



Mohammed Choudhury
State Superintendent of Schools

TO: Members of the State Board of Education
FROM: Mohammed Choudhury, State Superintendent of Schools
DATE: May 23, 2023
SUBJECT: Overview of MSDE’s Division of Rehabilitation Services

Purpose

The purpose of this item is to provide an overview of the Maryland State Department of Education’s Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS), including an in-depth review of two of DORS’ major disability programs, the Disability Determination Services (DDS) program and the public Vocational Rehabilitation program that DORS manages. The overview will provide specific information about each program’s services, data highlighting the services and the individuals who are receiving those services, the challenges facing the two programs, and the solutions that MSDE DORS are implementing to address these challenges.

Background/Historical Perspective

DORS is the largest Division of the Maryland State Department of Education providing direct services to Maryland’s most vulnerable citizens, both young and old. DORS oversees two major disability programs and several smaller programs throughout the State.

One of the two major disabilities programs is DDS, which is responsible for the adjudication of Social Security disability benefit claims. DDS handles approximately 50,000 disability claims each year.

The second major program is the public Vocational Rehabilitation program, commonly referred to as DORS. DORS provides vocational training and education for disabled individuals who want to go to work or want to continue to be able to work. In addition, DORS is responsible for providing Pre-Employment Transitioning Services (Pre-ETS) for students with a disability who are between the ages of 14 and less than 22. The Pre-ETS are intended to provide an opportunity for students to explore possible career pathways and post-secondary educational options of interest.

Executive Summary

This presentation will provide an overview of the disability programs that DORS manages, data trends, review the challenges that DORS has historically faced, and present the solutions that MSDE DORS is implementing to address these challenges.

Action

No action is required; this information is for discussion only.

Attachments

Division of Rehabilitation Services PowerPoint

DIVISION OF REHABILITATION SERVICES

DIVISION OF REHABILITATION SERVICES

MARYLAND STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION | May 23, 2023

Presented By | Scott Dennis, Assistant State Superintendent



PRESENTATION OUTLINE

1. Overview of the Division of Rehabilitation Services
2. The Disability Determination Services
3. The Vocational Rehabilitation Program Overview
4. Vocational Services
5. Pre-Employment Transitioning Services
6. Challenges and Solutions for the Division of Rehabilitation Services



Overview of the Division of Rehabilitation Services

1. Overview of the Division of Rehabilitation Services
2. Disability Determination Services
3. Overview of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program
4. Vocational Services
5. Pre Employment Transitioning Services
6. Challenges and Solutions for the Division of Rehabilitation Services

The Division of Rehabilitation Services is a multifaceted disability organization within the Maryland State Department of Education.

Division of Rehabilitation Services

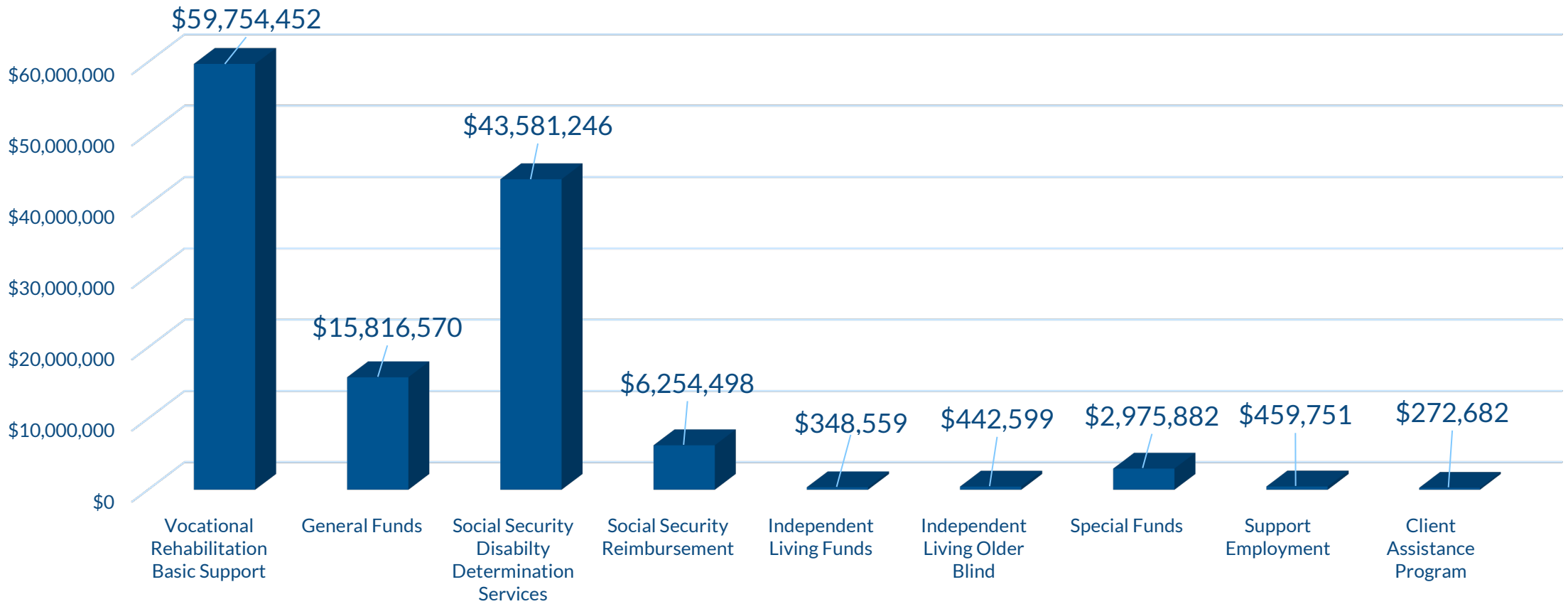
- The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation program was created in **1929**.
 - Senate Bill 174 (1929) created the **Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR)** within the **Maryland State Board of Education**.
 - The program's **initial appropriation was \$15,000** and had two staff members.
 - The program at that time had single focus of providing vocational rehabilitation services for individuals with a physical disability.
 - In 1954, the Social Security Administration Disability Determination Services program was created and placed under the control of DVR.
 - In the early 90's the name of the agency was changed to the Division of Rehabilitation Services.
- Today, DORS has a **budget of \$132,349,409** and has a **staff of 658**, of which 592 are FTE PINS and 66 contractual positions.
 - DORS is the largest division of MSDE and comprises over **50% of MSDE's employees**
- DORS operates **two major disabilities programs** and five smaller disabilities programs

Programs Operated by the Division of Rehabilitation Services

- Disability Determination Services
- Public Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program
 - Business Enterprise Program for the Blind
 - Provides business opportunities for individuals who are blind on federal and state property.
 - Independent Living (IL) Program
 - Provides funding to the seven Centers for Independent Living around the State.
 - Independent Living Older Blind Program
 - Provides independent living training for individuals who are 55 or older and legally blind to live independently in their homes.
 - Support Employment Program Adult and Youth
 - Two separate programs: the Adult programs is for 25 and older and the Youth program is for individuals 24 and younger. Both programs support individuals who are employed.
 - Client Assistance Program
 - To provide client advocacy for individuals who are receiving services through the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) or IL programs.

