

TRANSCRIPT

Commissioner Schultz Quarterly Conference Call with Vocational Rehabilitation Stakeholders 2 p.m. ET Wednesday, April 29, 2020

Speaker 1: Ladies and gentlemen, welcome and thank you for joining today's conference, the RSA commissioner quarterly call. Please note that all audio connections are muted at this time, but there will be an opportunity later during the call to ask a question. With that, I'll turn the call over to Mark Schultz, acting assistant secretary and RSA Commissioner Mark, please go ahead.

Mark: Thank you. Good afternoon partly say good morning depending on where you're at to everyone. I want to thank you for joining us today and to welcome you to RSA second quarterly call with the VR agencies to say much as occurred since our last call in January is really an understatement. At that time, the full extent of the Covid 19 pandemic had yet to be felt across the country. It took effect on VR agencies and individuals with disabilities was unknown.

We've all experienced a tremendous amount of change due to the Covid 19 pandemic. How we interact with each other, how we serve consumers and businesses, and even the availability of students with schools closing and adults who may be under stay at home orders. Our access to businesses are no longer an operation or operating much differently. It's created a lot of uncertainty for VR programs for life in general. I want to thank all of you for your commitment to continue services remotely, but whatever way that you find me possible at this time. Many of you are teleworking as is RSA. A hundred percent of our staff are teleworking and as I'm sure you've learned ongoing frequent communication is an absolute necessity now more than ever. I want to make sure I thank RSA staff for all they're doing in supporting they're programs.

Speaking of communication that's why these meetings are so important. Today we want to highlight for you actions the departments has taken and the technical assistance that RSA has provided, and will continue to provide you deliver critical services to the individuals and businesses you serve. In addition, there happens to be other work going on other than Covid 19 related responses, believe it or not. And we're going to provide updates about activities RSA staff are working on and working

on with you. You're able to state plans and performance accountability and the insurance of discretionary grant notices and help support the work of the VR program. So, I'm going to start off by talking about some of the Covid 19 related actions and the technical assistance that we've been providing. So, on Monday April 27th we sent to Congress, a report required by the cares act identifying waivers of statutory provisions requesting provisions that might support grantee operations during the pandemic.

That report included certain waivers of provisions in the rehabilitation act that were applicable to VR program into the rehabilitation long-term training program. So, I just wanted to briefly share in case some of you are aware of the areas that we requested waivers within. So the first one was looking at carry over funds additional year beyond the two years that are currently allowed and looking at the waiver of the 15% mandate for preemployment transition services and have 15% set aside of federal funds, equate some additional flexibility that how those ones could be expended primarily due to the fact that access to students is limited at this point in time. And for the same reason we believe that access to you will also state you're going to run into issues with that as we've heard from many of you. And so, we recommended that there be a waiver provided to the secretary for supported employment services regarding the 50% set aside for you.

And along with that the required 10% match. So that again, that would create more flexibility in terms of how those funds could be expended. We also recommended that use VR plans be extended to provide support to render separate vendors to restock when -- to restock expired fiscal food products when they're returning back to business and to help facilitate their viability at those **[00:04:32 venue]** and sites. And then finally we requested more flexibility around internships and service obligation requirements for RSA scholars. So those are the four areas that we requested in the report to Congress, the secretary requested in her report to Congress.

On March 27th we released an initial frequently asked questions document related to implementing performance accountability provisions under title one with WIOA. And just yesterday, we issued a second FAQ document responding to questions about the fiscal administration of the VR program. As you can see operations during the pandemic. And that covered areas around personnel costs and employee compensation during closure. It covered the allowable use of

program funds for conference training or other activity cancellations it allowed the use of program funds for travel insurance for future travel. And then also with it extending the period of performance. And that as you know, is going to be covered in the report to Congress and our request for a waiver to allow that to occur. So, we also intend to release additional FAQ documents. We've been working on those and they will be intended to address the remaining questions you submitted concerning the VR process.

