

Meeting minutes: Rehabilitation Review Panel

Date: July 9, 2026

Minutes prepared by: Nathaniel Corcoran

Location: Hybrid – Washington Room at the Department of Labor and Industry (DLI), 443 Lafayette Road N., St. Paul, MN, and online

Members present

- Angie Andresen (remotely)
- Ashley Scully (remotely)
- David Dubovich (remotely)
- Russell Gelfman (vice-chair, remotely)
- Laura Hokeness (chair, remotely)
- Richard Hills (remotely)
- Stacie Goodrich
- Steve Patton (remotely)
- Jessica Stimac, assistant commissioner

Members absent

- Dr. Tolu Oyelowo

DLI staff members present

- Nathaniel Corcoran
- Bretta Hines
- Denise Holmes
- Jordan Trumbo
- Katrina Namad
- Melissa Parish
- Kelsey Kuhn (remotely)
- Michael Haire

Visitors present

- None

Agenda items

1. **Call to order** – Chair Laura Hokeness called the meeting to order at 1:01 p.m. A roll call was taken and a quorum was met.
2. **Approval of April 2, 2026 meeting minutes and July 9, 2026 agenda** – A motion to approve the meeting minutes was made by Ashley Scully and seconded by Stacie Goodrich. A roll call vote was taken and the motion carried.

3. Commissioner's update – Jessica Stimac, assistant commissioner, DLI

- Leadership changes: The Compliance, Records and Training (CRT) director position is vacant following Sandy Stoddard's departure. Melissa Parish is serving as interim director. Both the Vocational Rehabilitation unit (VRU) and Special Compensation Fund (SCF) have new supervisors. The department's contract with medical consultant, Dr. Taiwo Lawal, has been extended.
- The Workers' Compensation Advisory Council bill passed this session, with further details to be provided by the Office of General Counsel.
- Commissioner Nicole Blissenbach's last business day is July 17; Deputy Commissioner Kate Perushek will assume the role of commissioner July 20; and both small-scale and broader transition planning are underway for the commissioner's office and anticipated governor's office change.

4. Rehabilitation policy update – Jordan Trumbo, CRT, DLI

- Rehabilitation orientation will be in person Aug. 10 in DLI's Minnesota Room. Registration is July 1 through 24. The event is required for interns within their first year and is also open to qualified rehabilitation consultants (QRCs), job placement vendors, returning rehabilitation professionals and administrative staff members.
 - Orientation is offered yearly, in August and February, with August typically drawing higher attendance. DLI sends targeted reminders to interns who must attend the August session for compliance.
 - Registration and event details are available on the DLI Training for rehabilitation providers webpage, which includes direct links for participants and anyone assisting with registration.
- Rehabilitation update training occurs every two years. The next session is Sept. 14. It will be offered virtually, via Webex, with live and recorded viewing options under a single-registration system.
- Planned rehabilitation update topics include legislative and rule updates, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) research developments, QRC registration guidance, alternative dispute-resolution navigation for rehabilitation requests, and compliance and filing procedures.
- DLI is noticing an increasing trend of late annual registration and late payment. As a reminder, registration submissions are due 60 days before expiration.
- Three withdrawal options exist for QRCs: R3 withdrawal (referral to VRU); R8 withdrawal (no VRU referral appropriate when liability is denied); and using a Rehabilitation Request form for unique situations, such as safety concerns where an R3 or R8 withdrawal are not appropriate.
- The Work Comp Campus hub hosts step-by-step reference manuals frequently used by QRCs and administrative staff members for filings. A question was raised about adding online payment options for QRC registration; Denise Holmes acknowledged that option remains under consideration, but is not currently available.

5. CRT update – Melissa Parish, CRT, DLI

- Melissa Parish is serving as the temporary director for CRT; she has served 19 years at DLI, primarily in CRT, and will return to her permanent role as a supervisor in the Alternate Dispute Resolution (ADR) unit after the temporary assignment.
- DLI is in the process of hiring a permanent CRT director and is interviewing for two compliance services officer positions (intermediate and senior), which will expand the staff, but not affect the rehabilitation team served by Jordan Trumbo and Tracey Haskin.