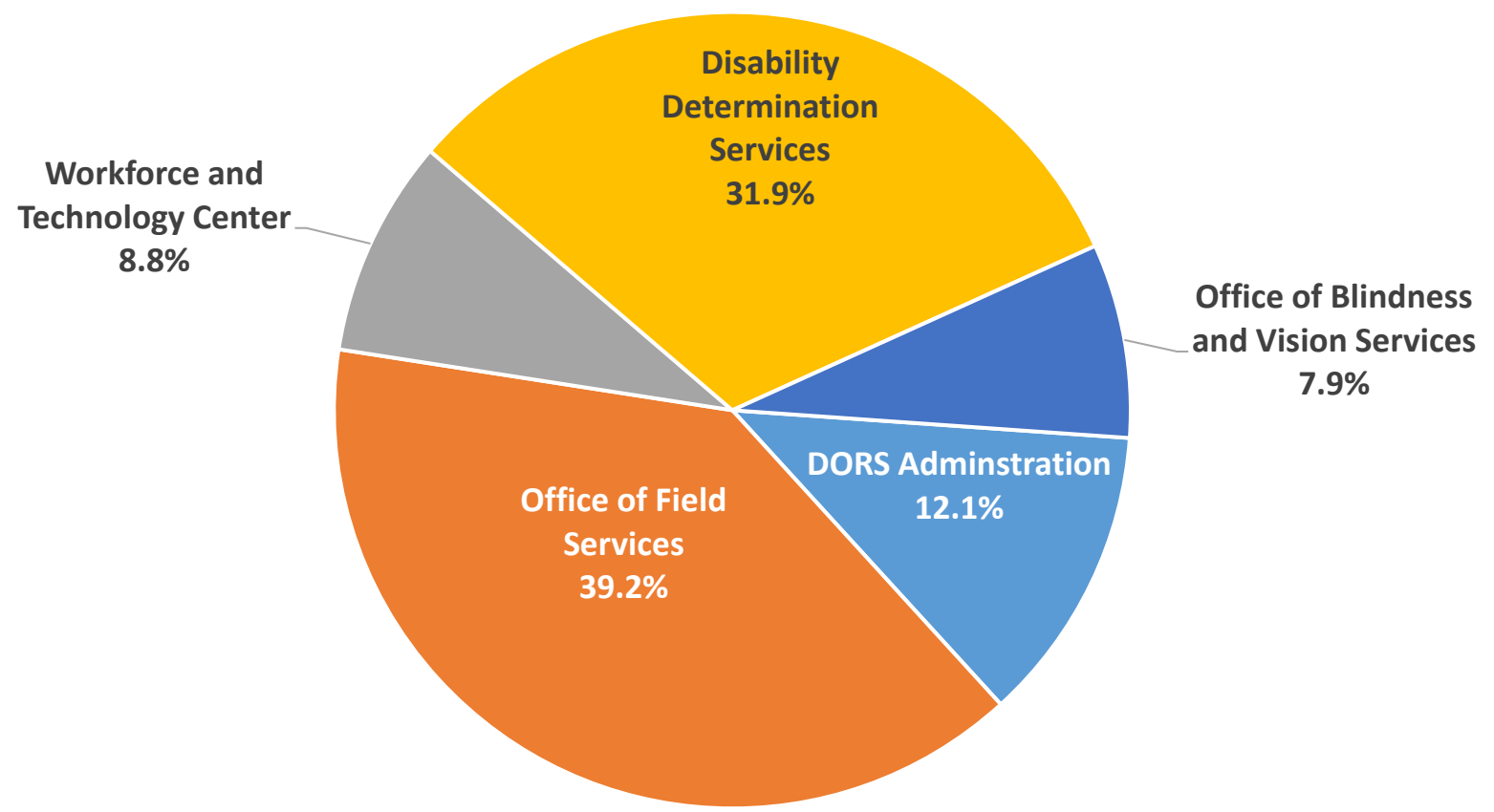
DORS FY23 Budget: Sources of Funding

More than 85% of DORS is funded by Federal funding.



DORS FY23 Budget: Funding Allocation by Program

More than 87% of funding goes to directly to providing services to Marylanders.





The Disability Determination Services

1. Overview of the Division of Rehabilitation Services
2. **Disability Determination Services**
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The Disability Determination Services adjudicates claims of Marylanders who file for Social Security disability benefits.

Disability Determination Services

- **The Disability Determination Services (DDS) was created with the 1954 amendments to the Social Security Act with the creation of the Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) program.**
 - **The 1972 Amendments to the Social Security Act created the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) Program.**
- **The DDS is responsible for the determining eligibility of Marylanders who apply for SSDI or SSI.**
- **DDS has 239 employees, located in Hunt Valley.**
- **Due to the nature of their work DDS employees have a high-level security clearance, which includes, FBI criminal background, credit check, FBI interviews with family, friends, and current and former employers.**
- **The Social Security Administration funds 100% of the operation as a reimbursable to the State.**

Disability Determination Services

- DDS has 106 examiners, 14 Section Supervisors, and 14 Quality Assurance Specialists.
- **DDS examiners must complete a 13-week intensive training program, which includes all bodily systems and the diseases that affect them, the various types of psychological and social illnesses, impact of medical treatment, and how all this impacts an individual's ability to work.**
- Depending on the individual's situation they **may file in one of three different ways**. Each claim type has its **own set of requirements** that must be met to be **approved for benefits**.
 - Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) only
 - Supplemental Security Income (SSI) only
 - Concurrent claim both SSDI and SSI at the same time

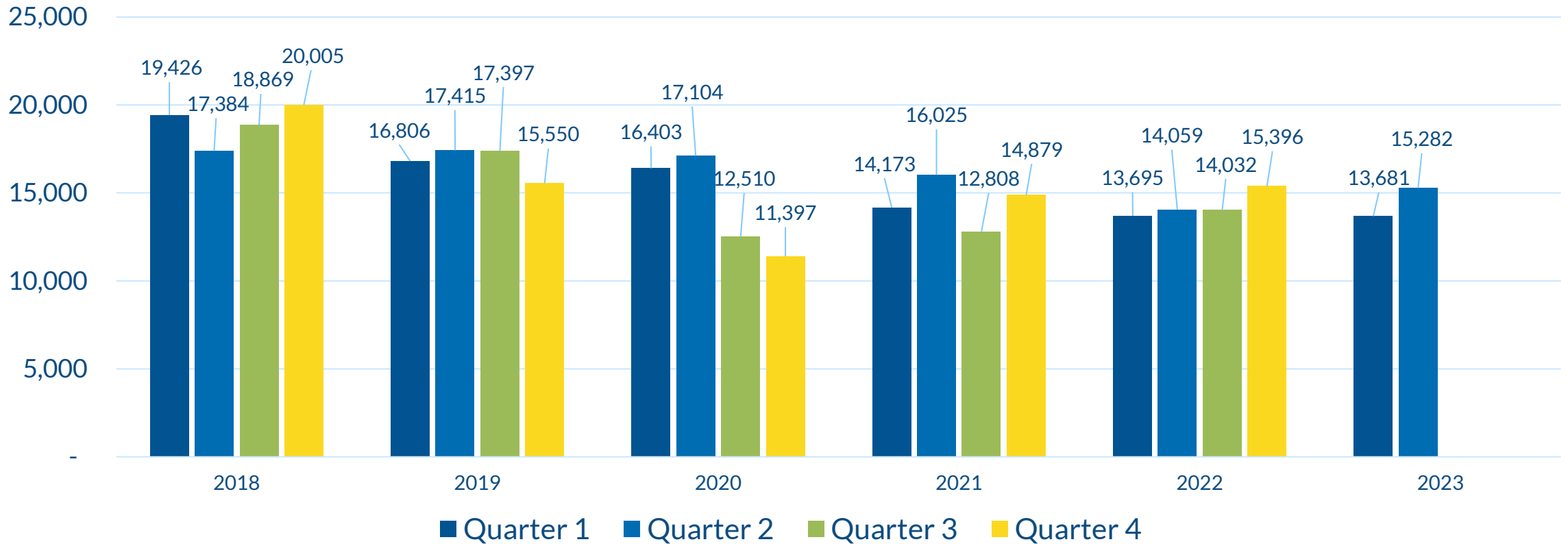
Connections of DDS and Social Security Act

- **What is SSDI (Title II) of the Social Security Act?**
 - **Title II** provides for **payment of disability benefits to disabled individuals** who are under the age 65 and have earned sufficient “work credit” under the Act by virtue of their contributions to the Social Security trust fund through the Social Security Federal Insurance Contribution Act (FICA) on their earnings, as well as to certain disabled dependents of insured individuals.
- **What is SSI (Title XVI) of the Social Security Act?**
 - **Title XVI** provides **cash payments to individuals who are elderly, blind, or disabled and have low incomes**. In addition to the federal payment, some states add a small supplement to the monthly benefit. The amount varies by state, marital status, and living arrangements but usually ranges from \$10 to \$400 per month. **Most people who qualify for SSI also qualify for their state’s Medicaid program** and may be eligible for other programs. SSI payments are funded by general revenue (not the Social Security trust fund).
- **What is the definition of disability under Social Security?**
 - For all individuals applying for disability benefits under title II, and for adults applying under title XVI, the definition of disability is the same. **The law defines disability as the inability to engage in any substantial gainful activity (SGA) by reason of any medically determinable physical or mental impairment(s)** which can be expected to result in death, or which has lasted or can be expected to last for a continuous period of not less than 12 months.
- **What is SGA?**
 - **Substantial gainful activity (SGA) is the level of work that a person without a disability can do**. One of the basic requirements for Social Security or SSI disability is that a person’s medical condition must be serious enough to prevent them from doing more than an insignificant amount of work for at least 12 months.

DDS: Social Security Claims

Social Security benefits claims have not returned to pre-pandemic levels.

