Report on the Response of the Department of Rehabilitative Services to the Impact of the Aging of Virginia’s Population

James A. Rothrock, M.S., L.P.C.
Commissioner

November 15, 2007
Pursuant to legislation enacted by the Virginia General Assembly of Virginia, the Department of Rehabilitative Services submits this report of its progress in addressing the impact of the aging of Virginia’s population.

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Executive Summary

During FY 2007 the Department of Rehabilitative Services (DRS) provided services to 245 persons who were over the age of 65. The DRS programs utilized by senior citizens include Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), Community Rehabilitation Case Management Services, Personal Assistance Services (PAS), as well as services at the Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center (WWRC).

Most of the services offered through DRS have growing waiting lists. As the number of seniors grow this may present problems in access to services. PAS is one valuable service that has direct applicability to helping seniors to maintain control and independence in their lives. This service is a more desirable and less expensive alternative to assisted living and nursing care. If PAS is to adequately address the growing population of seniors that would benefit, funding will have to be increased accordingly in order to address the growing waiting list and to provide the needed supports as the need arises.

*GrandDriver* is one program that provides a needed service. WWRC and the Virginia Department of Aging initiated a partnership in July 2004 to provide comprehensive driving assessments and specialized training for elderly individuals with disabilities and those with Alzheimer’s, utilizing federal funding from the Administration on Aging under the Alzheimer’s Demonstration Grants Initiative. Federal grant funding for this high demand program expired, effective July 1, 2007. Over one hundred thirty individuals have been served through the Virginia “*GrandDriver* Program”. WWRC continues to offer this program for seniors with disabilities; however, the cost of services, now that it is not subsidized by grant funding, is considered prohibitive by many eligible participants and their families.

The Department of Rehabilitative Services is actively involved in meeting the requirements of HBs 110, 854, and 2624. DRS is developing strategies and revising printed and web based media to be more “senior-friendly” even though the relative numbers of seniors served is small. Telephone and office accessibility is very good due to the commitment that DRS has to address accessibility issues for physically disabled citizens of the Commonwealth.

Additional funding is needed to address the growing number of seniors that require DRS services especially if the goal is to provide valuable programs like PAS and *GrandDriver* to more of Virginia’s aging citizens.
Agency Description

DRS provides and advocates for the highest quality services that empower individuals with disabilities to maximize their employment, independence and full inclusion into society. DRS manages the federal-state funded VR program that provides eligible individuals with disabilities with a comprehensive array of services to enable them to obtain, retain, or advance in employment. There are field offices throughout the Commonwealth that provide VR services to eligible individuals with disabilities. DRS also operates WWRC which provides comprehensive residential and outpatient services to individuals with multiple and complex disabilities. In addition, supports and services to enhance the independence of individuals with significant disabilities are provided through an array of community-based programs.
Data Requested

Number of Senior Citizens Receiving Services

During Fiscal Year 2007, the DRS provided services in the following program areas to aging persons:

Vocational Rehabilitation: 80 Total  
Age 65-74: #70; ages 75-84: #10; ages 85+: #0

Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center: 108 Total  
Age 65-74: #56; ages 75-84: #42; ages 85+: #10

Community Rehabilitation Case Management: 38 Total  
Age 65-74: #38; ages 75-84: #0; ages 85+: #0

Personal Assistance Services: 19 Total  
Age 65-74: #14; ages 75-84: #3; ages 85+: #2.

Grand Total: 245

Sub-Totals: age 65-74: #178; age 75-84: #55; age 85+: #12

These numbers are fewer than the previous fiscal year. The largest reason for this decrease is the loss of funding for GrandDriver.
The DRS programs utilized by senior citizens (age 65 or older) include VR, CRCM, PAS, and services at the WWRC. VR services assist eligible individuals with disabilities in becoming or maintaining employment. CRCM provides case management services to individuals with physical and sensory disabilities. PAS, sometimes called attendant care, is a range of non-medical services provided by one or more persons, designed to assist an individual with a significant physical disability with completion of activities of daily living such as dressing, bathing, and toileting. WWRC in Fishersville provides a comprehensive array of services (vocational, medical) to individuals to help them to achieve employment or live more independently. While senior citizens may have access to these programs depending on their ability to meet certain eligibility requirements, none of these programs are utilized by senior citizens in significant numbers. VR, WWRC, PAS and CRCMS each have a waiting list for services. Given the few number of senior citizens served by these programs, it is likely that the waiting lists contains few if any senior citizens. The PAS Program has funding to serve about 140 consumers per year and will require more funding to expand sufficiently to serve the growing numbers of seniors that will need personal assistance. There is already a waiting list of 54 persons of all ages for PAS.