So that will accomplish service delivery, including the delivery of preemployment transition services, section 5.11 monitoring data collection and reporting. Render separate program as well as AIDRS and other discretionary grant programs. So really want to thank you for your patience as we're working diligently with our offices across the department to address these concerns. And many of these are cross cutting issues and so we're working with our other offices to make sure that there's consensus on the responses as well as consistency in those responses. So that's taken a little more time than we anticipated. We're getting close to issuing those FAQ documents in the very, very near future.

So also want to mention that we will be submitting a report to Congress and we intend to meet the deadline, which is tomorrow on the impact of WIOA on VR program services. So, if you recall, we were asked to report to Congress on VR program services before and after enactment of WIOA. So once that report has been submitted to Congress, we will be making that report available on our website. So, make sure you continue to check there. That should be there very soon.

And lastly, I just want to mention that we responded as quickly as we could to Wintac in a modification of its grant so that they could provide technical assistance that they knew was much needed by VR agencies when operating a program and providing VR services remotely. But Wintac was most recently on April 20th delivered a well-received an informative webinar featuring the many ways in which several agencies transitioned to remote operations and service delivery. So, I want to thank Massachusetts, Missouri, Mississippi, Oregon, and Texas for being examples of how VR agencies can continue to provide services in the current environment. So, thank you very much for both your leadership and your willingness to share what you're doing with other state programs. So, I would encourage you to contact Wintac and continue to take advantage of the technical assistance and resources that they can provide. As the **[0:08:31 inaudible]** then reaching out to track the status of office closures and telework and the provision of services with

programs across the country. And as a result, we've identified some of the difficulties that you're having in doing so, but also some of the successes. And at this point I want to turn it over to Roseanne to talk about one of the issues that has been identified and to speak a little more about that, to share with you. So, Roseanne.

Part 1 of 5 ends [0:09:01]

Roseanne:

Thanks Mark. So, over the past four or five weeks, we've had a number of agencies approach us with a request to assign some of their staff to help out with the processing of unemployment insurance claims because of the huge numbers of people who've become unemployed because of Covid 19. We've spoken to 21 agencies and we have calls set up with two additional agencies. And during these calls we discuss the programmatic and fiscal provisions that you need to consider before you reassign staff for this work. We talk about the 90/10 rule under 34CFR361.13; which states that 90% of the staff and the designated state-unit must be employed full time on vocational rehabilitation or other rehabilitation work which leaves a maximum of 10% of the staff that may participate in UI work which is not other rehabilitation work. We also talk about the fact that VR funds cannot be used to pay the salaries of staff engaged in UI claims processing. Of the agencies we've spoken to, seven of them have committed a total of 142 staff to do UI work and what I am asking you today is if you are considering reassigning staff in this way, please do contact your state liaison. We would like to have a conversation with you to answer your questions and just to be sure that you are clear about the programmatic and fiscal consideration. So now I'm going to turn things over to Suzanne who's going to be talking about state plans

Suzanne:

Thank you Roseanne. I first of all want to say hello to everyone and hope everyone is well. First, I want to thank you also for working with your workforce partners to submit your WIOA state plans. We've received thus far all plans but two to-date. And so, we really appreciate the effort that has gone into getting those plans to us. As a staff, as well as others from ETA and RK. Our partners are reviewing the plans and we may be asking you to make revisions as necessary to the VR services portion if applicable, or to the common elements of the plan. So many of you may have already received a request for revisions if needed. And we also just want to again express our appreciation to you for your response to the request to submit these plans and to make whatever adjustments to the plans that need to be made in the midst of all that you are doing to support your staff and individuals with disabilities during this unprecedented time. So, thank you again for your cooperation and getting your state plans. If you have any questions, be

sure to contact your state liaison who can assist you with those plans. And now I'm going to turn it back over to Mark.

