

**Utah Department of Workforce Services and Utah State Office of Rehabilitation**  
**Livestream Video Transcript**  
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**NATE:**

I'd like to welcome everyone joining us today as part of Workforce Services and the Utah State Office of Rehabilitation. I'm here today with Jon Pierpont, executive director of the Department of Workforce Services and Darin Brush, the executive director of USOR.

We're happy to be here to really talk about the important legislation that was passed over the session and was just signed by Governor Herbert to really talk about the transition of what's going to be happening over the next few months and this is a great opportunity to be able to really hear from both Jon and from Darin.

We've got a great response from many of you asking questions and we have these questions ready and we're gonna get going. We want to do this in a tight timeframe and make sure we get a lot of questions answered.

But I also want to make sure there are questions that we don't get to we will post a Frequently Asked Question on the website on the same link that this is found on. And we'll keep that updated so if you have questions again in the future you want to submit send them to me and we'll get the answers to those questions and post them on this frequently asked question sheet.

Anyhow we're going to move forward here I want to first introduce Jon Pierpont and just let Jon and both Darin just a little bit about themselves and a little about the department and USOR to help everyone get familiar with each other a little bit and also just brief talking just briefly about the transition. So go ahead, Jon.

**JON:**

Thank you. Good morning everyone. Appreciate everybody's time this morning and attention to what we believe is a very important matter in front of us, which is the transition of Utah State Office of Rehabilitation into Department of Workforce Services so we've been working on this over the last few weeks and are excited to work through the transition together.

I've been around the department going on 24 years now. Started as an eligibility worker in the department and worked my way through the organization and have been serving as the executive director almost four years now.

So very proud of the work that we do here at DWS. It's a large organization with a lot of good work that's going on in many of our divisions and maybe I'll just touch upon our main divisions so that you're familiar with those.

Our largest is our eligibility services division where they determine eligibility for all the public assistance programs which includes things like food stamps and Medicaid and child care and financial programs that we administer. We do a lot of that work at the call center as well as in our employment centers.

Our next largest division is our Workforce Development Division where we do a variety of things but more specifically help people become trained or employed in areas that they feel like they have a skill set to serve the business community. So we have a large footprint. We have a presence in every county of the state except for Daggett but we have an employment center there where people can come in and look for work and get some skills training. We can sponsor their training and such and we can help them develop a plan to set them forward other direction they want to go.

The next is our Unemployment Insurance Division. We run the unemployment insurance program for the state. It's recognized as the top managed Unemployment Insurance Division in the country. We're very proud of that, but really it's determining eligibility for unemployment but more importantly helping people get reattached to the labor market and so connecting back with the Workforce Development Division and the services there to help people get back on their feet and into jobs. And then lastly our Housing and Community Development Division they do a variety of things from serving homeless to weatherizing homes to the HEAT program to community development type projects. Rural infrastructure of the list goes on and on but they have an important role in the department as well so those are our four main divisions.

Of course we do all the labor market data, all the research and analysis for the state. So we have a division there. We have our Refugee Services Office where they focus on serving the refugee population. Office of Child Care, which is really a subsidy program as well as quality programs and after school and things where we can help focus children to be successful in their environment.

**NATE:**

So I'm not going to let you get away with not telling something about yourself personally. Just give us one thing.

**JON:**

One thing about me personally? I grew up in Provo. I'm married and have a son that's 16. I took him to his first rock concert last night, which is always a big occasion, right? We went and saw the Smashing

Pumpkins at the Kingsbury Hall last night. I think it was more about me and the 90's band than it was about him. But we actually enjoyed it. It was a great show. He had a good time and so did I.

**NATE:**

Alright, Darin. Your turn. Tell us a little bit about USOR and the department and yourself.

**DARIN:**

Thanks Nate. Thank you for putting this together. I think this will be a great tool for us. Jon, thanks for hosting us. It's fun to reconnect with Jon. I've I think I've known you 15 to 20 years now and which gives us a great deal of confidence and comfort as we become one of those additional divisions under the Department of Workforce Services, the State Office of Rehabilitation.

Why I know Jon and so many other folks at Workforce Services is because I was here about 21 years ago I started and was here before, during and after the transition that became Workforce Services so I have to have an important vested interest in the success of the agency. It's been nice to reconnect with a lot of folks and I look forward to reconnecting with more and I have to apologize in advance I may not recognize you at first like I did today with old friends but it takes me a moment takes me longer as time goes on. I look forward to meeting folks.