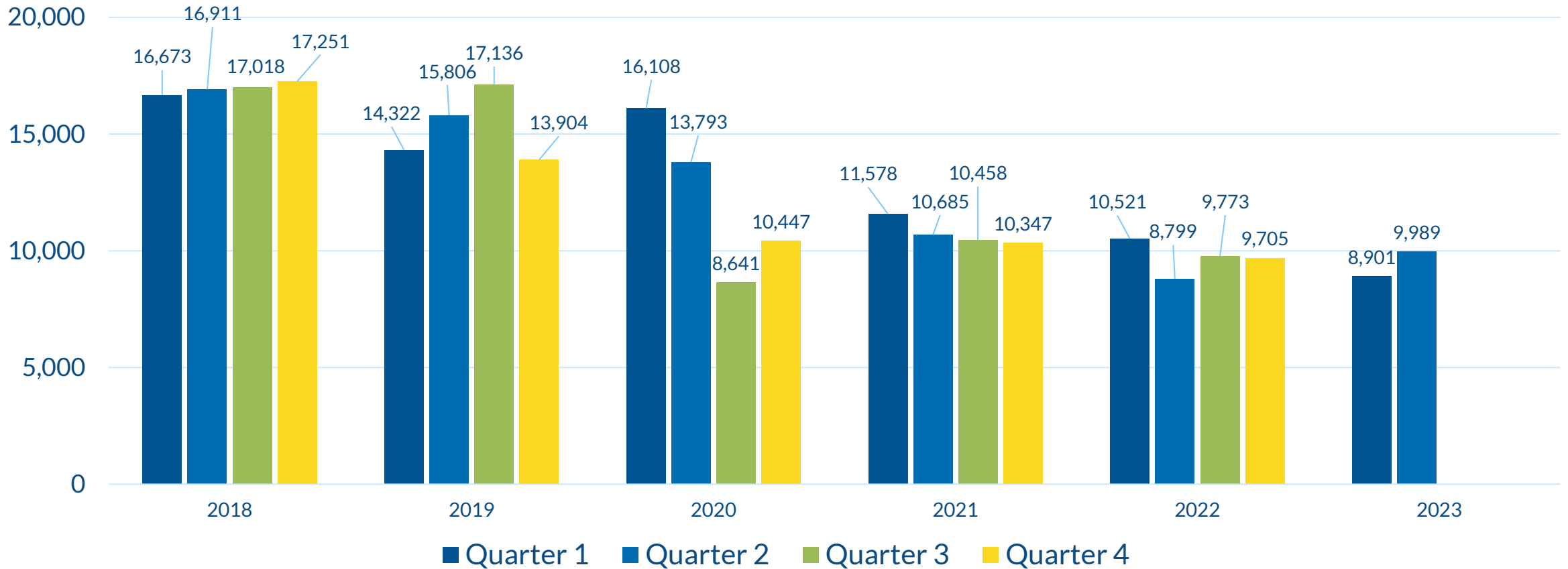
Social Security Claims Filed by Quarter



DDS: Social Security Claims Adjudicated

The adjudication of Social Security claims have not return to pre-pandemic levels.

Number of Claims Cleared



Disability Determination Services

- Total children's initial cases assigned: 1,086
- Total children's initial cases unassigned: 2,919
- Total children's Redetermination* cases assigned: 369
- Total children's Redetermination* cases unassigned: 300

- ***Children's Redetermination:**
 - Under the Social Security Act, DDS must redetermine the eligibility of the individuals who were eligible for SSI income based on their disability in the month before they turn age 18
 - Children's cases are decided on criteria that is specific to children under the age of 18. Once that child turn 18, their case must be reviewed again under the adult criteria to make the determination, with the exception for substantial gainful activity.



Overview of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program

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4. Vocational Services
5. Pre Employment Transitioning Services
6. Challenges and Solutions for the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services

The Vocational Rehabilitation Program serves transitioning students and adults.

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Staffing/Structure

- Each state determines **their own VR program structure**. The **Rehabilitation Act** allows for **three organizational structures** for the VR Program:
 - **Combined Agency:** Provides VR services to all disability groups
 - **General Agency:** Provides VR services to all disability groups, except individuals who are blind
 - **Blind Agency:** Provides VR services to individuals who are low vision or blind
- **DORS is a Combined Agency**
 - Office of Field Services (OFS)
 - Office for Blindness & Vision Services (OBVS)
 - Workforce & Technology Center (WTC)
 - The VR program has **approximately 436 employees** in 21 field offices and the Workforce & Technology Center

Workforce and Technology Center

- The **Workforce and Technology Center** is one of seven comprehensive vocational training centers around the country.
- The Center has two main programs:
 - Workforce Services focuses on **training and employment**
 - **Rehabilitation Assistive Technology**
- The Workforce Services training program works with employers from around the state **to provide industry specific training**, which leads to **higher employment outcomes** for DORS clients.
- The Center partners with the Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) and Prince George's Community College (PGCC) to **deliver customized employer training**.
- The Rehabilitation Assistive Technology program provides **individualized assessments and training on the latest technology** that will provide the necessary accommodations for an individual to be successful in their career.
- Examples of assistive technology are **screen readers, screen enlargements, speech to text and text to speech, and adaptive driving equipment for vehicles**.

Division of Rehabilitation Service Governance

- The **Rehabilitation Act of 1973**, as amended, requires the State Vocational Rehabilitation program to have a **Governor appointed Commission or a State Rehabilitation Council**.
 - **Maryland has a State Rehabilitation Council.**
- Each Council member can **serve up to two three-year terms**.
- **Must represent or be an individual with a disability, current or former clients, and employers.**
- Meet at **least 4 times a year**: February, May, September, and November.
- Responsible for **reviewing performance of the VR agency**.
- Review of VR agency **policies, procedures, regulations**, and provide input and recommendations.
- Collaborate with the VR program in the **tri-annual Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment**.
 - The **Assessment requires stakeholder input** from the disability community, service providers, employers, and DORS staff.

Financial Overview of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program

- The VR program is a **mandatory funded program**; **Congress must provide funding** each year.
 - The VR funding increases based on changes to the Consumer Price Index.
- Funding for each State is **determined by a federal funding formula** which is part of the Rehabilitation Act.
- The funding formula considers:
 - **Average state wage** (Maryland is ranked **#1** in highest median household income), **poverty level of the State**, and **change in the State's population**.
- The funding formula does not consider:
 - **Number of disabled individuals living in the State** or the **cost of living in that State**.
- States must provide **Match** in order to obtain their full allotment of federal funds.
- 78.7% from the federal VR grant and 21.3% must come from the State Match.
 - Commonly referred to as the **“80/20 split.”**
- There is also a **Maintenance of Effort (MOE) requirement** for the State. Meaning the State is required to provide the same level funding effort it had in previous fiscal years.


Vocational Rehabilitation Program

- **Maryland's overall wealth, overall poverty level, and moderate population growth** means that the federal funding formula has an **adverse impact** on the funding for DORS.
- **Maryland**
 - Population: 6.2 million
 - FY 24 Federal Award: \$60,201,129
- **Wisconsin**
 - Population: 5.9 million
 - FY 24 Federal Award: \$76,416,446
- **Missouri**
 - Population: 6.1 million
 - FY 24 Federal Award: \$86,759,015

DORS Funding Past and Future Projections

- Maryland is projected to receive more federal funding than it is currently matching
- For Match, for every \$1,000 dollars the State falls below its Match requirement, DORS loses \$3,695 of its federal funding allotment. By 2029, Maryland could lose as much as \$86,027,562 in federal funds if it does not meet its Match requirement over the next six years.

Year	Federal Grant Award	Required State Match	State Appropriations for the VR Program	Difference in State FY 24 Appropriations Compared to the Required State Match	Federal Funding Loss if State Match is held to FY 24 State Appropriations
2022	\$ 48,610,998.00	\$ 13,156,470.00	\$ 14,825,960.00	\$ 1,669,490.00	
2023	\$ 52,041,475.00	\$ 14,084,922.00	\$ 15,010,351.00	\$ 925,429.00	
2024	\$ 60,201,129.00	\$ 16,293,317.00	\$ 15,234,070.00	\$ (1,059,247.00)	\$ (3,913,917.67)
2025	\$ 63,813,197.00	\$ 17,270,917.00	\$ 15,234,070.00	\$ (2,036,847.00)	\$ (7,526,149.67)
2026	\$ 68,263,261.00	\$ 18,475,318.00	\$ 15,234,070.00	\$ (3,241,248.00)	\$ (11,976,411.36)
2027	\$ 72,710,040.00	\$ 19,678,830.00	\$ 15,234,070.00	\$ (4,444,760.00)	\$ (16,423,388.20)
2028	\$ 77,156,818.00	\$ 20,882,340.00	\$ 15,234,070.00	\$ (5,648,270.00)	\$ (20,870,357.65)
2029	\$ 81,603,596.00	\$ 22,085,853.00	\$ 15,234,070.00	\$ (6,851,783.00)	\$ (25,317,338.19)
				Total Reduction in Federal Funding	\$ (86,027,562.74)

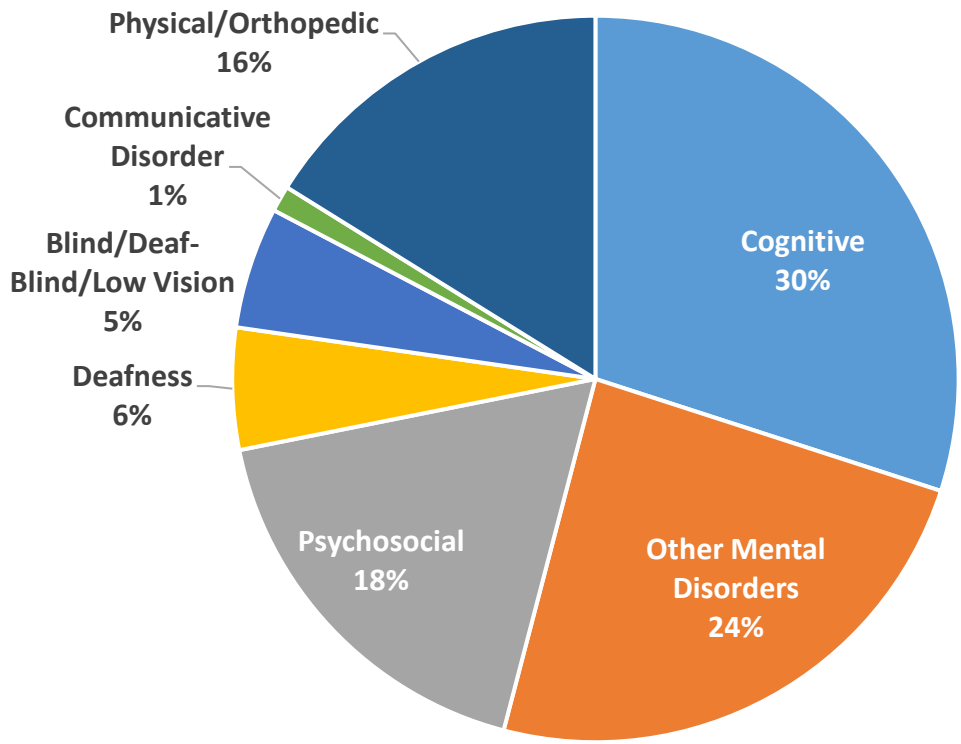
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Vocational Services

Employment in a competitive integrated setting is the goal for all individuals receiving vocational rehabilitation services.

