



## Statement from Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification In Response to Recent Changes to Massachusetts State Vocational Rehab

*New executive order directs state agencies to institute skills-based hiring practices, clearing the way for MRC to cut corners in providing support for individuals with disabilities*

March 14, 2024 – As a result of the recent [“Lead by Example” Employer Talent Initiative](#), discussions within the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission have led to concerns that certified rehabilitation counselors may not be able to divulge their credentials to clients.

Due to the new skills-based hiring initiative, Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commissioner Toni Wolf has indicated that applicants for state VR positions that directly serve disabled clients won’t be evaluated based on education level, which has the potential to dramatically reduce the quality of service.

With legislators across the country looking to follow suit, this policy could have cascading impacts throughout the industry and potentially negative outcomes for clients.

“Make no mistake: these changes will harm individuals with disabilities, an already vulnerable population that deserves the utmost quality of service, and have broad ramifications for the CRC profession at large,” said **Pam Shlemon, Executive Director of the [Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification \(CRCC\)](#)**. “You wouldn’t want someone performing surgery on you who doesn’t have a medical degree, and this executive order effectively does so with rehabilitation counseling – by putting all job applicants on the same plane, regardless of education level or certification demonstrating minimal competency, we are further treating individuals with disabilities as second class citizens and failing to provide them with the support they deserve from a CRC.”

However well-intended, the fallout of this step will threaten the stability of the rehabilitation counseling field, but more importantly, put individuals with disabilities at risk by failing to hire the most qualified professionals to serve them. CRCs represent the most qualified experts to help individuals with disabilities identify strengths and maximize abilities, cultivate successful, long-term careers, and participate fully in all aspects of their lives.

CRCs are professionals with expertise in disability issues, case management, placement, consultation, functional capacity evaluations, and vocational counseling for clients with disabilities/chronic illnesses. CRCs have specialized knowledge and training in the psychosocial aspects of disabilities regarding social participation (eg, self-care, learning, work, recreation, community life, and interpersonal interactions).

[Research shows](#) that clients working with Certified Rehabilitation Counselors (CRCs) have a higher rate of full-time employment than those who do not work with Certified Rehabilitation Counselors. A systemic review of CRCs concluded that they serve [a unique function](#) and extend value for people with disabilities and chronic illnesses. Additionally, research shows clients who work with counselors without a master’s degree in Rehabilitation Counseling tend to get jobs in the [secondary labor market](#) that provide [low incomes](#) and [few benefits](#). Such evidence supports that the health care and community service systems could benefit from referring patients/clients to CRCs.

State vocational rehabilitation programs are already under duress. With a dramatically low proportion of CRCs to clients already, we fear this move will disincentivize CRCs, who are uniquely qualified to counsel

people with disabilities, to stay in the field and support those who need their expertise the most. These actions will further shift our industry toward private-sector counseling, a luxury many individuals with disabilities will not be able to afford.

We urge other governors and politicians considering similar legislation to support policy efforts that subsidize upskilling to make it more accessible to all, including the Freedom to Invest in Tomorrow's Workforce Act. [CRCC is a proud advocate of the Tomorrow's Workforce Coalition](#), which includes over 600 organizations across 40 industries, which would offset the costs of licensure and certification, including the CRC.

### **About Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification**

The Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC) credentials graduate-level rehabilitation counselors (CRCs) in comprehensive, evidence-based, and ethical practices to equip youth and adults with every type of disability—physical, cognitive, mental—to live self-sufficient lives. For more information, please visit: <https://crccertification.com/>

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