I spent the last 10 years outside state government. I was CEO of Community Development Corporation of Utah. So when Jon talks about community development housing and other things that's those are some of things that we did but I felt the call to return.

I've been at the head of USOR for nine months and it's a labor of love. It's an opportunity I couldn't resist first because believe deeply in the mission I am attracted to our clients and our staff and the committed partners that we have and their fundamental dedication of what we do and ultimately we do many things well.

We ran into trouble the last couple of years in our largest program, the Vocational Rehabilitation Program. Not in terms of the services we offer but doing more than we could fund. And I looked at it and said this is reparable. We can fix this and that's part of the process underway now making good headway.

Something about me personally that I think some folks would appreciate as I took the original creation of the department so seriously that when I laid eyes on a beautiful woman that was in eligibility. I married her and many people know my wife Natalie because she worked in eligibility and worked for Jon for a long time as a matter of fact and many ask me about her and she's well and we have three kids since and that was 17 to 18 years ago. So we took transition seriously in our household.

So the State Office of Rehabilitation it's little known that the State Office of Rehabilitation is probably the oldest social services agency in the state of Utah. It has been around almost a hundred years. It began by serving returning veterans and injured veterans from WWI and helping them get training and employment. That's part of our DNA. Our largest program is the Vocational Rehabilitation Program that helps

individuals with disabilities achieve first of all achieve rehabilitation, work toward employment. And we define employment very broadly and that ultimately increase their independence.

We are in total an agency of more than 400 people about an \$86 million dollar budget and most of that is in the vocational rehabilitation. We affectionately call the VR Program or Voc Rehab. We're often confused as an agency just for that one division, that one program, but we have three other divisions that are important. We have Disability Determination Services, which looks a lot like a federal agency because it's all the social security disability programs. The determination of the eligibility and the benefits processing for those.

We also have a Division of Services to the Blind and Visually Impaired that is a community center for those individuals that provides training and other support services. It includes a part of our Vocational Rehabilitation Program so it's an all-encompassing community service center and then our Division of Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, which is truly a community center too for individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing and their family members. And wraps around all things in terms of community services and supports for the deaf and hard of hearing so those are our four divisions and in total as I mentioned we're about a \$86 million dollar agency with over 400 employees and looking forward to this transition because we recognize a lot of the advantages and the things are going to help us get better at what we need to do.

**NATE:**

Thank you. Speaking of transition, let's make a transition to talk about the transition. So the bill was just signed on Friday. Ink is drying as we speak from the governor signing the bill for this for the move. Let's talk a little bit about what the transition plan looks like and the commitment on both your sides of ensuring that this is a smooth transition and we're very transparent about it. Let's start with you, Jon.

**JON:**

It's important that we start working on this now. That's the intent of the legislators that we begin our planning in regards to what a transition needs to include. The legislation is very specific on things that they wanna see in the transition plans so my team and Darin's team have been working together weekly and we had a good three- to four-hour session a week ago to really start to understand the expectations as far as the details of the transition but we certainly together want to be very cognizant of what's required as well as probably going above and beyond what's being asked and then do a really good job to ensure a smooth transition for both DWS staff and USOR staff as we as we become one agency.

**NATE:**

Tell me about the timing that we're looking at here, Darin.

**DARIN:**

Well, as Jon suggested yeah there's a great sense of urgency because we're reverse engineering the transition from the real deadline which is October 1st so we need to be in DWS moved over by October

1st. So there are some other deadlines implicit in that. And as Jon suggested we met last week and expanded the team. I think about 40 folks there and it was a tremendously successful meeting. Because we reversed engineer that together. We said these are the subject areas that we need to focus on in broad terms assign team leaders to those in ultimately groups so that we could make it some other deadlines.

We have a self-imposed deadline of April 22nd to have a draft plan out. As Jon said that's fast. It's fast deliberately because we want to have a good comment period so the goal is for the month of May is that we would have that plan out available for comment. Jon and I go out and visit stakeholders and our staff in both our organizations. Answer questions and receive that feedback so that by June 1st that deadline has hit in the legislation that we will have a transition plan in place and as Jon suggested there is a transition plan outline specifically in the legislation. I think what we recognized last week is there are a whole bunch of things that he mentioned that are things that are going to come up things that we're adding now. Dependencies we couldn't have anticipated.

