

News & Views



★ Texas Rehabilitation Commission ★ A Human Energy Agency ★

Vol. 6, No. 11

November, 1984

New DDD Law Approved

After almost two years of deliberation, Congress in late September reached a compromise on a bill making changes in the Social Security disability benefits program.

On Oct. 9, President Ronald Reagan signed the bill into law.

"We know this bill will affect DDD but we're not sure in how many ways," said Dale Place, deputy commissioner in charge of TRC's Disability Determination Division. "However, it is obvious that when the new regulations from the Social Security Administration are available, our staff will require extensive training to become familiar with the new procedures."

The need for changes in the program stemmed from a Congressional mandate in 1980 that the program's rolls be reviewed to guarantee that only eligible people were receiving benefits.

However, the mandate did more than eliminate ineligible recipients. Many people lost benefits who should not have. Of those who appealed their loss of benefits, more than half had the payments restored.

The new bill provides that benefits may be ceased only if there is substantial evidence that there has been improvement in the person's condition or that advances in technology would permit the person to work.

"It will probably be six months before the regulations concerning

medical reviews are written," Place said. "In the meantime, we will continue our moratorium on these reviews."

The new policy probably will result in fewer cessations of benefits and therefore cut down on the number of people who appeal their cases.

Other key provisions of the bill are:

- Benefits will continue to be paid while a recipient is appealing a decision to cease benefits.
- In determining whether someone is eligible for benefits, disability examiners will now be able to evaluate the combined affect of all of a person's impairments, whether or not any one alone would be severe enough to qualify the person for benefits.

"This new provision will mean that some cases will take more time for disability examiners and medical consultants, and it will add to the amount of time clerical staff will need to prepare more complicated justifications for decisions," Place said.

- The new bill also calls for criteria to evaluate people with mental impairments. In the meantime, a moratorium on these cases continues.

- Another section of the bill requires that DDD make every reasonable effort to ensure that a

Federal VR Budget Passed

On Oct. 10, the U. S. Congress approved the 1985 budget for the Departments of Education, Labor, and Health/Human Services — a budget that includes vocational rehabilitation funding.

If this bill is signed into law by President Ronald Reagan, vocational rehabilitation will be funded at \$1.1 billion nationwide in fiscal year 1985. This is \$96.1 million above the amount requested by the Reagan Administration and constitutes a 6.2 percent increase from fiscal year 1984.

The bill includes \$5 million to fund comprehensive services for independent living. If made law, this will be the first time this section has been funded since its enactment in 1978.

Concerning the fiscal year 1984 budget, TRC received an additional \$1 million in federal money through an annual reallocation. States unable to spend all of their vocational rehabilitation money by the end of the year return it to the federal government. From there, the money is rerouted to states which, like Texas this year, can spend the funds before the fiscal year ends.

(... Continued on Page 3)

TxD
R1500.6 Tr.679 6/11

NOV 13 1984

Top 20 Counselors Named

Two TRC counselors from the Austin Field Office South share the title of most productive counselor for 1984.

They are senior counselors Jerry Joseph and Don Buck. Each successfully rehabilitated 90 clients during fiscal year 1984.

This is the second year in a row that Joseph claimed the honor. In 1983, she also rehabilitated 90 clients.

Joseph and Buck, along with the other 18 top counselors, received letters from Commissioner Max Arrell congratulating them on their exceptional performance.

As a way of showing his appreciation, Arrell authorized a merit raise for these counselors, except for those who, by state law, are unable to receive the raise because they've reached the highest step in their salary range.

The other counselors, and the number of clients they rehabilitated, are: William Parker, Austin Field Office North, 85; Bennie Bowser, Austin Field Office North, 82; Jane Jackson, Houston North Field Office, 78; Charles Byars, Wichita Falls Field Office, 76; Vicki Cook, Austin Field Office South, 75; Jacquelyn Ramsey, Paris Field Office, 74; Walter Dawes, Fort Worth Field Office Southwest, 70; Jose Lawrence, Austin Field Office South, 70; Bobby Grant, Houston North Field Office, 70; William Krieg, Austin Field Office South, 66; Terry Carlton, Plano Field Office, 66; Donna Johnson, Corpus Christi Field Office West, 66; Jim Nichols, Beeville Field Office, 66; Glen Starnes, Plano Field Office, 66; J. P. Cardwell, Corpus Christi Field Office West, 65; Donald Jones, Brownwood Field Office, 65; Zephyr Skinner, Dallas Field Office East, 65; and Elmer Blankenship, Wichita Falls Field Office, 64.

