

New Mexico Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC)

Regular Meeting

September 2, 2026, 10:00 AM

MINUTES

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

525 Calle De Los Marquez Suite 200

Santa Fe, NM 87505

1. Call to Order & Roll Call

Dr. Seanez called the meeting to order at 10:03 AM. She said she had received a message from Dr. Scott and that he was running late and would join the meeting shortly.

Roll was taken and attending in person were Dr. Paula Seanez (Chair), Bernadine Chavez, Joan Curtiss, and Greg Trapp (ex officio). Attending virtually were Rachel Minnaar, Mariah Regan, and Cody Unser. Dr. Stephon Scott (ex officio) arrived during the Chair report. Lisa McNivens arrived at 11:00 a.m. Absent were Marlencia Chee (Unexcused) and Michael Murphy (Excused).

2. Introduction of Guests, Partners, and Independent Living Network Members

Guests attending were Sarah Michaud, New Vistas Director; Samantha Rendon, Chief Financial Officer and Interim ASU Deputy Director, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR); Urja Lansing, National Federation of the Blind of New Mexico; Juan Haro, Commission for the Blind IL Program Manager; Elaine Trujillo, Chief Information Officer, DVR; Mario Lucero, Field Operations Director, DVR; Angelina Montoya, DVR; Maggie Saucedo, ASL Interpreter; and Cynthia Giron, ASL Interpreter.

3. Consideration and/or approval of changes to the Order of the agenda

Dr. Seanez reviewed the agenda, saying that only the order of items can be changed, and that nothing can be added or deleted from the agenda. The agenda was accepted as presented.

4. Approval of minutes of July 2, 2026

Dr. Seanez said she added additional notes to the minutes, and she knows that they are very lengthy. She said they capture the full discussion that took place at the meeting. She said the July 2 draft minutes were sent out and asked if the members had reviewed the minutes. Dr. Seanez gave the members time to review the minutes.

Bernadine Chavez motioned to approve the minutes of July 2, correcting the spelling of the last name of Joan Curtiss. Ms. Curtiss seconded the motion. A roll call vote was conducted, and All seven voting members in attendance voted to approve the minutes as revised. Mr. Trapp said the date on the electronic signature needed to be changed from August 12 to July 2.

5. Chair report, Paula Seanez, Ph.D.

Dr. Seanez said the SILC has 12 members, and she acknowledge new members of the SILC, Joan Curtiss and Cody Unser representing individuals with a disability. Dr. Seanez allowed time for Ms. Curtiss and Ms. Unser to share their background and their interests for serving on the SILC. Joan shared that back in the 1970s, she was a DVR client, and her VR Counselor (Jim Tally) help her to get employment. She said she had a job at New Mexico Protection and Advocacy (now Disability Rights New Mexico) where she worked for almost 40 years. She also shared that she has a son with schizophrenia who struggles in and out of hospitals. She said she has a passion for working with folks with mental illness who need independent living services. Ms. Curtiss started a group, New Mexico Allies, an organization dedicated to people with developmental disabilities. Although the program remains active, she no longer serves on its board of directors. Currently, she is performing in a historical play about the disability rights movement, portraying Mary Switzer- whom she and other advocates recognize as a pioneer behind the establishment of the Centers for Independent Living.

Cody Unser shared that she became paralyzed when she was 12 years old due to an autoimmune disorder called transverse myelitis. She said she is from the Unser family, and that racing is in her blood and that she wants to make changes and make a difference for people with disabilities, and that she is not a very patient person when it comes to making changes for persons with disabilities. Ms. Unser shared that as a person with a spinal cord injury, she wants to represent all people with disabilities. She talked about her involvement with the Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation; Christopher Reeves being one of her role models. When she got into scuba diving because it was the only thing that let her know that life was okay. Ms. Unser said she is known as the scuba girl even though we're in a desert. She said "I can rock being paralyzed. I don't have to doubt anything, and I wanted to offer that to others with disabilities." She said she has a master's in public health from George Washington University and is currently enrolled at UNM in medical sociology with the goal of a PhD to incorporate disability education in medical schools. Dr. Seanez thanked both Ms. Curtiss and Ms. Unser for sharing with the SILC.