And there'll be a lot of that, but we'll have our best shot at that transition plan by June 1st. July 1st represents an interesting date for us because that's when we create a transition fund that allows us to continue to pay bills while at the State Board of Education while we move to DWS. So I know for our finance team and for a lot of our staff that's important to make sure that we have that continuity of service able to meet our obligations as we serve our clients. One of our guiding principles is that there's not a break in continuity service either for the DWS staff or our staff and then finally that October 1st deadline. What becomes effective.

**NATE:**

Alright and we plan to use this link [jobs.utah.gov/usortransition](https://jobs.utah.gov/usortransition) as a link that will be posting the plan and will providing updates and timelines and everything like that so mark this direct link on your computer so you have direct access to it.

Alright, so when we talk about transitions and we talked about as we've gone through this process already there's been rumors floating out there circulating. People wondering things. I want to take really quickly, let's just squash these rumors.

**JON:**

This is the juicy stuff.

**NATE:**

You know some consider it juicy. So first off you know we did we had some constituent meetings during the legislative session period where we got to meet with a number of people. We heard a lot of this when we heard DWS serves most of their constituents over the phone and online and will make USOR transition to do the same. Jon, is that true?

**JON:**

I would say absolutely not. That's incorrect. I do believe that we serve a large population over phone and online and that meets their needs but we also have our 32 employment centers where any constituent citizen can come in and get services eyeball-to-eyeball so that won't change we're not going to ask the USOR staff to change their business model. The intent is to have the division come over as a division and continue to deliver the services as they are today.

**NATE:**

OK, alright. One of the other ones this was a heavy discussion. The potential closing of the Sanderson building and also collating offices. A lot of rumors floating around there. Alright Darin, I'm gonna let you do some squashing.

**DARIN:**

They are persistent rumors and I'm not sure quite how to get ahead of it except we continue to talk about it because I heard it again just recently so we do have we have two what I would consider community centers and a third smaller center in St. George. The Sanderson Center is a Division of Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. A hard-fought center for you know generations ago to establish that center as a meeting and gathering place for people who are deaf and hard of hearing. No it's not closing. The simple answer is no, it's not closing. We are not taking over offices there. Anyone we're not setting up cubicles in the gym. Nothing like that. It's important to us to preserve that center and its mission and purpose.

That's also true of the Division of Services to the Blind and Visually-Impaired. That's an important center also and that is not closing and we are one of the rumors I heard last week is that DWS is moving into the offices there. Nothing could be further from the truth. We expect to be business as usual as Jon described and the same is true of our satellite center in St. George for the deaf and hard of hearing.

**NATE:**

Alright last one. DWS doesn't do a good job servicing customers with unique challenges. What are your thoughts on that, Jon?

**JON:**

I'll give maybe just a couple of examples of populations that we serve in our state that have unique challenges. Certainly the refugee population is one that comes to mind. We integrate or resettle about 1,200 new refugees that are coming from all across the world. Often times with no written language, no English skills, no work skills and a service delivery structure or a program model that serves that population needs to be unique as compared to any other populations come in looking for work or training services. So that's one example that comes to mind that we've been able to reshape the way we do things so that we can serve that population in a more effective way than maybe the general population.

Another one that comes to mind is the disabled veteran population. We run the disabled veteran outreach program for the state where the primary focus is disabled veterans and their challenges that they face as they returned back from their assignment overseas and so it requires a different set of skills and strategies for them to get re-employed into the labor market. So there's a couple of examples of unique population.

Certainly I can go on with the homeless population and others that we're serving that really require different set of strategies than may be commonly used with the general public.

**NATE:**

So this is great and one of the things I hope to help everyone realize that when you hear rumors and rumors start circulating around there's usually a good explanation or a lot of times they are not true or they've been stretched or whatever and that's where we just encourage all our staff when they hear these type of things to talk with their supervisor, talk with managers and or just ask the question.

Ask the question to the appropriate right person so if there is something that is causing concern we will make sure it's addressed and that's something you can send it directly to me an email and make it one of our Frequently Asked Questions and we'll get a response to that.