The growing number of senior citizens that could potentially benefit from PAS will need to be funded either through additional funds provided to DRS for this purpose or through the Virginia Department for the Aging. This is a vital service that can significantly delay or prevent nursing home placement. Senior citizens who are able to remain in their own homes and stay in control of their day to day lives will appreciate the opportunity to remain independent as long as possible. PAS can provide hands on assistance with bathing, dressing, grooming, using the toilet, eating, and transferring. These activities are not provided by the Department of Social Services Home Based Services. These services can be delivered by home health care agencies using Certified Nursing Assistants to provide these kinds of help. When this route is used the cost is double and there is a loss of direct control by the consumer. In contrast, PAS provides direct control to the consumer. While many persons will receive PAS from Medicaid funded
programs, Medicaid is restrictive due to the requirements limiting services to only those seniors that meet extremely low income and resource limits. At the same time, many seniors that need personal assistance cannot afford to bear the cost by themselves. DRS PAS is one program that makes this possible.
Agency Programs Designed to Serve Senior Citizens

DRS does not provide any programs specifically designed to serve senior citizens. DRS’ mission is to provide services to Virginians with disabilities to help them become employed or live more independently.
Consumer Oriented Publications and Web Sites

Upon request, DRS provides information to citizens in large print, Braille, or in recorded media. The 1-800 information and referral number is manned by live employees not automated menus. TTY communication is also offered. All offices are fully accessible to people with disabilities.

Mary Margaret Cash, Assistant Commissioner for Community Based Services, serves on the Streamlining Access for “No Wrong Door” work group convened by the Department for the Aging and the Statewide Advisory Council for the Integration of Community-based Services.
Future Programs to Serve Senior Citizens

DRS was asked to participate in the GrandDriver effort through the Virginia Department of Aging when they were applying for their second round of three year funding from the Administration on Aging for their Alzheimer's Demonstration Grants. DRS initially received funding ($90,000) in July of 2004, followed by $55,000 in July of 2006. Federal grant funding for this high demand program expired, effective July 1, 2007. Since inception of this collaborative initiative, over one hundred thirty individuals have been served through GrandDriver. Nearly all clients have been seen for more than 1 visit and many clients received several sessions of driver’s training. Therapists continue to travel to the majority of these client’s home areas as part of the comprehensive evaluation and training process. The Department of Motor Vehicles is requiring that persons with questionable driving abilities be evaluated by Certified Driving Rehabilitation Specialists (CDRS) before licenses can be considered for reinstatement. WWRC currently employs three CDRS employees; there are only eight across the Commonwealth of Virginia. As a result, a high number of inquiries have been generated as well as a high demand for this service.

WWRC continues to offer this program for seniors with disabilities; however, the cost of services, now that it is not subsidized by grant funding, is considered prohibitive by many eligible participants and their families because these services are not reimbursable under Medicare or other insurance carriers. This creates a barrier to access for services critical to maintaining their level of independence. WWRC would be willing to explore strategies to subsidize this cost, through shared funding with other state agencies, to make this service more affordable for eligible seniors with disabilities.
Aging of the Agency’s own Workforce

DRS is currently addressing significant challenges regarding an aging workforce, increasing number of retirement eligible employees, loss of expertise of experienced employees as they leave the agency due to retirement, changing demographics and its impact on the agency culture, and an environment of continued change and complexity.

DRS employees over the age of 50 now exceed half the workforce. Additionally, more than three fourths of the workforce is over the age of 40. One in 6 employees are immediately eligible for retirement without reduction in benefits.

DRS has identified several strategies to fill to address problems related to the issue of an aging workforce. These include both formal and informal training of employees, greater communication among all staff (especially managers), greater planning efforts in all agency operations, and ongoing monitoring of the progress of the plan.

Current DRS Workforce Strategies:

- **Agency Critical Functions** have been identified and documented. A backup person has been identified for each Critical Function.

- **Special Consultants**: DRS has completed a brochure intended for agency employees retiring or leaving the agency. This brochure encourages the employees to come back at a later time after retirement. The purpose is to utilize the skills and knowledge of that employee in a special role. This role could cover the spectrum from mentor and coach to process improvement and special projects. The brochure is being included in retiree separation packages to make individuals aware of the possibility of employment after retirement.

- **Employee Satisfaction**: Ongoing efforts to improve employee satisfaction (including employee satisfaction surveys) and encourage existing employees to stay with the agency continue in conjunction with efforts to cross train other employees continue at DRS.

- **Student Internship Program** with various colleges and universities,

- **Expanded use of telecommuting, alternate work schedules, and flexible work hours** to attract and retain staff.