Dr. Seanez also recognized Rachel Minnaar, saying the emails she sent to Ms. Minnaar were being returned as undeliverable. Dr. Seanez said Ms. Minnaar has provided a current email address and will continue to participate as a member of the SILC.

Dr. Scott arrived at this time and apologized for being late.

Dr. Seanez said the executive committee had looked at the administrative duties of a SILC liaison and that Ms. Chavez will talk more about that later. Dr. Seanez said she sent out an email encouraging members to sign up for the Office of Independent Living Programs email list. Dr. Seanez said that a bylaws committee has also been created, and that Ms. Chavez will be giving an update on potential changes to the bylaws.

Dr. Seanez said prior to the July meeting, she sent out the State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL), adding that the SPIL will terminate on September 30, 2027. Dr. Seanez said she had encouraged the members to review the SPIL, saying that it is the responsibility of the SILC to monitor the SPIL at each meeting. She said there are three major goals in the SPIL: Goal 1, Enhance the lives of New Mexicans with disabilities through the coordination of Independent Living and other disability services; Goal 2, Ensure access to quality IL services throughout New Mexico's diverse communities; Goal 3, Enhance and expand the ability of the network of centers for independent living to deliver quality independent living services statewide.

Dr. Seanez also reviewed the Methods that will be used to evaluate the SPIL goals.

1. Review the SPIL at each SILC meeting through SILC updates, CIL updates and success stories and evaluate whether timelines are being met. If Indicators and/or objectives have not been accomplished, analyze why and determine whether adjustments need to be made. Public comment on monitoring the SPIL is available at each quarterly SILC meeting. This is to be completed Quarterly.

She said other areas for Methods that will be used to evaluate include:

2. Review the annual consumer satisfaction survey results. The CILs and the SILC have agreed upon at least 3 survey questions that all CILs will use and report results to the SILC at the end of each federal fiscal year. Timeline: 1st Quarter each year

Ms. Chavez said that the regulations say that the SILC is supposed to coordinate with other councils, and that it might be good for the SILC to get together with the two State Rehabilitation Councils. She said the councils have to do client satisfaction surveys, and that it might be beneficial to add a question on independent living to collaborate between the councils.

Dr. Seanez said there were 3 questions that were to be used by the CILs and that they have not been shared. No one on the SILC was aware of the 3 questions. Dr. Seanez recommended that this be reviewed at the next meeting.

3. Review the Program Performance reports from all NM CILs listed in the SPIL at the end of each fiscal year. 1st quarter of each year.

Dr. Seanez noted that while DVR received Program Performance reports from the NM CILs, the reports have not been shared or reviewed with the CILs.

4. Review ACL and DSE Site Review reports of CILs when available. If requested SILC can offer resources to assist CILs with corrective action plans for below standard performance designations. Timeline: As needed.

5. Create an annual Progress Report on the state of IL in New Mexico, including an analysis and recommendations and distribute to IL Network, state legislature, Governor's office and other interested parties.

Dr. Seanez said she wanted to bring the SILC back to the SPIL, which she said the SILC is supposed to be reviewing at each meeting. She said the SILC was to be looking at progress made towards achieving the goals, which she said she did not believe was being done by the SILC. She said the SPIL only had one more year, and that the SILC was going to need to be looking at developing a new SPIL.

Ms. Unser volunteers to be on a task force for the SPIL amendment and SPIL development process. Dr. Seanez and Ms. Unser will be on the Ad Hoc committee.

Ms. Hayes asked about annual reports from the centers for independent living, and Dr. Seanez said that the SILC was supposed to be creating an annual progress report on the state of IL in New Mexico. She said the CILs do report their information to DVR.

6. Independent Living Network Updates

a. Sarah Michaud – New Vistas

Ms. Michaud provided the following report, which was emailed to Dr. Seanez.