Mark:

Thank you, Susanne. Now we're going to talk a little bit in a second, Chris is going to share more with you on the measurable skill gains indicators, but I just want to thank you all for engaging with RSA and the negotiations to establish meaningful targets for the measurable skills gain indicators this year. It really reflects and should it reflect the importance and value of participation in recognized education and training programs by **[0:13:12 inaudible]** with disabilities, because they're working towards achieving their employment goals. And that should be balanced with the capacity of your agencies. And I know this is the first time that we're going through this process and I understand the concerns about grading targets during this time. And in fact, I know when I was going to going saving years ago as a VR director; I probably wasn't the easiest person to negotiate with. So now that I'm on the other side of this I have a different perspective and understand why we need to challenge ourselves at this point in time. And our partners under WIOA are going to be doing the same thing and they're going to be challenging themselves as well. But we need to have greater expectations and I appreciate those of you that have set those expectations high for yourself. But also understand, we know and recognize that there will be adjustments to those levels later in the process. So, at this point I'm going to turn it over to Chris so he can update you on the status of the negotiations.

Chris:

Thank you, Mark for sharing those remarks. In accordance with provisions in WIOA, like Mark mentioned, RSA is for the first-time establishing performance levels for one of the performance indicators, measurable skill game is great. We thank VR agencies for submitting expected levels of performance for this indicator in the state plans for program years 20 and 21. At the moment, RSA and VR agencies are setting negotiated levels of performance using the four factors established by Congress. In section 116. As you know, these negotiated levels must be entered into the unified or combined state plan before RSA and its federal partners that UTA and Okta may approve those plans to begin for program year 20. These performance accountability provisions apply to the VR program in all 50 States, the district of Columbia and Puerto Rico. As a result, RSA is negotiating performance levels with those 52 VR programs. Several weeks ago, on March 16th RSAs first negotiations involved our colleagues from the VR agencies in

Alabama and Montana and they were the first two States that we conducted negotiations with, so thank you. As of today, I am happy to report that RSA has completed negotiations with 45 of the 52 VR programs and we have plans in place to finalize negotiations with the remaining seven VR programs over the next couple of weeks. When RSA and VR agencies have completed all of the negotiations, RSA will publish this information on our website and we will notify grantees and stakeholders via email that these performance levels are available when RSA publishes the program year 19 WIOA annual reports. These reports will include performance for measurable skill gains rate for the third program year along with four other performance indicators. Employment rate in the second and fourth quarters after exit, medium earnings in the second quarter after exit and credential attainment rate. Likewise, the future WIOA annual reports for program years 20, 21 and moving on will include performance for all five performance indicators. Looking ahead a little bit in the second half of the state plans which Suzanne talked about we're in the process of reviewing and approving. So, looking ahead to program years 22 and 23, RSA plans to establish performance levels for all five of these WIOA indicators. Along the way, we will continue to partner with you and we will strive to be as transparent as possible, providing technical assistance and tools for data analysis that support us all really in telling the story of the VR program through the lens of performance. So, we thank you for partnering with us with these required activities. I'm now going to turn things over to my colleague Mary Lovely, to share some news related to RSAs, discretionary grants. Mary?

Part 2 of 5 ends [0:17:55]

Mary:

Thank you Chris. Good day, everyone. I hope you're all doing well. I'll be reviewing information available about our discretionary grants. First, I would like to briefly review the discretionary grant process with you. We publish first a notice of proposed priority for public comment when we are developing new priorities. We then analyze the comments and prepare a notice of final priority and a notice inviting applications. In areas where we're holding a competition based on statutory language, regulatory language or a prior published priority; we can go directly to publishing a notice inviting applications because rulemaking is not needed if we use statutory language. And when we compete out of the regulations or prior published priorities, the rulemaking process has already occurred. All of our discretionary grant notices and competitions can be found on the NCRTM website@ncrtm.ed.gov. On this website, we post all kinds of information including the contact information for the competition manager, a link to each federal register