Eleven other counselors successfully rehabilitated between 60 and 62 clients.



"A HUMAN ENERGY AGENCY"



TEXAS REHABILITATION COMMISSION

VERNON M. ARRELL, Commissioner

118 East Riverside Drive • (512) 445-8108 • Austin, Texas 78704

BOARD MEMBERS

Jerry Kane
CHAIRMAN

George McCullough, M.D.
VICE CHAIRMAN

Anne R. Race, M.D.
SECRETARY

William C. Morrow
Wendell D. Faulkner
Ernestine Washington

October 9, 1984

All TRC Employees:

Recently, I gave special recognition to the twenty (20) most productive counselors for the fiscal year ending September, 1984. The Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors are the backbone or mainstay of the vocational rehabilitation program. They are the ones responsible for the day-to-day contact with the disabled population. They are the individuals who are responsible and accountable for achieving or not achieving our level of expectations in rehabilitating vocational rehabilitation clients. They are the ones held accountable if the level of expectations is not reached and they should be the ones singled out for special recognition for exceptional work when expectations are exceeded.

This in no way minimizes the work and support of all other field and central office staff that provides support and contributes to the outstanding success we enjoy in serving the disabled citizens through the vocational rehabilitation program.

I recently received the following memorandum from a member of the support staff for one of the twenty (20) counselors recognized for outstanding services.

I am a member of the support staff for one of the 20 Counselors that have received recognition for a job well done this past year. The thing that concerns me most is that these Counselors get recognition in the form of a letter and in some cases merit raises.

I would like to know what about us! The support staff helped these Counselors get where they are. The support staff can make or break a Counselor. Why are we always the ones that this Commission forgets about?

I would think it only fair to give us some credit for getting these Counselors where they are. We do counseling with their clients too! We deserve to be treated the same as the Counselors in regard to recognition, upgrading our jobs and merit raises!

Please make note of this.

Thank you.

An Equal Opportunity Employer

I am in total agreement that outstanding work by support staff should be recognized and rewarded. This year 1,268 or 72% of TRC's employees received merit raises. Seventeen percent were ineligible because they were on step 8. This means that only 11% of the TRC's employees did not receive a merit raise. It is very important that all TRC managers recognize and reward exemplary work. Staff performing meritorious work deserve to be appropriately recognized and I expect no less from TRC managers. I feel that our record is good, but it is important that we take note from time-to-time not to forget those employees performing excellent work who are in positions of lesser visibility, but who make outstanding contributions to the mission of the Commission.

Vernon M. Arrell
Commissioner

Sunset Board Makes Decision On TRC

After a review and a Sept. 11 public hearing, the Sunset Advisory Commission has made recommendations about the operation of the Texas Rehabilitation Commission.

The Sunset Commission periodically reviews all state agencies and recommends to the Texas State Legislature whether or not the agencies should be continued.

The Sunset Commission recommended continuing TRC and made a series of suggestions, outlined below. These recommendations now will be forwarded to the legislature.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Should functions of the Governor's Committee for Disabled Persons and the Council on Disabilities be transferred to the Health and Human Services Coordinating Council?

YES

NO

x

Should vocational rehabilitation be included as a benefit under the Texas Worker's Compensation Act?*

x

Should state funds be appropriated to pay for comprehensive medical rehabilitation services?

x

ALTERNATIVES

The Crippled Children's Services Program could be transferred from the Texas Department of Health to TRC.

x

MODIFICATIONS

The statute should be amended to require at least two of the six TRC Board members be disabled.

x

TRC's Consumer Consultation Committee should be specified in the statute.

x

The statute should be changed to authorize consultation fees comparable to those of other health service agencies.

x

The Developmental Disabilities Council's statute should be amended to eliminate all language duplicating or conflicting with federal law and to require that the Governor appoint the chairperson of the council.

x

* The Sunset Commission did not disagree with the concept of including vocational rehabilitation as a workers compensation benefit but said it could not be made part of TRC's statute at this time.

(... Continued from Page 1)

qualified psychiatrist or psychologist review and sign all unfavorable decisions involving mental impairments.

Place said this may require DDD hiring more psychiatrists and psychologists.

• The new bill also provides for pilot projects to test face-to-face

interviews with applicants first filing for benefits who've been told their claims may be denied.

The pilot projects also will test the same concept for beneficiaries whose benefits may be ceased.

Place said it is probable that DDD will participate in these pilot projects.