Alright talking about questions we got a good response from a number of staff sent in. I would say you know there were 20-plus staff submitted questions. Got a good number of them. So we only have a few minutes here so I'm going to encourage you guys to be very brief on answering these questions and we're going to try and get through as many as possible and then the ones that we're not able to get through again I just wanted to let you know we will be posting a Frequently Asked Question sheet on this link and will continue to answer questions that you may have. Just submit them in. So alright, let's get going here.

Let's start with you, Jon. This one I think is up your alley. It is believed that Vocational Rehabilitation employs earn more per hour than DWS employees. How is pay going to be made equitable?

**JON:**

Before I answer that and I'll be brief I promise, this is an opportunity for Darin and I to begin the conversation with all of our employees. This won't be the first and last time that you'll hear from us. If this venue or this arrangement works for you we can do more of this but I think Darin and I will be out during the summer months eyeball-to-eyeball with as many offices both DWS and USOR so that we can interact with you and answer a lot of questions that may not be answered today and so we're looking forward to that opportunity together.

Certainly that will be one of those subgroups or subcommittees that will work on the transition so we have an HR subcommittee that will have membership from both DWS and USOR. This is not about fair and equitable pay. This is about bringing an organization into DWS. Lock stock and barrel is what we've heard through the legislation. Analyze that and see if there's disparity we have we have that going on currently

in all of our divisions at Workforce Services and we review that on the annual basis and if there is a budget available that we can try to create some equities and we will if not that it's just the situation that it is but we'll look at the analysis that HR does and they'll bring that forward to the transition team and then we'll make some decisions based on what we learn.

**NATE:**

Alright Darin. Here's an easy one for you. Will there be a voc rehab order of selection?

**DARIN:**

There will be there is already and that will continue into the foreseeable future. I can't promise that that will ever be lifted. I would like that but that's the only tool given to us federally to control the number of clients that we move into service. So order selection is probably more commonly understood as waiting lists and we do have waiting lists. USOR went on waiting lists back in February of last year.

We had to slow the flow of clients in the system because we were overextended. I'm pleased to report that we've opened a lot of that order selection. The order selection creates three categories of disabilities or client types. We've opened the highest category mostly giving it totally disabled that's completely open our customers directly into services.

Significantly disabled is the second category, the largest, we just moved over the course last few weeks 1,500 clients out of that into case service. That leaves clients in that category and the lowest category though still important, disabled. And there are about 5,000 clients and those on the waiting list that's down significantly but as long as our clients on the waitlist that's a concern to us.

We meter that very carefully watching very carefully we've created the tools to understand that now we didn't have them before and so we could understand what a client costs generally and so we can make good decisions about letting clients off. I expect in the future they'll trickle off more than in large batches of cohorts like we've moved them off in recent months. But yeah short answer is we'll be under order selection for a long time.

**NATE:**

Alright here's another one for you. How many USOR people will be housed at the DWS main administrative building?

**DARIN:**

All four hundred. [Laughter from all]

**JON:**

So we're moving out and you're moving in?

**DARIN:**

If you don't mind. No, we've talked about this and DWS has been extremely gracious. We want a presence here. We realize that I think I remember back in my memory may not be good I think this building was originally housed to hold about 300 people and you're well above that. So we're grateful for any presence we can have we think it's important we've agreed about that. So we expect about a dozen key positions. That's not everyone but we have the ability to absorb in some of our other facilities.

**NATE:**

Great, any expected timing on that movement?

**DARIN:**

Well yeah I don't want to hold you to a deadline but we generally agreed July 1st would be ideal for all of us. And October 1st is the implementation deadline but we wanted to be here sooner.

**JON:**

And we're prepared to make those arrangements so that they can move in with what they believe is the time frame.

**NATE:**

Staff fully integrate into DWS staff meaning will they become WDD, ESD, UI specific staff or will they maintain their specific customers and take only customers with disabilities as new customers?

**JON:**

The latter. They will come over as intended by the legislation they will come over as a Division of Rehabilitation Services. They will be another one of our DWS divisions but they'll come over and function as they are today just with a support structure of DWS to support them so they'll come over and be an independent division.

**NATE:**

Ok, USOR will be a division. They're not being absorbed and dismantled. It's being a division that's staying put.

**JON:**

Yes sir.