Ms. Michaud said New Vistas continues to engage in the provision of all five core IL services.

Service trends have remained steady throughout the calendar year. New Vistas Early Intervention program supported 631 children last year and has 334 open cases currently. Our DSA program is currently serving 76 individuals under ILP and 17 individuals through I&Rs. Our IL Staff participated in the Disability Pride parade in Santa Fe in July and were able to set up an informational table at the Plaza that day as well. Staff had a great time meeting with community members and sharing information on IL and agency services. We also set up a table at La Familia's Health and Wellness Fair, which was held July 25th. Staff from our EI and IL teams jointly staffed that table to share information with community members. We have signed up for a community re-entry fair in Santa Fe in October and for the Harding County Health Fair in October as well.

Our partnership with PED continues to go well. I continue to serve on the CTE Advisory Board as a CIL Director and currently chair the students with disabilities subcommittee.

Our 2nd annual youth transition conference was held on Friday, August 7th, at NMHU in Las Vegas. The conference included a resource fair, presentations on IL, financial management, employment support and an interactive Game of Life activity. The event was a great success, and we are already considering locations for next year's event.

We continue to host weekly youth Open Space sessions and online movie nights for our youth participants.

KIVA classes have started with Santa Fe Public Schools for the school year. We are working with 17 students this year to provide IL skills training and transition services twice per month.

Now that fire season has started, we have begun to update our website with wildfire updates from local incident management teams to help spread the word in our communities and help the disability community remain informed about possible evacuations in our service area.

Our IL Advocate who is trained as a non-attorney representative for social security claims has been assisting several consumers through the SSA adjudication process this year. She recently has been working with a few parents and grandparents raising grandkids in our EI program to assist them with applications as well.

Dr. Seanez asked about the 631 infants and toddlers who were served under the early intervention program and the 334 infant and toddler cases that are open, and Ms. Michaud confirmed the numbers. Dr. Seanez asked about the 76 persons that were served under an independent living plan, and Ms. Michaud confirmed.

Dr. Scott complimented Ms. Michaud on giving an impressive report, adding that she had a lot of good things going on.

Ms. Michaud spoke up about the non-presence of the CILs and requested greater advanced notice. She made it clear that she was not speaking for the other CILs.

Ms. Unser complimented the work of New Vistas, saying that they were doing amazing work. Ms. Unser asked how the SILC can engage the CILs to participate. Dr. Seanez encouraged SILC members to reach out and visit the CILs to talk about the SPIL implementation. She also said Ms. Chavez visited the Ability Center in Las Cruces, but they were not open at the time she was there. Dr. Seanez said she was open to other ideas as to how to rebuild the partnership.

Ms. Michaud said she needed to be very blunt, saying there are trust issues between the centers and the Designated State Entity and other partners. She said there are issues of how effective the communication is between the SILC and the centers, as well as the other organizations. She stated that the centers had made their opinions on certain things known and it seems to be disregarded by the SILC. She said one thing is to listen to the centers, allow them to provide feedback and truly take that under consideration, make sure that the centers are given the notice of things that are happening, and make sure that the centers are involved in the planning especially around the SPIL. Ms. Michaud said that the SILC needs more than half of the centers to sign off on the SPIL, and she noted that she is the only center at the SILC meeting. Ms. Michaud said she was speaking constructively, saying that things need to be repaired.

Dr. Seanez thanked Ms. Michaud for her comments, adding that she was open, and saying that she had only chaired one SILC meeting, and asked how she might do things differently.

Ms. Michaud said her comments had nothing to do with the SILC, adding that she is speaking as a center director who has more than 10 years in her role. She said the state struggled to support independent living the way that it needs to be supported and that has been discussed with the SILC. Ms. Michaud described that she feels that independent living very often feels like the little redheaded stepchild that just gets shoved into the corner by not getting the attention that it should. She further stated that independent living is not vocational rehabilitation and very often it is spoken of as an offshoot. She further said that there have been very limited requests for additional funding for this field and there has been very little support of those funding requests from the SILC as a body and from the DSE.