Clients Served by Disabilities, 2018 - 2022

Individuals with a cognitive disability is the largest group served by DORS.

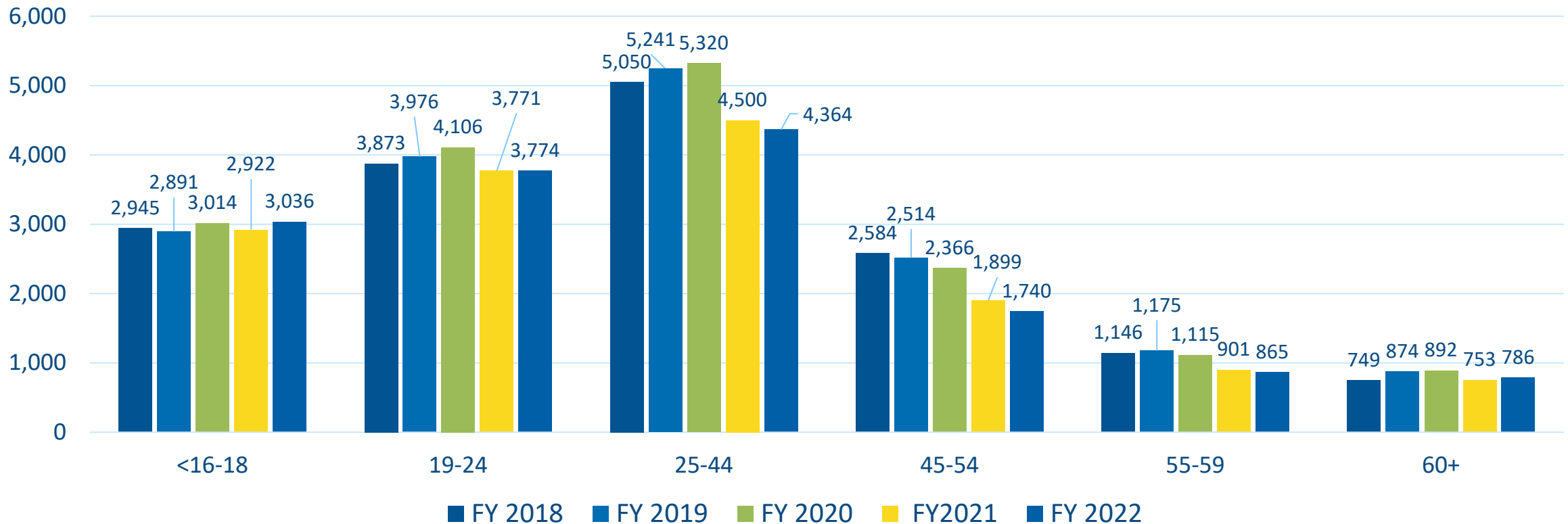


Disability Type	Clients Served
Cognitive	8,475
Other Mental Disorders	6,805
Psychosocial	5,028
Deafness	1,531
Blind/Deaf-Blind/Low Vision	1,530
Communicative Disorder	327
Physical/Orthopedic	4,565

Clients Served by Age Range, FY 2018 – 2022

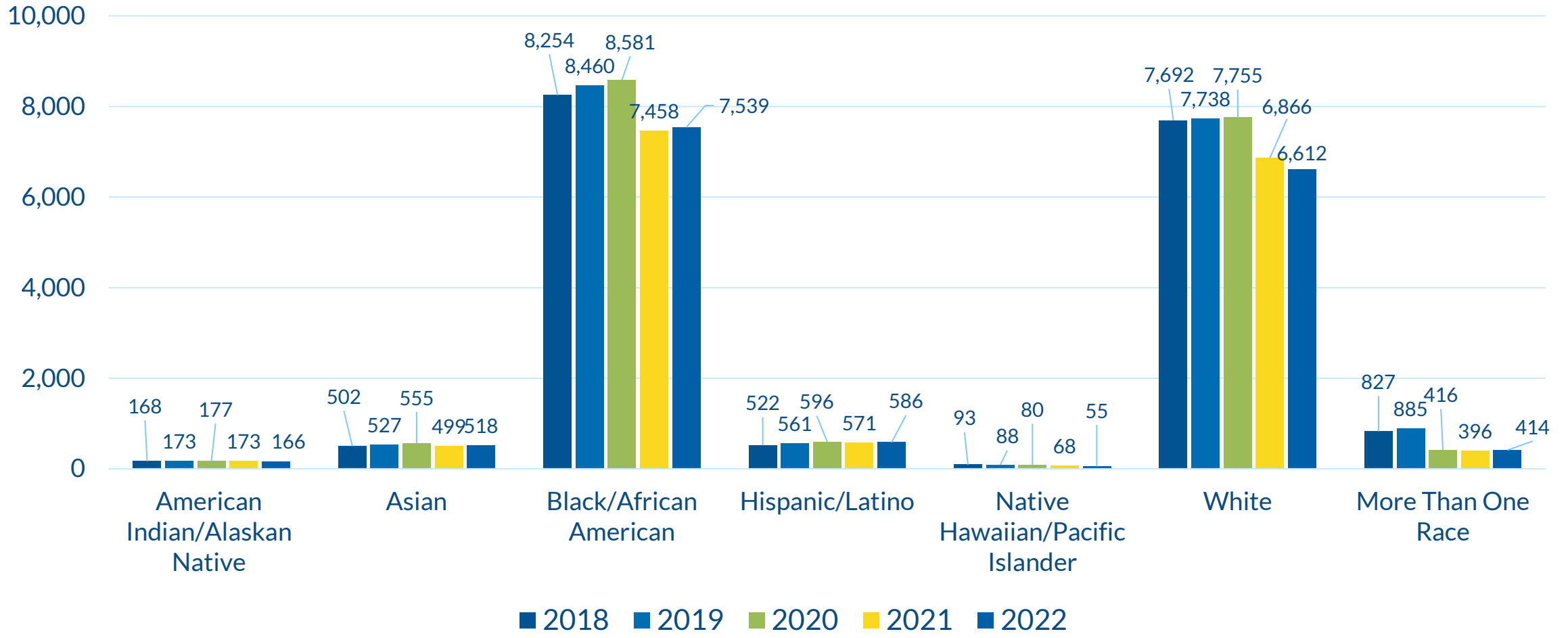
There was a significant drop in individuals who are between the ages of 25-44 during the pandemic.

VR Clients by Age Range



Clients Served by Race/Ethnicity, FY 2018 - 2022

There was a significant drop in Black/African American and White individuals served in 2021 and 2022



The Workforce Innovation Opportunities Act of 2014

- **WIOA made significant changes** to the Vocational Rehabilitation Program.
- **Created two distinct programs** within the Vocational Rehabilitation Program.
 - Traditional adult **vocational program** focused on training and employment.
 - **Pre-Employment Transitioning Services** for students with disabilities.
 - Required that 15% of federal funding be set-aside for this program.
- Changed the **performance requirements of VR programs** to match the requirements traditionally found with the U.S. Department of Labor:
 - Wages 2nd Quarter after exiting the program;
 - Wages 4th Quarter after exiting the program;
 - Median Earnings;
 - Credential Attainment;
 - Measurable Skills Gains; and
 - Engagement with Employers.

Eligibility Process for Vocational Rehabilitation Services

- The **Vocational Rehabilitation program is an eligibility program**, not an entitlement program, this includes students who apply for services.
 - Individuals who apply for services **must be an individual with a disability** that impacts their ability to either obtain or retain employment.
 - The individual must be **seeking employment in a competitive integrated environment**.
- Once the consumer's application is received, it is **assigned to a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor** in the **DORS Eligibility Determination Unit (EDU)**.
 - This unit's **sole focus is obtaining and reviewing** the medical records, determining eligibility of the individual, and assigning the individual to a **Category of service (Order of Selection)** based on the individual's disability and functional limitations.
- In the event the consumer does not have ready access to their medical records, the consumer can **give written permission so that the EDU VR counselor may request those records**, even if there is a cost.
 - If there are no current medical records available, **the EDU VR counselor will make arrangements** for a current physical or psychological evaluation to be performed, at no cost to the consumer.
- The standard set by federal regulation is **60 days for DORS to make an eligibility decision** for vocational rehabilitation services, **DORS makes that decision on average in 37 days**.

What is Order of Selection?