Governor's Committee Gives Awards

On Oct. 5, Gov. Mark White presented awards from the Governor's Committee for Disabled Persons and he signed a proclamation announcing National Employ the Handicapped Week, Oct. 7 - 13.

The presentations were made at the committee's annual meeting in Austin.

James Caldwell, a systems analyst for IBM in Austin, was named Disabled Texan of the Year. Caldwell, who is blind and has paraplegia, has developed handicap aids for the IBM personal computer.

"I'm looking forward to the day when accommodations for disabled people are so integrated that we'll look back on ceremonies like today's and wonder why they were necessary," Caldwell said when accepting his award.


The Corpus Christi Army Depot was chosen Governmental Agency of the Year. Of its 4,200 employees, 595 have disabilities.

Texas Instruments, Inc. of Dallas was awarded Large Employer of the Year. TI was cited for its good record of hiring disabled people and for its emphasis on contracting work with sheltered employment centers.

Dr. William Donovan, a rehabilitation specialist at the Institute for Rehabilitation and Research in Houston, was named Physician of the Year for his work with patients, most of whom have spinal cord injuries.

Texas Industrial Surveys of San Antonio was honored with Small Employer of the Year. More than 20 percent of the company's work force are people with disabilities.

The Governor's Citation for Meritorious Service went to Gracie MacKinnon of Humble, who's been active on the Harris County Committee on Employment of the Handicapped. As part of her work with the committee, she started a program with the Houston Independent School District and employers to market the skills of disabled high school seniors.

 **Applause**

Pay Raises ?

Starting with September paychecks, all state employees received a three-percent annual pay raise.

However, big jumps in health insurance, in some instances increases of 27 percent, wiped out many raises. And in some cases, employees took home smaller checks than they had in August.

Out of 1,745 TRC employees, 445 took home less money, including 137 people whose checks went down by \$30 or more.

Of the 1,300 employees whose paychecks went up, 366 got less than a \$10 a month increase, and 964 of the 1,300 received a \$30 or less pay hike.

"The three percent increase wasn't enough to meet inflation in the first place," said TRC Commissioner Max Arrell. "Inflation, coupled with the increases in health insurance premiums, makes all state employees lose out. It gets pretty hard to call these 'pay raises' at all."

TRC counselor **Jo Anne Hull**, Corsicana Field Office, has coaxed the *Waxahachie Daily Light* into publishing each day an item about the Texas Rehabilitation Commission. The notice says who TRC serves, what kinds of services are offered and gives Hull's name, phone number and address.

TRC employees donated \$900 to the 1984 Muscular Dystrophy fundraising drive. **Sue Swift**, program specialist in the Civil Rights Office, coordinated the effort.

Randy Jacobs, TRC area manager in the Amarillo Field Office, has been named a board member to High Plains Handicapped, Inc., a non-profit corporation recently formed to start a transitional living home in Amarillo.

The following employees recently received press coverage for TRC: **Ilene Gray**, program specialist in Central Office; **Ken Bowen**, area manager, **Joey Crow**, counselor, and **Gladys Weaver**, counselor, all from the Victoria Field Office; **Jack King**, regional director in the Austin region; and **David MacCabe**, director of Internal Audit, Central Office.

The Disability Determination Division of TRC ranked first in accuracy for the nation during the quarter ending July, 1984. The

division's accuracy rate in determining disability benefit cases was 99.8 percent.

The Public Information Office and Instructional Media of TRC recently received two awards in the National Association of Mental Health Information Officer's 1984 Media Contest. A special project titled "Consumer Letters" won third place in its division and "TRC News & Views" placed third in the newsletter category.



TRC News & Views is published by the Texas Rehabilitation Commission for distribution to its employees and retirees throughout the State. Inquiries may be addressed to **Kaye Beneke**, Public Information Office, Texas Rehabilitation Commission, 118 East Riverside Drive, Austin, Texas 78704; or telephone (512) 445-8745, (Tex-An - 887-8745).

Kaye Beneke Director
Connie Villec-Nemmers Editor
Becky Nieto Illustrator
Susan Antoniowicz Illustrator
Sue Durban Illustrator
 TRC Printing Services Typeset and Printing

TEXAS REHABILITATION COMMISSION
 118 E. Riverside Drive
 Austin, Texas 78704

BULK RATE
 U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
 Austin, Texas
 Permit No. 1605

Address Correction Requested

ACQUISITIONS DEPARTMENT 63
 ROOM 430
 NTSU LIBRARY, BOX 5188
 N.T. STATION
 DENTON TEX 76203