Ms. Michaud said she is not pointing fingers at anyone, adding that there have been a lot of administrations in her in New Mexico and it's held true across the board. She said that centers get tired of calling out into the wilderness. She further said that she was not in any way, shape or form an attempt to belittle anyone on the council because she knows the council cares. Ms. Michaud said she was trying to be honest about what she has seen in over 20 years working in the disability community and over 10 years in independent living and living in New Mexico as a person with disabilities, saying that we get overlooked so often. She said the SILC and the DSE need to be better voices for independent

living and the need for additional funding. Ms. Michaud said that for over 20 years; they told the state there are five unserved counties in the state and not once have the centers gotten funding to change that. Ms. Michaud ended saying, if we are truly going to build a partnership, then we need to start with addressing the gaps. Ms. Michaud said we need to honor independent living, saying it is a vibrant, consumer based, center driven service and that's where it needs to start.

Dr. Seanez thanked Ms. Michaud for her comments.

Ms. Chaves asked what five counties are not being served, and Dr. Seanez said the five counties include Quay, Roosevelt, and Catron.

Dr. Scott said the other two are Hidalgo and Curry.

Dr. Seanez reminded the group to review the SPIL as those counties are indicated in the SPIL and have been for some time. She said she has seen those five counties come up time and again, and that in her short time as Chair she wants to see transparency, to report on how much money is being funded, and that the SILC needs to be aware of those numbers. She asked what has been researched over the last 20 year and last 10 years about those counties, including what is the population, what has been tried, and what agencies have been partnered with to serve those counties. She said it is important for the SILC to be transparent about the budget. She said there is a lot of information, and she wants the SILC to make informed decisions. Dr. Seanez said she is fully aware that independent living is not vocational rehabilitation. She said the twelve members of the SILC all have a role to play in working on solutions, building trust, and moving forward.

Ms. Unser agreed and shared her experience growing up in auto racing and the importance of a pit crew. The driver is not alone on the track and needs support to get to the checkered flag. She paralleled the support of the SILC and CILs as the pit crew in auto racing.

Dr. Scott thanked Dr. Seanez and Ms. Michaud for their feedback. He said it's consistent with everything that we've been talking about and working towards collaboration. He said that he would share a little more when it was his turn to report. He said trust is critical so we can better collaborate to meet the needs of New Mexicans with disabilities.

Dr. Seanez asked if there were more questions for Ms. Michaud. Ms. Michaud agreed to provide a copy of her written report. Dr. Seanez proceeded to the next agenda items.

- b. Gil Yildiz– Independent Living Resource Center- Not Present
- c. Albert Montoya – The Ability Center- Not present
- d. Audra Wilson – Choices- Not present
- e. Charlie Phelps – San Juan Center for Independence, Not Present

Dr. Seanez said that Mr. Murphy said he was not able to attend, but that he would send a written report. Dr. Seanez also asked Ms. Michaud if she could send in her written report, and Ms. Michaud said she would forward it.

- f. Dr. Stephon L. Scott– Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (Designated State Entity)

Dr. Scott provided an update from DVR as the Designated State Entity. He said he wanted to reiterate the need for DVR to be held accountable to the centers for independent living as well as the SILC. He stated that he had met with each of the CIL directors, and it was enlightening and informative. He said DVR stayed true to its word, as DVR proposed additional resources from the state recurring general funds in the amount of \$337,300 to the Governor's office. He said throughout the nation, the Ticket to Work funds or Social Security reimbursements funds are declining and are unpredictable. He said the goal is to make sure there is reliable income for the CILs. He said DVR kept its word and submitted the request. Dr. Scott said he took very seriously the conversation from the last SILC meeting, primarily from Michael Murphy and some of the CILs. He reiterated that the role of the SILC is to ensure compliance with the SPIL, monitoring that, but also ensuring that the CILs have the resources they need.

