

## DVR Problems of a Consumer and Family

My daughter is Deaf and is a student at RIT/NTID in Rochester NY. We have had problems getting DVR to support her post high school goal of attending the college of her choice and communicating clearly with us and her financial aid and admissions counselors at college.

My daughter finalized her interest in attendance at RIT in the January of her senior year of HS. However, she had expressed interest in RIT the previous summer (her junior summer) when she attended a pre-college summer program recommended by her DVR counselor. DVR did not pay for the summer program as she was still on the DVR waiting list for services. She was approved for DVR , shortly after the summer program started which resulted in us paying for this summer program.

My daughter was accepted into RIT in April. We immediately notified DVR . DVR informed us that it was too early to discuss their support until the end of the fiscal year. We had to commit to RIT by May which we did in order to retain her spot and in anticipation of DVR approving. On 7/ 19, My daughter was then asked to submit an essay justifying her choice for college. She submitted her essay and DVR denied her request for out of state funding on 7/31. We were notified by email and we found errors in the reasons for denial. We submitted an informal appeal and my daughter submitted another essay. By this time we had already submitted her housing contract and deposit and had made plans to transport her to RIT.

Despite the denial for out of state funding to attend RIT, her participation in the mandatory new freshman orientation was approved. DVR issued payment. This gave us hope that she would be approved for out of state funding at a later date. Since she had no other college options by this point, I drove her to RIT to start the new freshman orientation on 8/16. We were notified on 8/30 that she was denied again. I communicated these issues to RIT and they attempted to contact the DVR counselor who did not return their calls. We felt that the denial was based on a subjective rather than objective analysis of my daughter's essay.

Fortunately, DVR did approve for a training grant. This helped us minimally. They denied requests for books, tuition and transportation. This has caused a huge burden on my family that could have been avoided if DVR had been clearer regarding the criteria for approval for out of state funding from the beginning.

## Cathy Steffke

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**To:** Cathy Steffke  
**Subject:** FW: Are you in the office?

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**From:** Kristina Finnel [<mailto:kristina@mhawisconsin.org>]  
**Sent:** Thursday, October 18, 2012 1:23 PM  
**To:** Cathy Steffke  
**Subject:** Wisconsin Rehabilitation Council

Good Afternoon,

My name is Kristina Finnel and I'm the CEO of Mental Health America of Wisconsin (MHA). I'm not able to attend the hearing today, so I chose to write my testimony. I'm writing on behalf of individuals with mental illness that receive services from our agency (MHA).

I appreciate you taking the time gather stories and hear from those who utilize the services of DVR. As I'm sure you'll agree, the voices of those served by DVR are important.

Many of the individuals we serve have applied for DVR services. While some have been successful in obtaining work, most have been told that they are on a waiting list. When asked about the waiting list, they are told they fall to the bottom of the priority list due to the fact that their mental illness isn't as debilitating as others who are on the list.

One specific program participant, wanted me to share her story with all of you. In this testimony, I will refer to this participant as Beth.

Beth first met with her worker in the beginning of 2012. At that time, Beth came up with a list of things that were a barrier to her receiving employment. The main items were childcare, professional clothing and transportation. Beth reports that the DVR worker told her to take the bus. Beth informed her worker that she deals with anxiety and doesn't feel comfortable taking the bus. Beth had her therapist write a letter to the DVR worker confirming her anxiety. In addition, an Advocate from MHA attended an appointment with Beth and reiterated Beth's great desire to find employment along with anxiety around taking the bus. At that time, the DVR worker told Beth to call Independence First, Milwaukee County and Goodwill for transportation assistance. MHA's Advocate reported from her visit that this worker did not understand anxiety and why it would be anxiety-provoking for Beth to take the bus. MHA's Advocate also mentioned that the worker was not forthcoming with how DVD could help her get a job. Beth and MHA's Advocate later visited the DVR website to obtain some answers to their questions and to get a better idea of what DVR should be able to help with.

Assistance with child care was never addressed. As for clothing, Beth was told to go to Burlington Coat Factory (BCF) to purchase items but she was not given a voucher. Beth purchased items, brought the receipt to her DVR worker and was told she spent too much. She was then given a voucher and was told to go back to BCF. Once at BCF, they told her the voucher didn't add up correctly, so they sent her back to DVR. When Beth arrived back at DVR, her worker said she couldn't meet with her and informed her someone else could help. Forty five minutes later, a gentleman from DVR was able to make the correction for Beth and she was then able to purchase some clothing at BCF after the 3rd attempt.

Beth reports that her DVR worker told her that she gets a headache every time she meets with Beth. Beth reported feeling like a burden to this worker. When discussing specific employment opportunities, Beth mentioned she

would like to work in the financial field. The worker told her she couldn't do that because she wasn't good at math and proceeded to mention a position as a CNA or work in the hospitality field. Beth told her she wasn't interested in that type of work and the worker reiterated those were the only options. Beth mentioned that when she asked questions she would get one word answers from the worker, so she frequented the DVR website for information.

Beth's frustration did lead to her filing a grievance against the worker. Beth hasn't heard anything since. It's now October and Beth is still unemployed. Beth has a great employment history and is very eager to work, but childcare and transportation remain the biggest barriers.

Thank you again for your time.