation. She read a report by the National Federation for the Blind that highlighted concerns regarding the RSA and the Department of Education. She also

shared an update about special education and the possible move to DPHHS or the Department of Labor. As for State updates, the focus is on policy proposals for bills and the budget. She expanded on Employment First and 406 Jobs. Additionally, Chanda discussed changes to the Blind Vending Program and other proposals related to prisons and sheltered workshops. She also shared that with federal approval from the RSA, Montana has now closed Category 1, so all categories are now closed. This does not affect Pre-ETS, and all open cases are still being served.

- Sarah Seltzer, Deputy Division Administrator, gave an update on the educational requirements for Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors, sharing that they now hire in several different skill levels, including Rehabilitation Techs, Vocational. Rehab. Counselor I, and Voc. Rehab. Counselor II, and that a VR I only requires a Bachelor's degree and 1-2 years of background in human services. Sarah further explained that they have additional required internal training. The VR II position still requires a Master's degree.
- Chanda announced that Lacey Conzelman had won the 2026 VR IPS, which is an international award.
- Lacey Conzelman gave an update on the 504 lawsuit. She also shared details about the "5/04 Party," which will be held on the lawn at the attorney general's office. She also shared several other dates when Disability Rights Montana would hold additional events.
- Roundtable discussion on Pre-ETS: This included guest speakers and collaborators: Kara Bates, Heidi Gibson, Kendra Brown, Rebecca Sirim, Vena Jean, Theil Claybo, and Jennifer Hermanson. Topics included recent and upcoming events and demonstrations for youth with disabilities across the state. The discussion covered tours at welding and autobody shops and how these programs develop and build skills for students exploring these careers. Other career explorations for students at these events included strong interests in agriculture, natural resources, and animal care. There was discussion about how the Pre-ETS Specialists are helping students achieve their career and financial goals. Several two-day camps allowed students to discover additional career paths, and the panelists shared those experiences with us as well. These camps provided in-depth training in outdoor job skills, such as fly-fishing and navigating waterways safely. There were volunteer firefighters, ranchers, and other businesses on site for these events as well. Summer camps and skill-building opportunities for the coming season were also shared with the group. Further discussion included Pre-ETS work-based learning, job site tours, and placements in these programs for students. Other discussion topics included perspectives from and about employers, the hiring process for students, and wages for entry-level positions. The Montana Empowerment Center brought their new books for distribution today, also.

The combined SILC and SRC discussed ideas for their next joint meeting to include Roundtables, Disability Services, and transportation. The next joint meeting is tentatively set for next spring.

Meeting adjourned at 3:31 pm. A tour of the Montana State Capitol was scheduled for 4 pm for those who wished to attend.