notice, a general information for RSA discretionary grant competitions PowerPoint; for anyone interested in applying for any of the RSA discretionary grants, a specific RSA discretionary grant PowerPoint for each competition, information about the pre-application meetings if one is going to happen, including a link to register for that pre-application meeting, a summary of the questions and answers received as part of the pre-application meeting and this is usually posted about six days after the pre-application meeting and finally a link to the [0:20:21 inaudible] information on funding opportunities from RSA page which provides information about all of our notices of final priority and notices inviting application. But now our notices of proposed priority or extension notices, which is why I recommend that you go to the NCR TM first. With that background, I would like to share with you those discretionary grant actions that we now have posted. First, I'll review those items that are currently open for public comment. These include the Technical Assistance Center for quality management and the Technical Assistance Center for quality employment. Those are contained in a single -- no, those are proposed priority and the comment period for those close on May 11th. We also have the innovative rehabilitative rehabilitation training program with a comment period that closes on May 27th. We also have a waiver and extension of the project period for a grant that provides rehabilitation short-term training to the client assistance program, which also closes on May 27th. And I'd like to mention that April 24th, the public comment period closed for the independent living services for older individuals who are blind training and technical assistance center. RSA staff are currently working on reviewing the comments that were received as of the closing date. Second, we have open discretionary grant competitions right now in the following areas. We have [0:22:31 inaudible] long-term training for general rehabilitation counseling. That competition is scheduled to close on May 14th. We also have the American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program and that application period closing date is May 26th. We also have apparent information and training program and apparent information and training program technical assistance. Apparent training and information centers. Both of those have application periods closing on June 22nd at this point, that is all of the notices that we have. But if you keep an eye on the NCR TM website, or on the federal register, you will see additional ones come as we move along into spring and early summer. I will now turn over the conversation to Carol Goldberg for a question and answer period. Carol?

Carol:

Thank you Mary and good afternoon everyone. We are approximately halfway through the time allotted for the call and so I think we have plenty of time left for your questions. You may feel free to ask a question of Mark or anyone else you have heard from during this conversation so far, or I want to let you know that David Steel chief of our fiscal unit is also available for questions if you have any of him? I

think first though, we'll hear from our conference coordinator Nicky, who will provide you to instructions on how to ask your question. Nicky?

Nicky: Ladies and gentlemen to ask a question, press pound or #2 on your telephone keypad. Again, press pound two and you'll hear a notification when your line is unmuted and then please state your question. Going to our first question caller, please go ahead.

Karen: Hello everyone, this is Karen Carol from New Jersey. I'm wondering will there be general guidelines issued by RSA to allow for electronic signatures during this current pandemic?

Carol: Okay. This is Carol and I can address your question there. We have received many questions from our agencies about alternative means for obtaining signatures; and that is one of the questions that we are, or will be addressing through the next sets of FAQs that Mark has identified will be issued in the near future. Mark, do you have anything else you'd like to say about that?

Mark: No, I don't think there's anything to add. Just that is one of the areas that we will be adapting the guidance.

Carol: Yes.

Karen: Okay, thank you.

Nicky: Next question. Caller, please go ahead.

Daisha: Good afternoon, commissioner Schultz. This is Daisha Johnson from Oregon blind. I want to thank you and your team first of all, for your leadership and informing the report that secretary Devoss issued to Congress and the flexibilities that it could offer. Do you have any insight or anything that you could share with States in regards to when we can anticipate a decision that Congress would make in relation to the recommendations the secretary put forward?

Mark: No. I have no indication in terms of how fast they're going to act on that. We were able to meet the deadline that was established for us and I know right now that they were due to be back in session, I think this last week and they postponed that. So, I don't know when they're going to act or how quickly they'll act, but they give these matters I think attention once they're in session fairly quickly they responded. So how it anticipates once they return this will be something that they'll be considering terms of all the waivers and whether that will be part of the

fourth or fifth bill, I have no idea. That hasn't been communicated to us yet.

Karen: Thank you very much.

Nicky: Next question from Alison. Alison, please go ahead.

Alison: Hi, this is Alison planning going forward in general. Thank you all for this opportunity to give us some updates. It's very much appreciated and I can echo what Daisha said. We appreciate all of your all's hard work and got into forgiving to us. I'm not sure if this question will go to David or Mark, but on the waiver of the Mo, is this going to be part of the guidance you all are waiting on?