- In accordance with Federal regulation 34 CFR 361.36, if a **State does not have sufficient resources (financial or human) to serve all eligible individuals and provide for the full range of vocational services** then an Order of Selection must be established.
- **Order of Selection** means that the State must **establish the criteria** by which all eligible individuals are placed into a **category based on their severity of their disability**.
 - The criteria must assure that those **individuals with the Most Significant disabilities are served first**.
 - **Maryland has been in Order of Selection since the late 1980s.**

Order of Selection Process

- If it is determined that there is a need to move to Order of Selection, the **VR Program is required to submit to the Rehabilitation Services Administration a plan on how the VR Program is going to serve individuals** on an Order of Selection and what criteria that the VR Program is going to use.
- The criteria is **not based solely on the type of disability.**
- The criteria must be **based on the significance of individual's disability and the impact the disability has on their functional levels.**
- It is **up to the State VR Program** to determine if an Order of Selection is needed in their State and the number of **Categories the State will use** to determine who receives services.

Order of Selection: National Overview

- There are a **total 78 VR agencies in the country** and territories.
- **40 VR agencies have no Order of Selection.**
- **38 VR agencies are on Order of Selection.**
 - **18 of the 38 VR agencies have some categories closed.**
 - **20 of the 38 VR agencies are on Order of Selection with all Categories open.**
- **No VR agencies have all the categories closed.**
- Each State on Order of Selection must set up how they plan to serve individuals and in what order by establishing Service Categories.
 - **32 State VR agencies have three (3) categories, including Maryland**
 - **5 State VR Agencies have four (4) categories**
 - **1 State VR Agency has five (5) categories**

Maryland's Order of Selection (1 of 3)

- **Category 1 – Most Significant**

- An individual with a "**most significant**" disability is an individual who is available and willing to participate in the DORS Vocational Rehabilitation program, meets the definition of significant disability, and has a disability which seriously affects three or more functional capacities. Currently Category 1 is open with no waiting.

- **Example:**

- Consumer has a diagnosis of Bipolar Disorder, Personality Disorder, and recovering substance abuse. Consumer reports that due to her depression she stays in bed days on end at times, and she also reports past hospitalizations for her mental illness (Interpersonal Skills). Consumer stated she resides with her fiancé who supports her financially and he also helps her with daily living tasks (Self Care). Consumer reports she has not worked in approximately 16 years (Limited Work Skills).

Maryland's Order of Selection (2 of 3)

- **Category 2 – Significant**

- An individual with a **“significant” disability** is an individual who is available and willing to participate in the DORS Vocational Rehabilitation program and meets the definition of significant disability; has a disability which seriously affect one or more functional capacities. Currently Category 2 is closed with a four year wait time.

- **Example**

- Consumer has progressively lost her hearing. Consumer provided a recent hearing evaluation and hearing aid recommendation. She communicates verbally and does not know sign language. Consumer is requesting services for DORS to assist with hearing aids so that she can use them as an accommodation on the job.

Maryland's Order of Selection (3 of 3)

- **Category 3 - Non-Severe**

- An individual with a “**Non-Severe**” disability is an individual who is available and willing to participate in the DORS Vocational Rehabilitation program who has been determined eligible for VR services but has not been determined to have a significant or most significant disability. Currently Category 3 is closed, and DORS does not anticipate that it will serve individuals in Category 3.

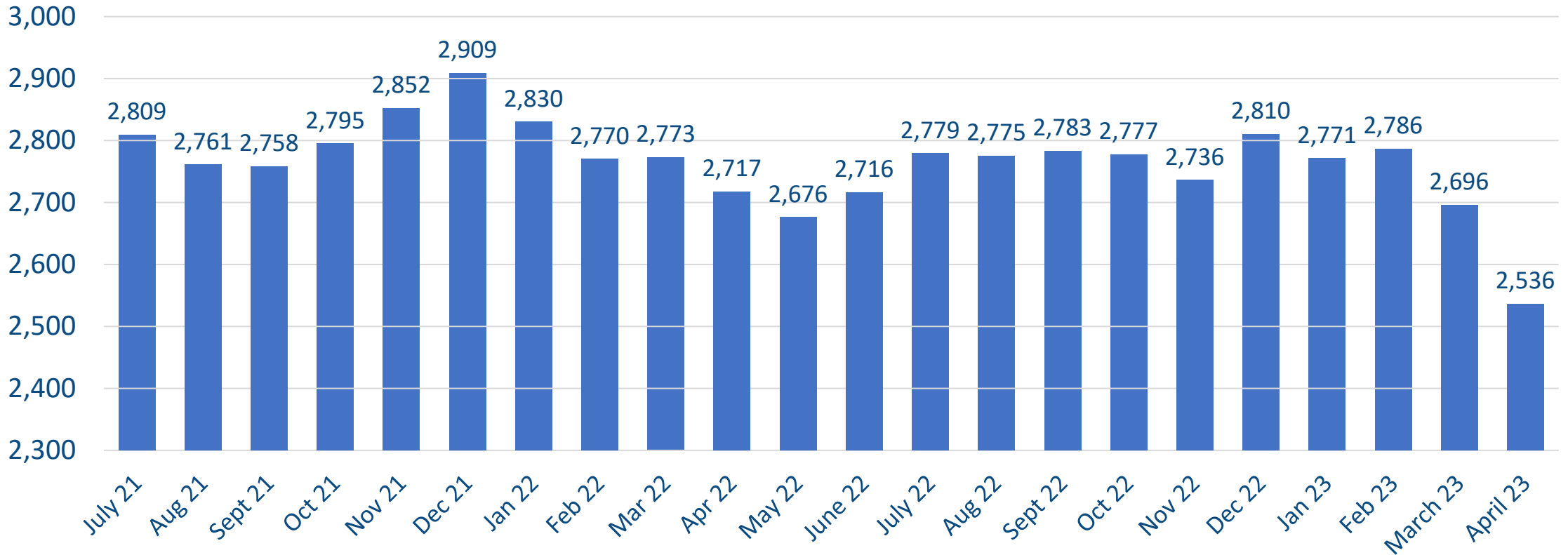
- **Examples**

- Sam's medical documentation points to low back pain controlled with rest and ibuprofen. No other disability information or functional limitation provided.
- Jeff is a 17-year-old student who has a 9th grade reading and math level. Documentation of ADHD but no meds or counseling.

DORS Waitlist Trends

DORS continues to work on lowering the number of individuals on the waitlist.

July 2021 to April 2023 Waitlist



Inputs that Affect the Order of Selection Waitlist

The size of the waitlist is dependent on three major types of issues. The next section will go into details of each of these categories:

- Funding
- Staffing levels
- Workloads

Funding Issues

- In the early to mid 2000s the **relative wealth of the State of Maryland was increasing**. Because of the federal funding formula, the **federal funds** for the VR program were **either flat or decreased**.
- This trend continued for approximately three to four years, while the **costs to operate the Division continue to increase**.
- By the end of **FY 2006** the Division was **running out of funding** before the end of the federal fiscal year.
- To realign resources to **match the federal funds**, the Division shut down all nonessential spending, limited the approval of new services on **Individual Plan for Employment (IPE)**, and in June 2007 **closed Categories 1 and 2**. In addition, the Division laid off and eliminated approximately 30 staff positions.
- In the **FY 2009** budget, **DORS received a \$2 million** State fund enhancement to address the growing waitlist. **Category 1 was fully reopened with Category 2 open, but with a waitlist**.
- By 2012, funding was no longer an issue as DORS had **received funding** through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and through federal reallocation of VR funding from States **who could not meet their Match requirements**.

Staffing Levels

As a result of State budget cuts and the VR federal funding issues, DORS has seen a significant reduction in staff over the years.

Program	FY 2008	FY 2023	Difference	Percentage Change
Headquarters	85	61	24	28%
Office of Field Services	229	198	31	14%
Workforce and Technology Center	130	90	40	31%
Office of Blindness and Vision Services	47	41	6	13%
Totals	491	390	101	21%

Staff Retention and Recruitment

- State **starting salaries were low** when compared to salaries paid by some counties, federal, and private organizations.
- The historically **low salaries made it difficult to both attract and retain experience VR Counselors.**
- **DORS received a small number of applicants** for each recruitment regardless of geographical area of the State.
- The majority of seasoned DORS **VR Counselors have Master's Degrees**, which with their education and VR experiences **makes them an attractive candidate for other organizations.**
- By the end of June 2022, the VR program had **40 vacant VR counselor and supervisor positions**, which represents approximately **25% of frontline VR counseling staff.**

Workloads

- **Nationally**, the average caseload size for a **VR Counselor** is between **85 to 100 cases**.
 - Currently the **average active caseload size** for a **VR Counselor in Maryland** is **139**, if the individuals from the waitlist were added the average caseload would be **156**.
 - The top three counselors have **438 cases**, **334 cases**, and **244 cases**.
- **DORS current active cases** for VR and Pre-ETS is **17,692 cases**. In total, for Fiscal Year 2022, DORS handled **27,561 VR and Pre-ETS cases**.
- In **2007**, DORS handled **25,795 cases** and the waitlist had **4,473 individuals**.
- There is **no** Order of Selection for Pre-Employment Transitioning Services.
- DORS is **averaging 366 new referrals** for either VR or Pre-ETS services each week.

