

## **MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING**

**Between the**

**Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians**

**For the Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation Program**

**And the**

**Maine Department of Labor**

**Bureau of Rehabilitation Services**

**Division of Vocational Rehabilitation**

**Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired**

The Maine Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, through its Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (hereinafter referred to as BRS DVR/DBVI), shall collaborate with the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians, through its Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation Program (hereinafter referred to as WVRP), as the recipient of Section 121 Grant under Title 1 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014 to enhance the lives of American Indians with Disabilities. This Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) represents the cooperation, coordination and collaboration required to create a joint effort within Maine's rehabilitation community to increase vocational opportunities for American Indians in Maine with disabilities (hereinafter referred to as consumers).

The State of Maine Bureau of Rehabilitation Services and the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians herein express a shared commitment to advance the principles of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014, in a unified manner. BRS DVR/DBVI and WBVR will meet all the required obligations and responsibilities contained in state and federal laws and regulations.

### **Shared Principles and Values**

In the spirit of enhancing the lives of individuals with disabilities, the BRS DVR/DBVI joins the WVRP to provide VR services and agrees:

- To have mutual respect for each other, their cultural differences, and their tribal or government entity and actively strive to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- That individuals with disabilities can live independently, are able to work in competitive and integrated employment settings in their communities and are respected members of the community.
- That the informed choice provisions in the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014, empower individuals with disabilities to take ownership of their rehabilitation planning and outcomes will be respected.
- To the principle of cooperation yet value the difference of opinions that enrich our abilities in the future.

- To express their opinions and educate partners toward their point of view and agree to work toward consensus.

#### Parties to this Agreement

- The Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians, through the WWRP, as the recipient of Section 121 Grant (under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act 1973, as amended by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014), is responsible for implementing Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services to eligible members with disabilities of federally recognized tribes who reside on or near tribal reservations or tribal lands in Maine
- The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and Division of the Blind and Visually Impaired are the two Designated State units that are responsible for the administration of the federal Vocational Rehabilitation Program (under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014) in Maine. DVR and DBVI are part of the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services within the Maine Department of Labor.

#### Implementation and Coordination of Services

- A. Both WWRP and BRS DVR/DBVI have a responsibility to provide VR services to eligible or potentially eligible American Indians of Maine's Federally Recognized Tribes with disabilities who reside on or near reservations or tribal lands. The applicant must be an enrolled member of the federally recognized tribes in Maine (i.e. Maliseet, Mic Mac, Passamaquoddy, Penobscot) currently living in our service area defined in the program narrative for the Vocational Rehabilitation Service Projects For American Indians With Disabilities, 84.250J, Aroostook, Washington, or Penobscot counties. Any Tribal member who resides outside one of the established service areas is not eligible for services and will be referred to BRS DVR/DBVI. Provision of VR services will be consistent with individual strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, and informed choices so that they may prepare for, obtain, maintain or advance in gainful employment.
- B. In the event that the Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation Program does not receive continued grant funding, individuals being served by WWRP will be offered a transfer of VR services to DVR and/or DBVI based upon the IPE's developed by WWRP VR Counselors.
- C. Rights of consumers to services from either program will not be superseded by this agreement.
- D. The authority and responsibility of either party to manage its own staff (including location of staff, assignment of staff responsibilities, training staff and staff supervision), to manage program resources, and to manage the programs for which they are responsible will not be abridged by any statements contained in this MOU.
- E. Each agency will prepare and make available to the other, at least annually, a list of staff potentially providing service to joint consumers, their service area, and normal itineraries.
- F. WWRP and BRS DVR/DBVI agree to arrange regular meetings to coordinate services on program and individual consumer services delivery levels.
- G. WWRP and BRS DVR/DBVI agree to work cooperatively to maximize funding from the Social Security Administration's Ticket to Work Program.
- H. Under the terms of this MOU, American Indians with disabilities may become consumers of both WWRP and BRS DVR/DBVI simultaneously. Concurrent services may be provided by both WWRP and BRS DVR/DBVI. The following is a general description of the process:

- Upon initial contact with the new consumer, the BRS DVR/DBVI counselor or the WWRP counselor should refer the consumer to the program if there is a potential for the individual to benefit from the other program. (The consumer has the right to refuse the referral.)
- Referrals are regarded as new consumers for the receiving agency, and both agencies will make every effort to be responsive to the needs of the other and the other's consumers.
- Referrals will be facilitated by individual VR counselors.
- An agreement from the consumer (including an authorization to share information) to perform joint planning and service delivery may be obtained when deemed necessary or when there is current or past involvement of the consumer with the other agency. The consumer will be informed that this authorization is for the duration of the entire rehabilitation process. The consumer may revoke the authorization at any time. This right to revoke shall be clearly contained in the authorization to release information.
- Upon execution of an authorization of release of information by the consumer, documentation and other information obtained by an agency will be released to the other as may be necessary and useful.
- Qualified VR staff from either the WWRP or the BRS DVR/DBVI will make decisions regarding administration of VR program in accordance with their own agency policies. Moreover, both agencies will observe presumption of eligibility as state in the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014.
- Individualized Plans for Employment (IPE) shall, when appropriate, be jointly developed and accepted by WWRP and the BRS DVR/DBVI to guarantee a comprehensive level of service in a coordinated manner.
- A separate consumer record of services will be maintained by each agency.
- Disagreements regards the coordination and delivery of VR services will be addressed by the due process procedures of the agency from which the consumer has a dispute. The Client Assistance Program (CAP) will be offered to consumers and made available as an advocacy resource
- **Pre-Employment Transition Services** - Students with disabilities, as defined under WIOA, have the right to access five Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) as either potentially eligible or eligible individuals. BRS DVR/DBVI will collaborate with WWRP - whenever appropriate - in planning, coordination, and delivery of Pre-ETS in the identified service area to ensure culturally responsive services. In the course of providing Pre-ETS, BRS DVR/DBVI may serve students who may be potential WWRP consumers and will share information on WWRP and facilitate a referral given a signed release. BRS DVR/DBVI will share information with WWRP on planned Pre-ETS activities occurring across the state - including summer work experience and work-based learning activities, disability-specific services, peer mentoring, social skill instruction and other services and programs to promote post-secondary success - to encourage enrollment of WWRP consumers.