Mark: So, I was going to see if David was going to jump in. But yes, we'll be talking about the process for when there's, you know, there's an existing process and there are exceptions to that and it's at the discretion of the secretary and we will be outlining that. But in addition, I think we understand this as an issue that's down the road, which is why we haven't addressed that immediately. Mo will be becoming at a later point in time. And I don't -- David, do you want to say anything in addition to that?

David: Certainly. I think it's important to remember that for maintenance of effort, it's not a waiver of the requirement. It is a waiver of a specific amount. That would be a deficit that we would be looking at. And so, we're unable to determine the deficit until the final asset for 25 or the federal financial reports have been submitted. So, for our state purposes, we really won't even be looking at deficits until such time as we received the final asset 425 the financial federal reports. And then we've had a chance to look and determine an amount. And it's at that point that we issued letters to agencies with specific instructions about how to apply for waivers. That's our typical process that we'll use. So again, it's a little premature for States to be thinking about some of the waiver requests until such time as we know what the final numbers are going to be.

Carol: Okay. This is Carol. Do we have another caller who would like to ask a question?

Nicky: Next question from Joe. Joe, please go ahead.

Joe: Joe Xavier, California.

Carol: Hello Joe. You can go ahead.

Joe: Thank you. Hey Carol. Good morning. Good morning Mark and the rest of the team again, thank you everybody. As everybody has said, thank you for not only the call but the work that you guys are doing. One of the things that the States are dealing with in addition to the Covid 19 is just that the sheer volume of demand on doing business in a different way. Have you guys given any thought to, and are you able to provide any relief from the demands of requiring prior approvals and this environment at least for a period of time?

Carol: Joe, this is Carol and I know that is also one of the questions we we'll be addressing and our upcoming FAQ documents. But you know, it is a topic.

David: I can tell you -.

Carol: Go ahead, David.

David: We're responding to those requests as soon as we get them and there are no prior approval requests. States have requested laptops in the aggregate or other forms. We've made a priority to turn those around within a day or two. And I've worked with state to state to get that information. So as of now I can tell you that we're processing them and there aren't any in queue as far as pending.

Mark: This is Mark and Joe I would just -- to follow up with that. Are you experiencing any problems? I guess that would be my question.

Joe: Yeah, I guess my question is not so much on the workload on you guys, although we certainly appreciate that and you know how fast you're turning it around. It's more the demand on the States, you know, packaging and preparing and doing that. That would be an area where we could get a little relief on the burden that would be aligned with these states.

Carol: Thank you, Joe for that. Go ahead, Mark. Sorry.

Mark: No, that's all right, Carol. I was just thanking him.

Carol: Yeah, I appreciate the clarification of your question. And like I said, we will be addressing this area in our upcoming frequently asked question documents.

Joe: Thank you, I appreciate that.

Carol: Do you have any other questions Joe? Or is there another caller who would like to ask a question?

Nicky: And there are no more questions at this time? Again, to ask a question, press pound two. Going to our next question Suzanne, please go ahead.

Suzanne: Yes, thank you for taking my call. I work for AIVR Tech and represent AIVRs programs, that's American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Programs. And my question is this with very limited funds some of the VR counselors are trying to work at home, but they don't have satellites. Is this -- and the satellite is pretty expensive for an individual not making a whole lot of money. So, the question is, can satellite be purchased with grant funds? Big silence.

Part 3 of 5 ends [0:33:21]

Carol: [0:33:31 inaudible] I did not mean to leave you in silence. We can certainly look into that. We are able to provide certain things in order to assist individuals who are working virtually. So, if you reach out to [0:34:01 inaudible] we can include that in the items that we are discussing for inclusion.

Suzanne: And how do I-

Carol: In our FAQ document.

Suzanne: Thank you very much. I appreciate your time and help and everything that you're doing for everyone. Thank you.

Carol: Well, thank you Suzanne for all that you're doing. Anyone else?

Nicky: Question from Andrea. Andrea, please go ahead.