What is the Individual Plan for Employment Process? (1 of 2)

- If an individual is **determined eligible by the EDU** and assigned to category **1, Most Significantly Disabled**, the next step in the process is to **develop an Individual Plan for Employment (IPE)**.
 - At this point the individual is assigned to a VR counselor in the office they selected on their referral form.
- The **IPE is a document that commits the individual and DORS to the services/items that will be provided** and indicates who will be responsible for paying for those services/items.
- The **VR counselor will contact the individual and set up an appointment to begin the process of determining the individual's employment goals and objectives, identifying what training needs the individual may have to meet their employment goals, including needs for Assistive Technology or other supports, while considering any barriers that may have hindered the individual in achieving their employment goal. This process also identifies responsibilities of the individual that they need to do as part of their program. All this is included on the IPE, which is signed by the individual and the DORS counselor.**

What is the Individual Plan for Employment Process? (2 of 2)

- If the individual is unsure of their possible employment or career path, the **VR counselor can arrange for the individual to complete an online interest inventory or an online or in-person Career Assessment to help guide the discussion.**
 - Local labor market information is also used to help determine if the employment goal is realistic.
- The **IPE is a dynamic document that can be amended as the individual progresses through the various stages towards their career goal. DORS can only provide those services that are on the IPE. If new services are needed, then they can be added to the IPE. The IPE also recognizes services that might be provided or funded by other organizations.**
 - Example: DORS has agreed to pay for half of the tuition to go to college with the other half being paid by a Pell grant.
- The **standard set by federal regulation for the development and signing of an IPE is 90 days from date of eligibility.**
 - Currently, **DORS VR counselors average 66 days** to complete this task.

Services Which May be Found on an IPE Under the VR program

- **Vocational Guidance and Counseling**
- **Assessments**
- **Credential training** such as GED, technical and vocational schools, apprenticeships, colleges, and universities
- **Non-Credential training** such as work readiness, **apprenticeship** prep programs, work-based learning, internships, orientation and mobility
- **Job Search and Development/Placement/Coaching**
- **Assistive Technology**
- **Treatment**
- **Home or vehicle modifications**
- **Maintenance and Transportation**
- **Other goods and services**



Pre-Employment Transitioning Services

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5. **Pre-Employment Transitioning Services**
6. Challenges and Solutions for the Division of Rehabilitation Services

Pre-Employment Transitioning Services allows students with a disability to explore the world of work and possible career pathways.

Pre-Employment Transitioning Services

- **Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act** required VR agencies to **set-aside 15% of their VR funding to provide Pre-Employment Transitioning Services** for students with disabilities.
- **A student with a disability** is defined as:
 - An individual who is at least 14 but younger than 22;
 - Is enrolled in secondary or post-secondary school;
 - **Has documented disability is eligible for, and receiving, special education or related services** under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1411 et seq.); or is an individual with a disability, for purposes of Section 504; or has medical documentation.
- Pre-Employment Transitioning Services is limited to five specific services.

Allowed Pre-Employment Transitioning Services (1 of 5)

- **Job Exploration Counseling, or Career Counseling** can include a wide variety of professional activities which help individuals with career-related issues.
- **Examples:**
 - **The student's vocational interest inventory results**
 - **Local labor market** information
 - **In-demand industries** and occupations
 - **Non-traditional employment** options
 - Identification of **career pathways of interest** to the students

Allowed Pre-Employment Transitioning Services (2 of 5)

- **Work Based Learning Experience** is an educational approach or instructional methodology that uses the workplace or real work to provide students with the knowledge and skills that will help them connect school experiences to real-life work activities and future career opportunities.
- Examples:
 - **Job Shadowing**
 - **Career Mentorships**
 - Paid and non-paid **internships**
 - **Service Learning/Volunteering**
 - Paid and non-paid **work experiences**
 - **Workplace Tours/Field Trips**

Allowed Pre-Employment Transitioning Services (3 of 5)

- **Counseling on opportunities for enrollment** in comprehensive transition or postsecondary educational programs.
- **Examples:**
 - **Community Colleges** (AA/AS degrees, certificate programs and classes)
 - **Universities** (Public & Private)
 - **Career pathways** related workshops/training programs
 - **Trade/Technical Schools**
 - **Military**
 - **Post-Secondary programs** at community colleges and Universities for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Allowed Pre-Employment Transitioning Services (4 of 5)

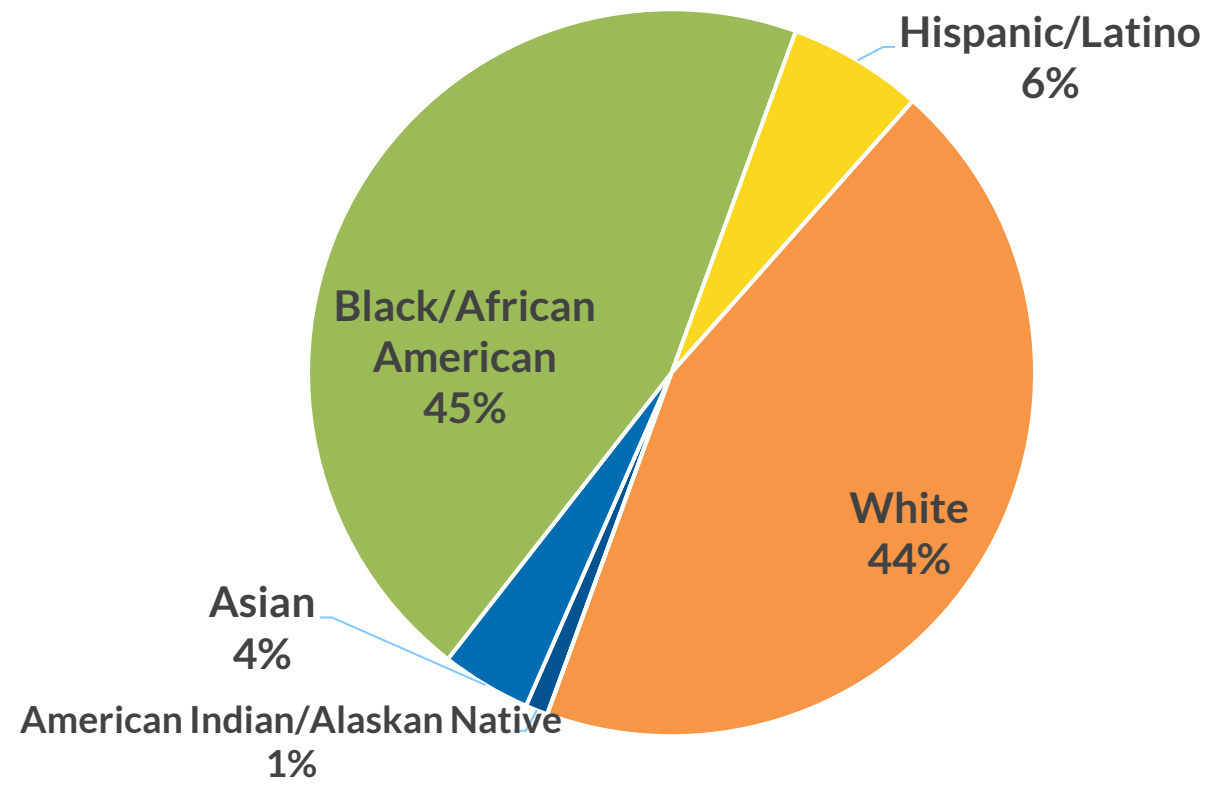
- **Workplace readiness training** to develop a set of skills and behaviors that are necessary for any job and are expected by employers.
- Examples:
 - **Social/Interpersonal Skills**
 - **Independent Livings Skills**
 - **Financial literacy**
 - **Orientation and mobility skills**
 - **Job-seeking skills**
 - **Understanding employer expectations** for punctuality and performance
 - **Other "soft" skills** necessary for employment

Allowed Pre-Employment Transitioning Services (5 of 5)

- **Instruction in self-advocacy** to teach an individual to effectively communicate, convey, negotiate or assert his/her own interests and/or desires.
 - **Self-determination** means that individuals with disabilities have the freedom to plan their own lives, pursue the things that are important to them and to experience the same life opportunities as other people in their communities.
- **Examples:**
 - **Self-awareness**
 - **Understanding one's disability and how to disclose**
 - **Requesting & utilizing accommodations**
 - **Knowing one's rights & responsibilities**
 - **Learning how to problem solving**