**NATE:**

Alright question. I got a few of these that came in about retirement. With the transition from one to the other there's questions about those within USOR with retirement. Just take a brief moment to talk about that.

**DARIN:**

Ok for as I talk with our DWS colleagues what you're talking about Nate are probably a couple of things. We've been under State Board of Education for a very long time. State Board of Education operates a couple of things differently than we're used to under the governor's cabinet one of those things that I became aware of quite recently actually is that there is a program that provides a stipend for up to five years to help bridge employees who are under the State Board of Education to retirement and ultimately to Medicare and so we're evaluating that I wish I had a better answer but we've had a hard time quantifying that.

In fact under the State Board of Education I don't think that was ever really fully understood and properly hedged against and so we're having to do that now it's forcing that discussion so we understand how many people are affected we make some actuarial assumptions about how much that really means but I'm pleased to report that some things don't change and the State Retirement System doesn't change and those things are common so if someone had for instance converted sick leave that they had accrued prior to. I can't remember what year it was because I left, but lost all that, but that doesn't change and some of those other things and one particular piece of that is the health insurance premium pool that people can tap into to help bridge that retirement period.

That doesn't change. That exists at DWS and exists at USOR. That will be the same we come in but part of I think the angst is understanding this stipend and dental coverage that exists for State Office of Education, State Office of Rehabilitation employees currently. So we're quantifying it. It's going to take us a couple more weeks to understand it and then we can make some good decisions about it. We want to honor that obligation. We need to understand what that means though.

**NATE:**

Anything you want to add to that, Jon?

**JON:**

No, he handled it perfectly.

**NATE:**

Alright, we have a few more minutes. I was told these are really rapid-fire questions but these are more of just yes-or-no questions that we're just going to end on this. Ok so do we anticipate any more specific positions being eliminated before the move?

**DARIN:**

USOR. No, we don't anticipate any new positions eliminated, but as our staff knows in our VR program we have to right-size. Not an expression I like but I haven't found a better one. So we were living on a bloated budget. Our staff understand that they've recognized it and they're doing incredible things to adjust. That meant we eliminated 43 positions, FTEs in the last 18-24 months they know we're eliminating an additional 14. We're about halfway to that goal. Those people we expect them we want them to land well so some of already transferred to other positions internally. DWS has made open positions available

to our staff that are affected. There are no additional plans to decrease or to cut jobs or decrease FTEs. The 14 that are known to us will continue to execute on will do that by July 1st but no additional cuts.

**NATE:**

Do we believe that USOR staff will be moving into DWS office or vice versa?

**JON:**

I think that's one thing that we'll evaluate over time as leases come due and are up to expire and renew then Darin and I will evaluate whether or not there's opportunities to co-locate, but I think it's too early to tell. There'll be a subcommittee to work on facilities specifically so we know that we have some overlap in different communities so if there's an opportunity to do that we'll consider that but right now there is no you know in the early foreseeable future to do any of that currently.

**DARIN:**

I'll say two jobs right at all. I say to that I think we both genuinely liked the idea of co-location we think it's better for the clients we serve. I think it helps. It'll take time to figure that out, not going to do anything drastic but I don't think that we're averse to that. We like that idea.

**NATE:**

Ok, I'm going to end on this because everyone likes to ask questions about pay. So we got a couple about this. Will there be any pay changes upon becoming part of DWS? Any plans of changing pay structures?

**DARIN:**

I think you already answered that.

**JON:**

We'll analyze where people salary levels are and see if there's compression with years of service but I don't think there's any immediate plans to adjust people's pay. Either on the USOR side or the DWS side.

**NATE:**

Well, I just want to end by just really thanking both of you for being willing to be here. Answer these questions. We have more questions but again we'll get answers to these questions and will post them. But the fact that that you're both willing to go live and to talk to staff to be put on the spot and answer questions, you've proven that you're willing to do that and you're gonna be getting out to get to know the different staffs within different organizations and that's great.

And I know there's a commitment on the Department of Workforce Services on the part of the communication division to ensure that everyone that we're transparent and we're communicating and we're getting things out there so staff are fully aware and informed and so we encourage you to stay tuned ask questions and to follow this link in the future.

Those who want to go back. It will be posted this video will be made into a video and will be posted on this link for others to view at a later time as well. Thank you for joining us and we'll be seeing you more in the future.