Carol: [Crosstalk] Andrea, are you on mute?

Andrea: I'm here now. Hi, this is Andrea Guest from Delaware general. Good afternoon, everybody. Hope everybody's feeling well. My question was, last week I attended a workforce board meeting in our state and our partners in labor did a presentation and they showed their measurable skill gain goals and they're separated by adult and youth. And there was a big variation in the percentages. The youth obtaining higher percentages than the adults. And I was wondering if there was any thought of our measurable skill gain goals being separated by youth and adults to be comparable to this.

Carol: Chris, do you want to respond to that?

Chris: Sure. Hi Andrea, thank you for the question. Section 116 requires that all six of the core programs establish performance levels for the indicators as applicable. Under title three, the Wagner Kaiser program does not establish performance levels for measurable skill gains or credential attainment rate because that program doesn't support people in education or training. However, under title one there are three core programs as you know, adult, dislocated worker and youth. So when you see those expected levels of performance and the negotiated levels of performance, they're delineated that way because they have three separate programs under title one, the section 116 for the VR program does not distinguish between adults with disabilities that VR agencies are serving or people we would call youth or students or transition age youth. So, at this point in time when we're establishing these levels, they must apply to all program participants who are doing educational training programs. Does that answer your question, Andrea?

Andrea: Yeah. That answers it. I just, you know, hope moving forward that if there's comparisons done that, you know, we'll be comparing apples to apples so that it doesn't look like they're underperforming. Because I noticed that our rate was comparable to our state's adult rate, but the student rate is a lot higher. So that was just my only thought.

Chris: Sure. The good thing about the WIOA annual report that year end summary is it does provide a breakout of sex, age, ethnicity, race, and then all of the different barriers to employment and provides performance levels based on those participant characteristics. So, in that sense, we do publish performance rates for individuals, you know, aged 19 to 24 for example. And I'm sorry that my neighbor has decided to mow his lawn the exact time I have to answer your question.

Andrea: That's okay. Thank you.

Chris: Thanks Andrea.

Carol: Okay. Thanks for that information, Chris.

Nick: Question from Alison. Alison, please go ahead.

Alison: Hi, this is Alison in Florida general again. Chris, this is probably a question for you. You know, here in Florida we're really starting to pull data and look at the impact of code in over the last two months. Other than the regular federal reporting data that we submit like through the 911 and so forth. Is RSA considering an additional data reporting to get

a really good understanding of the impact of Colette on the States or is there any discussion on that at this point?

Chris: Hey Alison, it's Chris. No, we have not discussed additional data collection or reporting requirements. We believe that the RSA 911 in reporting services and outcomes for individuals at the time of exit and then their status post exit will provide us with the information we need to calculate the indicators and move forward with the performance accountability provisions. So, in short, no. We have not decided to collect any additional data.

Alison: Okay, I'll hold you to that Chris. I'm just kidding.

Chris: I hope that's good news, Allison.

Alison: It is. Thanks.

Carol: Who's next?

Nicky: And there are no more questions in the queue at this time. We have a question now from Joe. Joe, please go ahead.

Joe: Good morning. Hey Carol and Mark and team. Just a follow up question here. I know that making advanced payments is something you guys have spoken to, but we continue to have that need of find a way to ensure that our provider systems are available and ready to go back to work. There's this -- we get past this Covid 19. Have you guys been able to find any mechanism to allow States to support the provider system so they'll be available post Covid 19?

Carol: This is Carol and I certainly invite anybody else to jump in when I'm finished. In response to your question Joe, but this certainly is another area in which not only RSA but many program officers across the department have received questions about this. And as a result, as Mark mentioned earlier in the call, that is the type of question that we are responding to across the department with consensus and in attempt to be consistent and as we respond to our individual grantees and we will be doing so and addressing that in our upcoming frequently asked questions documents.

Joe: Okay. I appreciate that. Thank you.

Carol: [0:41:19 inaudible] Okay, you're welcome Joe.

Nicky: And again, to ask a question, press pound two to going to our next question. Kathy, please go ahead.