- The rehabilitation team has handled nearly 500 customer-assistance tickets this year, plus phone calls and email messages; staff members successfully transitioned to a new help desk ticketing system that has improved efficiency.
- CRT has issued almost 400 outreach requests for missing Disability Status Report/Discontinuance (DSR SX)-related filings and reminds adjusters to file disability status or benefit-suspension forms promptly to ensure rehabilitation services proceed appropriately.
- More than 200 case reviews have been completed, revealing frequent noncompliance with Rehabilitation Consultation Report and R-2 Rehabilitation Plan requirements, informing future training priorities.
- CRT is revamping basic adjuster training into accessible online modules, developing Work Comp 101, and adding a permanent partial disability module; additional medical policy training is underway, including participation in a PTSD panel at the International Association of Industrial Accident Boards and Commissions convention.
- Stakeholders are encouraged to use and subscribe to DLI's quarterly *COMPACT* newsletter for CRT and rehabilitation-related updates.
- The Claim Shell Team, working with Trumbo, has significantly improved turnaround time on "shell" claims, where no first report of injury has been filed, thereby reducing delays for QRCs waiting to file required documents.

6. R3 withdrawals leading to VRU referral – Michael Haire, VRU, DLI

- VRU is a registered rehabilitation firm (established in 1983 and moved to DLI in 1991) that maintains timely firm and QRC renewals, provides rehabilitation consultations ordered by the commissioner and primarily serves as a safety net for injured workers under Minnesota Statutes 176.104 when disputes exist regarding medical causation or injury work-relatedness. It operates from six statewide offices.
- VRU can only accept R3 withdrawals when there is an identifiable dispute under Minnesota Rules 5220.0510 (for example, claim petition, objection, formal hearing request); VRU cannot accept referrals when the only issue is wage-loss benefit litigation at a 239 conference, unless an appeal to the administrative decision on discontinuance is filed.
- If VRU receives an R3 withdrawal without litigation, the case is returned within about one week to the QRC, with the QRC needing to pursue other options, such as waiting for the petition, filing an R8 closure or completing a change-of-QRC filing.
- VRU logs R8 closure notifications for future awareness but does not act on them, ensuring clarity about whether VRU involvement may become appropriate later, while maintaining a process that prevents inactive or non-eligible cases from remaining in the VRU queue.

7. Workers' Compensation Advisory Council and rulemaking update – Bretta Hines, Office of General Counsel, DLI

- The department is advancing several rulemaking proceedings; the Medical Services Review Board is reviewing injection treatment parameters and potential PTSD treatment parameter changes, with pending updates to the pharmacy fee schedule and annual fee schedule.
- Six sections address the Workers' Compensation Reinsurance Association, including excess surplus distributions and deficiency assessments, with a repeal of obsolete parts of Chapter 79 aligned to these updates.

- The Workers' Compensation Court of Appeals may, when short on judges, draw judges from the Court of Administrative Hearings (CAH) with chief judge approval.
- Workers' Compensation Act (chapter 176) updates: PTSD diagnosis authority expanded to include psychiatric mental health nurse practitioners; housekeeping changes regarding retainer agreements; independent medical examinations witness clarified (personal physician or unpaid witness); and stipulated-facts decision authority clarified between CAH and DLI.
- Permanent partial disability multipliers increased for dates of injury on or after Oct. 1, 2026; the employer window to change an admitted liability determination to a denial extends from 60 to 90 days for dates of injury on or after Oct. 1, 2026 (with notice of discontinuance required if denying outside that window).

8. Future agenda items – Chair Hokeness and panel

- Any agenda ideas can be emailed to Hokeness or Nathaniel Corcoran.
- Elections for chair and vice-chair will be during the Oct. 1, 2026 meeting. Jessica Stimac reminds members of the importance of attending so that a quorum is present.

9. Next in-person meeting – Thursday, Oct. 1, 2026, at 1 p.m.

Adjournment

- A motion to adjourn was made by Scully and seconded by Goodrich. A roll call vote was taken and the motion carried. The meeting was adjourned at 1:47 p.m.