### Roles and Responsibilities of Each Party

#### **Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation Program:**

- A. WWRP agrees to utilize a service delivery system similar to the system used by BRS DVR/DBVI. Utilizing similar systems will guarantee that program provisions and consumer's transition will be responsive to requirements of Section 121.
- B. WWRP will provide technical assistance to BRS/DBVI as appropriate.
- C. WWRP will provide training - at least annually - to BRS DVR/DBVI to increase the cultural competence of BRS DVR/DBVI staff and improve skills in serving Maine's American Indians with disabilities.
- D. WWRP will identify a primary point of contact to act as liaison to BRS DVR/DBVI and will ensure that a program representative participates on both State Rehabilitation Councils for BRS DVR/DBVI.
- E. WWRP will provide the above service at no cost to BRS DVR/DBVI

#### **BRS Division of Vocational Rehabilitation/Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired:**

- A. BRS DVR/DBVI agrees to provide WWRP technical assistance and consultation through access to staff and program policies and procedures.
- B. BRS DVR/DBVI will identify a primary point of contact to act as liaison to WWRP.
- C. BRS DVR/DBVI will include WWRP in training (including "New Counselor Training") offered as part of its Comprehensive System of Personnel Development to improve services to Mainers with disabilities and expand the availability of qualified rehabilitation staff. Videoconferencing will be strategy used to increase access to training, given Maine's large geographical area.
- D. BRS DVR Intake Unit will identify co-enrollment opportunities for clients eligible for both WWRP and DVR.
- E. BRS DVR/DBVI will assign a representative to serve on the Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation Advisory Committee.
- F. BRS DVR/DBVI will share labor market intelligence and employer resources with WWRP.
- G. BRS DVR/DBVI will provide the above services at no cost to WWRP.

### Confidentiality

All material and information, whether verbal, written or in electronic format, exchanged between WWRP and BRS DVR/DBVI as part of the coordinated service delivery of VR services in Maine shall be regarded as confidential information. Steps will be taken by WWRP and BRS DVR/DBVI to safeguard the confidentiality of such material or information in compliance with federal and state statutes and regulations, including expressed written consent and file protections.

### Dispute Resolution

If a dispute develops that is related to the execution of the MOU, the parties will look to the leadership in their respective organizations for resolution. If resolution cannot be achieved that is satisfactory to both WWRP and BRS DVR/DBVI, then the parties will engage a certified mediator to assist in resolution of the issue. If resolution through mediation is not possible then the Rehabilitation Services Administration will be consulted for technical assistance.

### General Provisions

- A. This MOU will not supersede any powers, rights or responsibilities under applicable federal, tribal, state constitutions, laws, administrative rules, standards, or Executive Orders of any

party to this MOU. All actions under this MOU will be carried out in accordance with these constitutions, laws, rules, standards and Executive Orders.

- B. The MOU will take effect upon the date of signature by WVRP and BRS DVR/DBVI and shall remain in effect unless terminated upon (30) days advanced notice by either party. By such termination, no party may nullify obligations incurred prior to the effective date of termination.
- C. The MOU will be reviewed at least annually.
- D. This MOU may be modified, but only in writing and only with concurrence of all signatories to this MOU.
- E. If any element of this MOU is determined to be invalid, the remainder of provisions within this Agreement will not be affected.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, this Memorandum of Understanding has been executed and approved by the parties and persons whose signatures appear below:

**Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians**

By: *Darcy Gentle*  
Darcy Gentle, Director

1-2-2024  
Date

Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation Program

**Maine Department of Labor**

**Bureau of Rehabilitation Services**

By: *Libby Stone-Sterling*

1/4/2024

Libby Stone-Sterling, Director

Date

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

By: *Elissa Rowe*  
Elissa Rowe, Director

1/4/24

Date

Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Approved 2/28/09  
Reviewed 3/1/10  
Approved 6/17/11  
Revised 5/16/13  
Revised 7/01/15  
Revised 10/31/17  
Approved 1/29/19  
Revised 5/19/21  
Revised 7/16/22  
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