Kathy: Yes. Hello. This is Kathy Trotter with North Carolina DVR. Thank you for taking the question and for doing this call. This is very, very helpful. I actually have kind of two questions. One is regarding pre-epservices. As you know, with school being closed and social distancing, we're having to ask our providers to assist in providing pre-ep services entirely differently than was planned originally. And so, we're stepping outside the box and being creative to make sure that the students with disabilities get what they need. But my question around that is, have RSA looked at any ways that maybe we can try to compensate vendors for the extra that's going on right now? And have we looked at the 15% set aside and any flexibilities there? Considering the added difficulty around trying to reach them? **[0:42:49 inaudible] [crosstalk]**

Part 4 of 5 ends [0:42:35]

Carol: Certainly, Mark go right ahead.

Mark: So, I would say in regards to that, the 15% set aside in the flexibilities, obviously that's included in our report to Congress, the secretary's report to Congress, as one of the waivers for requesting to allow for greater flexibility there. In terms of allowable uses, the rates that you compensate providers for those services is something that you would establish. It's not something that we would be doing. So, I think, and I guess I would ask David or Carol to weigh in, but I don't know that we gave you restrictions as long as you're negotiating that appropriate rate for the service.

Speaker 3: Right Mark. And I think it's important that would be part of the agency system of payments that they provide them in determining you know, how those costs were reasonable and determined that they were eligible to the VR award.

Carol: And if I might follow up on that, there was a lot of direction around how those numbers were to be derived, especially for pre-ep. And maybe we need to have an offline discussion around that. But there was a lot of specificity that had to go into what those reasons are. That now we're not having time to back up and redo a lot of that unless we stopped delivering the service work for some time. So that was a concern, we wanted to keep services going. But thank you for your willingness to be flexible on this and we'll definitely have some more conversation around that. Yeah, Kathy, I would **[crosstalk]** go ahead.

Kathy: I'm sorry David.

David: Yeah, go ahead.

Kathy: I'm sorry, I was just going to say that I you know, it would be helpful if you reached out with this question to your financial representative for North Carolina. And then he and David can work together to address your specific concerns in your state about how to approach this.

Nicky: Next question from Natasha. Natasha, please go ahead.

Natasha: Hi everyone, this is Natasha Jordy with Minnesota blind. My question is around cancellation fees. Our vendors were hit pretty hard in March when many of our customers canceled services with them and they were hit incredibly hard. So, I was wondering if there's been any discussion about allowing services to be reimbursed that were not provided or at least in March and April when it was hit the hardest for them.

Carol: This is Carol and I think Natasha, your question is somewhat similar to the one Joe asked a few minutes ago. The question of cancellation fees again is -- and payments for services that were not rendered is one that the department is considering on a cross cutting basis. And we'll have the opportunity to respond to you and others in our FAQ documents that will be issued in the near future. David, is there anything else you'd like to share?

David: No, not at this time, thank you.

Natasha: Thank you.

Nicky: Next question from Steve. Steve, please go ahead.

Steve: Hello everybody, Steve Wooderson. Thanks, RSA, for the presentation; really for the Q and A now because I know this is so important to everybody. Appreciate all the work that you're doing. Carol, the expected to be any additional information coming related to allowability of costs, particularly as we look at things related to the outbreak itself, PPE for staff, consumers, cleaning costs, things like that. Will there be any more guidance coming out as to whether those are going to be allowable or not?

Carol: Yeah, Steve, this is Carol and I don't want to sound like a broken record, but as you can imagine, that question was also one of a cross cutting nature across all of the programs, our educational programs as well as vocational rehabilitation. And that answer is being considered in that

light across the department and we will be responding and our upcoming FAQ document.

Steve: That's great. Thanks Carol.

Carol: Yes. Anybody else?

Nicky: Again, to ask a question, press pound two. Press pound to ask a question.

Carol: Yeah, I think we have time for one more, one or two more. Well Nicky, if we're not hearing any more questions or you're not being notified that there's anybody else on the call who would like to ask a question; I'm going to turn the conversation back to Mark for some closing remarks.