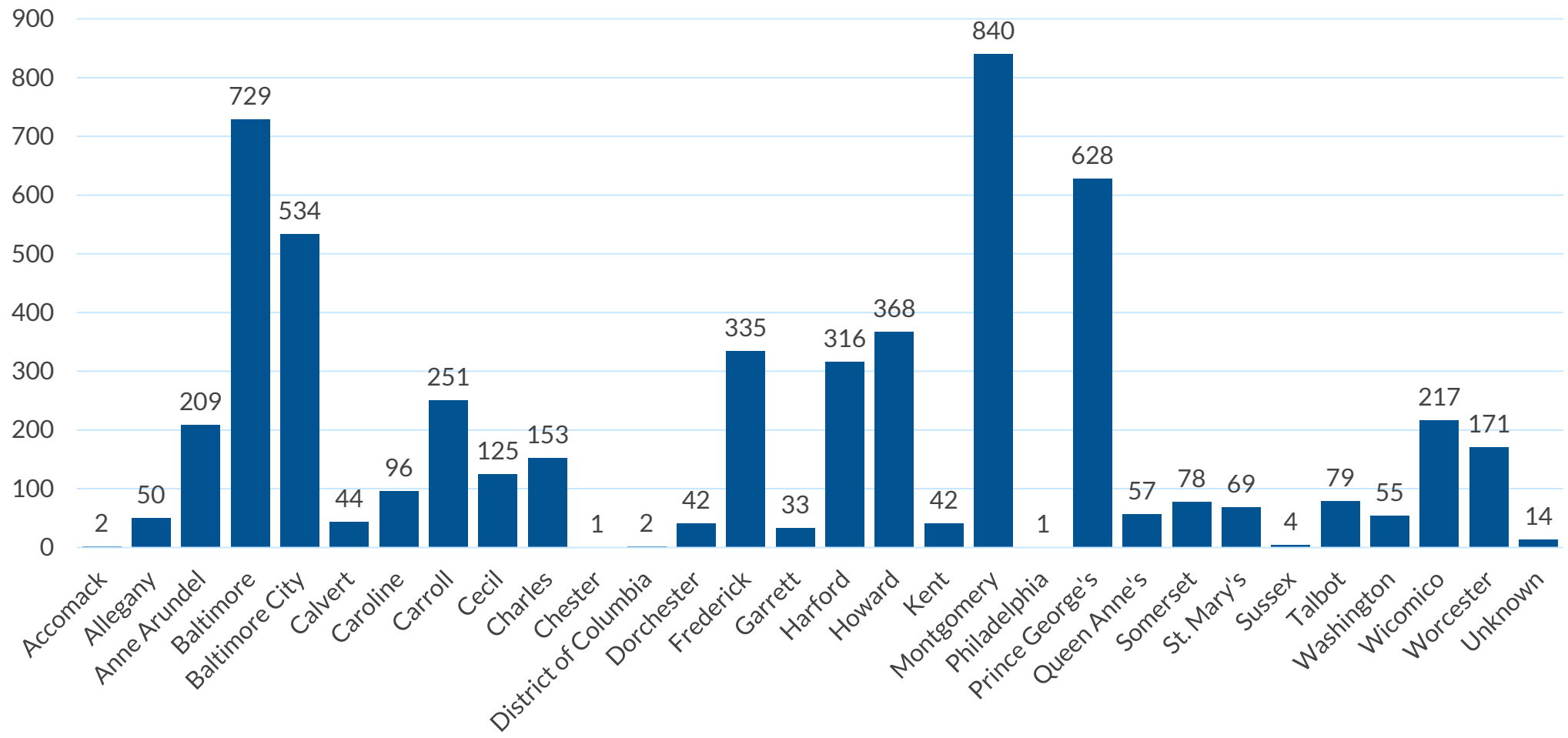
Current Pre-Employment Transitioning Services by Race

Asian and Hispanic/Latino students participate in Pre-Employment Transitioning Services at a higher rate than their participation rate in the vocation rehabilitation program.



Pre-ETS Students by Local Jurisdictions

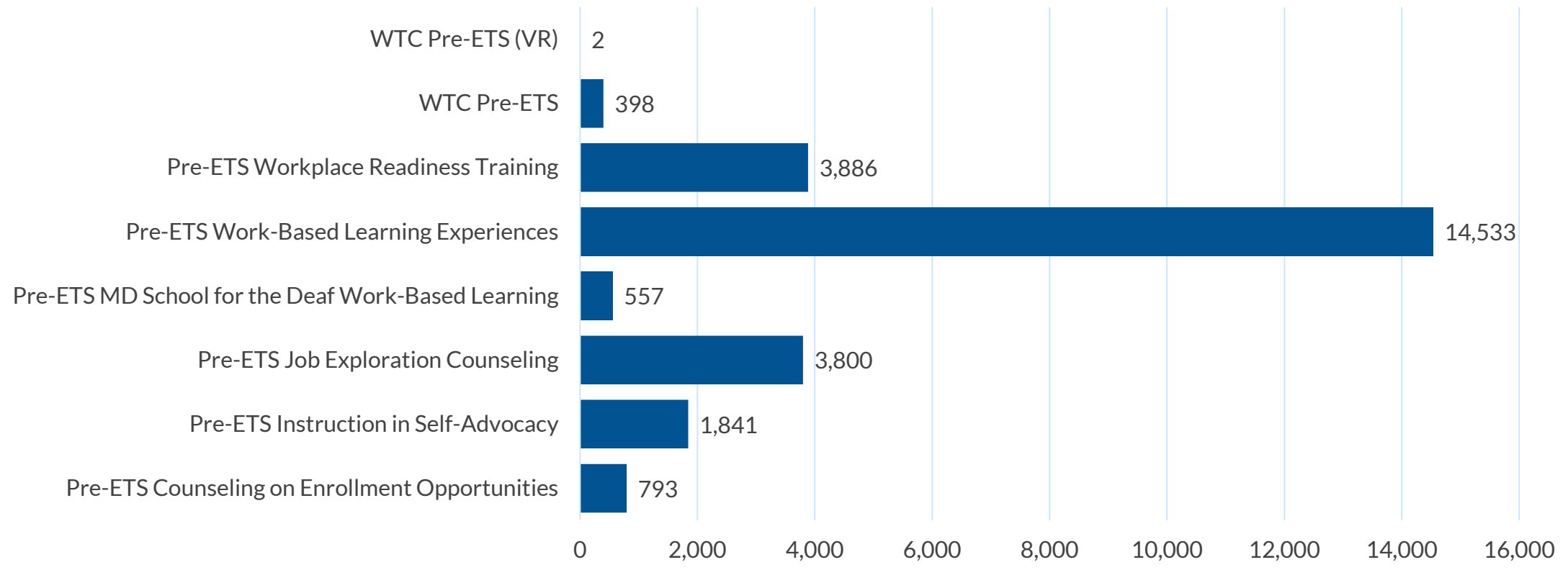
The VR program allows individuals to receive service, including Pre-ETS, from other jurisdictions.



Historical Transitioning Services by Types of Service

DORS has a strong work-based learning experience program, already established prior to WIOA

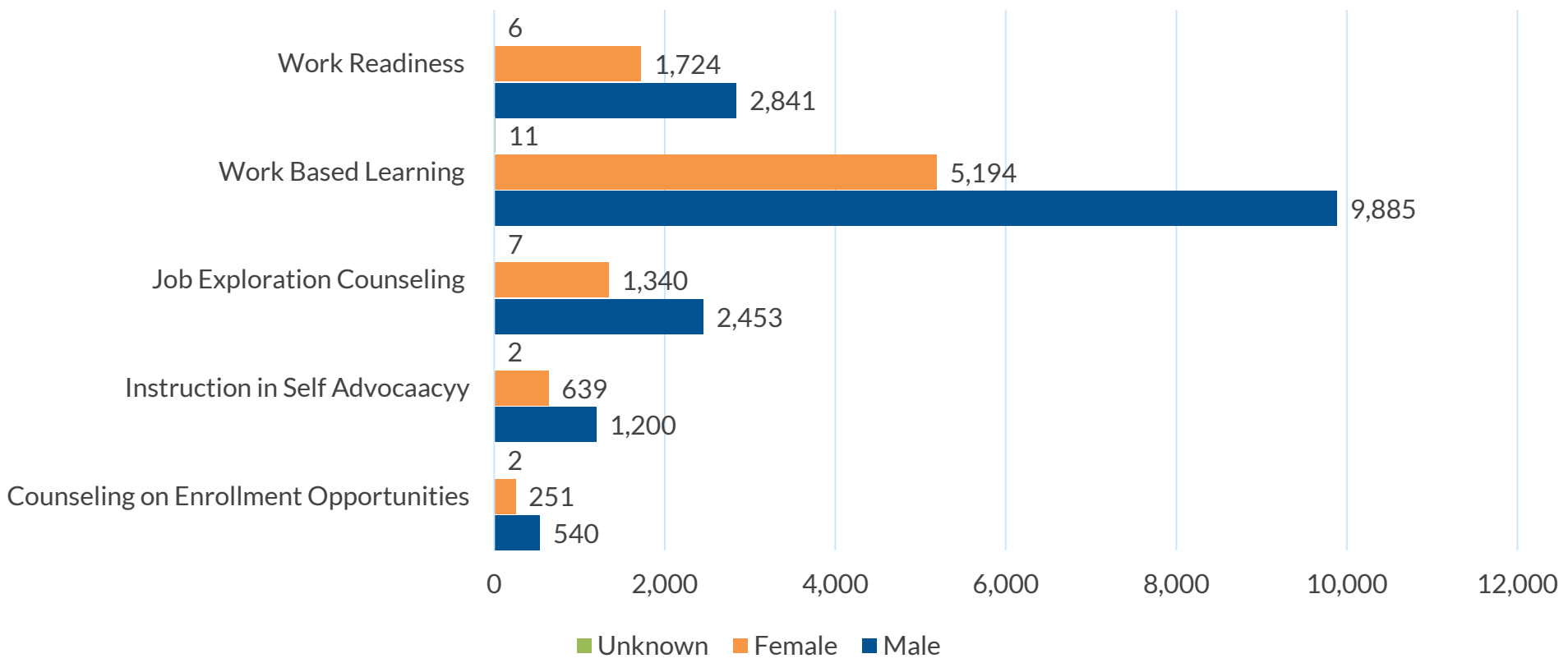
Pre-ETS Services provided since 7/1/2017



Services by Gender

As with the VR program, male participants represent a higher percentage of the participants.

