

# Injured Employees Rehabilitation Services Working Group

## MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2026

1:00 PM in Room 2A of the LOB and Zoom and [YouTube Live](#)

The following working group members were present:

Rep. Fazzino, J. 83, Sen. Winfield, G. S10, Rep. Quinn, M. 82, Sen. Kissel, J. S07, Rep. Sanchez, E. 24, Sen. Kushner, J. S24, George Michna, Marie Gallo-Hall, Jeremy Brown, Jason Dodge, Bud Drapeau, Eric George, Pete Myers, Dan Livingston, James Demetriades, Mike Petosa, Rudy Demiraj, Michael Muszynski, Diane Ritucci, Katie D'Agostino

Absent were:

Rep. Weir, S. 55, Sen. Sampson, R. S16

### **I. Convene Meeting**

The meeting was called to order at 1:00 PM by the Chairman, Rep. Fazzino, J. 83. Members present in person and online were acknowledged, and audio confirmation was conducted for remote participants.

### **II. Welcome and Introduction of Working Group Members**

Members introduced themselves and stated their affiliations. Participants included representatives from labor organizations, claimant- and employer-side workers' compensation attorneys, insurance carriers, business and municipal associations, the Workers' Compensation Commission (WCC), the Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS), and members of the Connecticut General Assembly (CGA).

### **III. Overview of PA 25-12 and Call of the Working Group**

Rep. Fazzino, J. 83 provided an overview of Public Act 25-12, enacted in spring 2025, highlighting four major components related to workers' compensation:

- Amendments requiring administrative law judges to award the next class of benefits once an injured worker reaches maximum medical improvement, following the *Gardner v. the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS)* decision.
- Expansion of survivorship benefits to include parents of deceased workers when no designated beneficiary exists.
- Creation of supplemental benefits for seriously injured workers engaged in vocational rehabilitation who cannot return to their prior occupation.

- Finally, the establishment of the Rehabilitation Services Working Group.

The Chair outlined the working group's charge, which includes evaluating whether the Workers' Compensation Act provides adequate funding for rehabilitative services, identifying ways to encourage injured workers to utilize such services, and considering whether additional benefits are warranted for workers receiving permanent partial disability (PPD) benefits.

Sen. Kissel, J. S07 and Rep. Fazzino, J. 83 discussed the statutory timeline for the working group's responsibilities. A preliminary report is due in February 2026, and a final report is due prior to the convening of the 2027 legislative session. Any legislative action based on the group's recommendations is anticipated for 2027 and beyond.

#### **IV. Review and Discuss Initial Areas of Focus**

Attorney Bud Drapeau discussed the circumstances of injured workers who sustain permanent restrictions that prevent them from returning to their prior occupation and whose employers cannot accommodate those restrictions. Concerns were raised regarding workers whose benefits expire while they are retraining, creating a financial disincentive to begin vocational rehabilitation.

Additional commentary by Attorney James Demetriades focused on workers with relatively low disability ratings but significant functional limitations that prevent them from continuing in physically demanding professions, including healthcare workers, firefighters, and other public safety employees. Attorney Demetriades further noted the difficulty such workers face in transitioning to employment with comparable wages and benefits.

Pete Myers expressed interest in understanding current utilization rates and outcomes of the state's vocational rehabilitation programs. Attorney Dan Livingston discussed the need to evaluate where data is coming from and whether existing programs are effectively returning injured workers to the workforce, as well as whether program design or incentives could be improved.

Marie Gallo-Hall explained that the Workers' Compensation Commission (WCC) does not collect comprehensive post-claim employment outcome data and does not have the capacity to conduct follow-up surveys once cases are closed. It was noted that vocational rehabilitation services are administered through the Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS), which George Michna explained maintains more relevant data.

A substantial portion of the discussion focused on the lack of comprehensive, centralized data. Members emphasized that anecdotal evidence alone is insufficient to guide policy recommendations, and they identified two primary data questions:

1. The percentage of injured workers who apply for and utilize vocational rehabilitation services.
2. The percentage of injured workers who do not return to their prior job, including distinctions between returning to the same employer in a different role versus employment with a different employer.

Potential data sources discussed included the Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS), municipal insurers, large public-sector employers, large private employers (subject to confidentiality constraints), insurance carriers, and industry rating organizations. Members stressed the importance of clear definitions and data consistency.

#### **V. Other Business**

Members discussed historical changes to vocational rehabilitation, including its removal from the Workers' Compensation Commission (WCC) and the impact of those changes on injured workers. Diane Ritucci noted that vocational rehabilitation participation has been limited and raised concerns about administrative delays, lack of engagement, and insufficient support during retraining. Comparisons to vocational rehabilitation models in neighboring states were suggested as a potential benchmark for evaluating Connecticut's approach.

Rep. Fazzino, J. 83 summarized next steps, including outreach by members to their respective organizations and agencies to identify available data. He clarified that the Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS) will serve as an initial baseline data source.

#### **VI. Announcement of Date and Time of Next Meeting**

Rep. Fazzino, J. 83 announced that he will coordinate with staff to schedule a follow-up meeting prior to the start of the 2026 legislative session on February 4<sup>th</sup>.

#### **VII. Adjournment**

There being no further business, a motion was duly made by Rep. Fazzino, J. 83 to adjourn the meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 1:45 PM.