Nicky: One more follow-up question from Suzanne. Suzanne please go ahead.

Suzanne: Hi, this is Suzanne again. What about as we're providing services and we're doing it through virtual in terms of creating an individualized plan for employment. What about signatures on documents, applications, ITEs? Do we have any kind of help in that regard? The digital signatures? Thank you.

Carol: Yeah. Suzanne, thank you for that question. It is one that, again, we have received many questions about. And it's a cross cutting question in the department and we are responding accordingly. We're very anxious to provide that information to all of you and it will be coming out in the upcoming FAQ documents that Mark mentioned earlier that part of which will address the VR process, which covers applications and eligibility determination, ITE development, including those signature issues. So, you can look forward to that in the near future.

Suzanne: Sounds wonderful. Thank you so much. I appreciate you taking my call again. Thank you.

Nicky: We have another question from David. David, please go ahead.

Speaker 4: Yes. Hi. This is [0:50:31 inaudible] from Mass Commission for the Blind and my question is, if they are going to be any consideration for extending the period of performance for realignment funds, given that we're not able to get everything done while we're on lock down.

Carol: Mark or David?

Mark: So, within the report to Congress, we did request an extension of waiver to operate intermetal period of performance. And so, if Congress

approves that, then the period of performance extension would be able to be put into place. So, the impact on -- obviously, that will have an impact on the release of funds for re-allotment and given the fact that there'll be an additional year to expend those funds. So, we have yet to assess what that impact will be.

Speaker 4: All right. Thank you so much.

Nicky: And there are no further questions at this time, Carol.

Carol: Okay. So, I -- we only have a few minutes left in the time allotted so Mark, would you like to provide closing remarks?

Mark: Sure, thank you Carol. Thank you for everyone participating on the call today. I appreciate the questions and just know that we are diligently working on responses and I hope that the majority of the questions will be answered very, very soon. With the FAQs that we hope to be released. I would just ask, first of all, I think before I start, I want to thank my dogs for cooperating today with their silence and their good behavior. So that hasn't happened in **[0:52:21 inaudible]**. So many thanks to them. But also, my thanks to all of you because I just now said we are trying to do our best and we appreciate your understanding and patience during this time. I also know that you're trying to do your best as well. And I appreciate particularly when we hear about the examples of the innovation and creativity and how you're leading the way through continuing services to individuals with disabilities and businesses across country. So, I really appreciate that. That speaks well to the program. To our commitment to our values and I think stands will stand as well as we celebrate the hundredth anniversary and look for the future. So, our support, your support to the individuals we serve is needed now more than ever, not just because of the changing environment. The fact that businesses are changing how they do business, how they operate, the more looking -- there's more and more of a need help individual retain employment as they adapt to telework or other ways of those businesses operating. There are also lots of new opportunities out there. In talking to some of the directors over the last week, we know that a significant number of individuals with disabilities have lost their jobs. At the same time, I'm being told there are lots of jobs out there too. And so, we need to continue to work helping **[0:53:50 inaudible]** employment. But also, with the added -- the added extra issue of considering individual's health and safety, because we worked through those placements and additional support. So I just want to assure you that everyone at RSA is committed to providing the flexibilities and as

we hopefully have demonstrated through some of the guidance that's been out there and we hope that we'll continue to demonstrate that with any guidance of the near future as well as the requests that the secretary has made in report to Congress. So, I appreciate you keeping **[0:54:28 inaudible]** of the issues that you're facing, the difficulties you're facing, and given us the opportunity to respond to those. So, continue to stay connected with your liaison. Feel free to contact any of us on the call if you have concerns or issues that you'd like to have us address or respond to. So once again, thank you for your commitment and I hope that all of you are doing well and just wish that you stay safe, and I look forward to the time that we can all get together again in person. So, thank you for the call today and take care.

Speaker 1:

That concludes our conference, thank you for using **[0:55:07 inaudible]** services. And you may now disconnect.

Part 5 of 5 ends [0:54:54]