Pre-Employment Services by Gender since 7/1/2017



Students' Perspectives on the Impact of Pre-ETS

- **Christopher**

- <https://youtu.be/6W-vX3VO2GQ>

- **Lucy**

- https://youtu.be/sE11pvA4Q_c



Challenges and Solutions for the Division of Rehabilitation Services

1. Overview of the Division of Rehabilitation Services
2. Disability Determination Services
3. Overview of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program
4. Vocational Services
5. Pre Employment Transitioning Services
6. Challenges and Solutions for the Division of Rehabilitation Services

MSDE is implementing multiple solutions to existing challenges facing the Division of Rehabilitation Services .

Staffing Challenges for the DDS

- DDS had a high level of claims examiner vacancies. In June 2022, **DDS had 59 vacant claims examiner and supervisor vacancies.** This represents approximately **fifty percent** of the positions for claims adjudication.
 - The loss of **one experienced DDS Claims Examiner represents 700 claims that are not adjudicated each year.** With 48 claims examiner vacancies, approximately 33,000 Maryland citizens claims are delayed in being processed.
 - Due to the medical and vocational knowledge required to process all the various types of Social Security claims, it takes **three years to fully train a new claims examiner.**
- The vacancies and other Social Security Administration policy changes has **created a backlog at the Maryland DDS.**
 - The backlog is not just a Maryland issue, **but a national issue as well.**
- The **national backlog currently stands at 580,198.** Maryland's backlog is currently **24,859.** If no more cases were received, it would **take DDS approximately nine months to completely clear the backlog.**
 - Backlog in **other states with similar workloads:**
 - Virginia: 25,422; Wisconsin: 20,707; and Mississippi: 20,658

Staffing Challenges for the VR Program

- VR had a **high level of claims examiner vacancies**.
 - In June 2022, VR program had **40 vacant VR counselor and supervisor vacancies**. This represents approximately **25% of the front-line VR counseling staff**.
- The **caseload size of the VR counselor is nearly double the national average**, which is leading to counselor burnout and high turnover.
- With the high level of VR counselor turnover, the **VR program was in constant new counselor training mode** and unable to provide the necessary ongoing professional development.
- **DORS VR waitlist is the largest and longest wait time in the nation**.
- Due to the **low State starting salary**, DORS was having **difficulty attracting and retaining staff**.
- **Staff was leaving for higher salaries** with the federal government, other states, the District of Columbia, and the private sector.
 - Employees **could earn \$20,000 to \$30,000 more** than what they were earning at DDS.

How MSDE is Addressing Staffing Challenges

- Superintendent Choudhury directed the senior leadership of MSDE and DORS to **undertake a salary study to determine what the appropriate salary range should be.** Based on the salary study and the approval from the Department of Budget and Management, a **new salary structure was created for the claim examiners.**
- On July 1, 2022, the **starting salaries went from \$42,035 to \$54,665.**
 - Today, the starting salary is **\$57,125**
- The starting salary for examiners with a Master's Degree went from **\$44,714 to \$58,226.**
 - Today, the starting salary is **\$60,847**
- As of May 11, 2023, DORS has **zero vacancies** at the DDS and **only 3 VR counselor vacancies** and **1 supervisor vacancy** in the VR program.
 - This is **down from 99 vacancies** in June 2022.
- **Net vacancies, including all staffing in DORS is now 17, down from 122.**

Workload Challenges in the VR Program

- **Nationally**, the average caseload size for a **VR Counselor** is between **85 to 100 cases**.
 - Currently the **average caseload size** for a **VR Counselor in Maryland** is **139**.
 - The top three counselors have **438 cases**, **334 cases**, and **244 cases**.
- DORS **current active cases** for VR and Pre-ETS is **17,692**. At the end of September 2022, **16,920 cases**.
- In total for Fiscal Year 2022, DORS handled **27,561 VR and Pre-ETS cases**.
- There is **no** Order of Selection for Pre-Employment Transitioning Services.
- DORS is **averaging 366 new referrals** for either VR or Pre-ETS services each week.

How MSDE is Addressing the Workload Challenges of the VR Program

- **MSDE is providing support to reduce some of the Pre-Employment Transitioning Services workload.**
- **A partnership was established using MSDE set-aside from federal ESSER funding to create the Centers for Transition and Career Innovation (CTCI), in collaboration with the University of Maryland**
- **Initial funding for the grant was \$1.6 million.** However, due to the increases in the number of Pre-ETS referrals from previous years, **MSDE provided an additional \$350,000 in funding to increase the number of staff at CTCI to support this initiative. The expectation that a sustainable fee for service model will be developed.**
- **CTCI is responsible for reaching out to the parents/guardians of the students to review exactly what Pre-ETS is and is not, discuss what documentation is required, receive the proper consent to obtain that documentation, and collect signatures of the parents/guardians giving permission for the student to participate in Pre-ETS.**
- **If the parents/guardians don't have the necessary documentation, CTCI will reach out to the school system or medical provider to obtain the required records.**
- **Once all necessary documentation and signatures are collected, the information is transmitted to the DORS Eligibility Determination Unit to qualify the student for Pre-ETS.**
- **Since September 2022, CTCI has handled 2,978 Pre-ETS cases for DORS.**

Despite the Challenges, DORS is Expanding Community-Based Services (1 of 2)

DORS currently provides a variety of **community-based services across the State through the Workforce and Technology Center**, including:

- **Community college pathways for students with autism, virtual autism college mentoring program, and autism planning for success program**
- **Driver Education**
- **Work site assessment**
- **Low-vision support group and self-advocacy support group** for Pre-ETS and transitioning students who are blind or low vision is provided virtually
- **Apprenticeship Services Program** is provided in person and virtually
- **Job placement and employment services** is in person and virtually
- **Academic assessment and remediation** is available in person or virtually
- **Pre-GED and GED training** is available in person or virtually

Despite the Challenges, DORS is Expanding Community-Based Services (2 of 2)

DORS is adding training and other services that are offered in communities across the State:

- **DORS' Workforce Services** is working with CVS and has identified Prince George's County as an area of need.
 - The Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) is assisting the Prince George's County Community College (PGCC) in **setting up the curriculum for the CVS training**. The training will take place at PGCC and is expected to start in late spring 2023.
- DORS's **Workforce Services** is working in conjunction with **CCBC** and will be holding the **Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) and Child Care training on CCBC's Catonsville campus**. The **Child Care training** will take place in the summer of 2023 and the CNA training will take place in the fall of 2023.
- **Autism Employment Job Clubs** will work with individuals who are **ready to start searching for a job**. The Job Clubs will be held in the local field offices.
- **Computer Skills Development Program** is to **teach basic computer skills**, the classes will be held in the local field offices.

Expanding Collaboration of MSDE DORS and MSDE Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services (DEI/SES) (1 of 2)

- DORS staff specialist for Transitioning Services and the DEI/SES's Transitioning Specialist **regularly collaborate on several statewide initiatives.**
- **Training is jointly offered for Local Education Agencies' Individual Education Program coordinators and chairs about the intersection of Special Education and DORS transitioning services.**
- DORS and DEI/SES collaboratively attend **State Transition Facilitator Steering Meetings** to inform and apprise steering committee facilitators of new DORS information.
- DORS participates in the **Special Education State Advisory Council (SESAC)**. SESAC is a committee of family members, individuals with disabilities and state agency representatives tasked with advising DEI/SES in administering, promoting, planning, coordinating and improving the delivery of special education and related services as directed by IDEA, Part B.

Expanding Collaboration of MSDE DORS and MSDE Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services (DEI/SES) (2 of 2)

- **DEI/SES and DORS will jointly hold professional learning opportunities for LEAs that will focus on the following four topic areas:**
 - **Unpacking the DORS services and supports for students and youth.**
 - **Understanding the process for the Vocational Rehabilitation and Pre-Employment Transitioning Services programs.**
 - **Support services for special populations.**
 - **Coordination and collaboration between DEI/SES, DORS, and local education agencies.**
- **DORS and DEI/SES will hold an annual joint training conference for VR transitioning counselors, LEA transitioning professionals, and other transitioning professionals.**
 - **This conference will focus on best practices in Maryland and around the country.**

MSDE's Initiative to Secure the Financial Future of the VR program

- As a result of MSDE's engagement with the **Commission to Study DORS**, and with the **support of the Commission**, State Superintendent Choudhury collaborated with members of the General Assembly to introduce legislation to **increase the VR staffing and to secure future state funding** to meet the State's match requirement for the VR program.
- **HB1222/SB934** were introduced during the 2023 General Assembly session to address both issues.
 - The bill would have provided DORS with **74 additional staff positions (PINs)**, which would have **eliminated the DORS waitlist** and allowed for a dramatic **expansion in community-based services**.
 - Would have **required the Governor** to increase State funding to **meet the State Match requirement**, allowing Maryland to get its **full allotment of Federal funding**.
- **Neither bill** passed during this year's session.
- MSDE will **continue to make this a priority each legislative session** until it becomes a reality.

Questions?