Dr. Scott said that the budget request was step one of the plans. He said that in subsequent years, DVR will request even more resources based on reviewing a viable plan for those five unserved counties, but not just for the unserved counties but also underserved counties. Dr. Scott stated that he would like to do it collectively and collaboratively with the CIL directors. He said the meeting with the CILs was collaborative. He said he was very transparent as the DSE about what he wanted to do, and in fact did do. He expressed that he wants us to continue that relationship because as research shows, consistency of behavior over time is how you build trust. He said it's not just mere words; it's also action and consistency. Dr. Scott said he was committed to working collaboratively, adding that it sounds like others here are also committed to working collaboratively, and he concluded by saying he was very optimistic.

Dr. Scott expressed that he's been working on building continuity within DVR since he started working as the Director. He reported that over 22 years, there have been 17 DVR directors, so the turnover has been considerable. He said he has been the director for a little over a year. He said that he has restructured certain parts of DVR to establish continuity regardless of who the director is. He said this included creating an RSU Director. He reported that Antoinette Holmes has been hired as the RSU Unit Director. She will be overseeing three critical programs including Client Services, Statewide Programs, and Pre Employment Transition services.

Dr. Scott added that the DVR team is currently working on a plan for education and assisting schools. This includes Tech Robots that will be at public schools DVR serves. They will act as resources for students and will assist counselors while taking away the stress of commuting. Counselors are spending an average of two hours commuting to one school. These resources will now take away this stress, while still helping the students and giving them the support they need.

Dr. Scott reported that DVR is working with the Veterans Affairs on Stand Down events where they meet with veterans to talk to them about their benefits. Veterans with disabilities are informed about the VR services and resources. Dr. Scott invited partners including the Commission for the Blind, Independent Living, VR, the SILC to collectively address the needs of all New Mexicans.

Dr. Scott shared that DVR started New Mexico DVR Community of Practice (CoP). Ms. Holms has conducted audits and realized DVR needs consistency of practice throughout the state. The CoP launched 2 weeks ago with the aim of consistency of practice across the DVR offices throughout the state to ensure that DVR is in compliance with their manual of operating procedures (MOP), in addition to budgeting and making sure that DVR is being good stewards of public money. He also stated that this has resulted in a fiscal agent initiative that DVR is launching so staff will receive training on what does it

means to be a fiscal agent of public dollars, and this is regardless of pay grade or position. Everyone will receive that training.

Dr. Scott ended his report by stating that he is very optimistic about what DVR and the SILC are doing, going forward.

Dr. Seanez asked the SILC if there were any questions. Rachel Minaar asked a question specifically about a friend. Her friend was a small-time vendor through the DVR was providing job development, job coaching and many of the authorizations were not paid and he ended up having to close his business.

Ms. Minnaar explained that the business owner is a person with a disability. He was contracted through DVR and was receiving authorizations for services and many of those bills were not paid, and he ended up having to close. Ms. Minnaar asked who her friend could reach out to find out about his contract and payment of past due bills. Dr. Scott asked that individual to contact him directly because he would need more facts to understand what the specific issues are with this specific vendor.

Dr. Seanez recognized that Lisa McNiven joined the meeting at 11:00 AM. Ms. McNiven expressed difficulty in seeing the interpreters. The SILC took a break while DVR set up a laptop to be able to highlight the interpreters.

After the SILC returned from the break Dr. Seanez asked Ms. McNiven to introduce herself. Ms. McNiven said she had been on the SILC previously when she was with the Governor's Commission on Disability, saying that she is no longer with the agency and is now on the SILC as an individual with a disability.

7. Update on State Fiscal Year 28 Budget Request from Designated State Entity

Ms. Rendon confirmed that DVR will be requesting \$337,300 in general funds for independent living services.

8. Update on the Process to Amend Federal fiscal Year 2025-2027 State Plan for Independent Living

Dr. Seanez reported that she reached out to Jennifer Martin who is with ACL, the Administration for Community Living. She said Ms. Martin is the contact for the State of New Mexico for the Office of Independent Living Program. Dr. Seanez said she will meet with Ms. Martin at 2:30 this afternoon. Dr. Seanez said the meeting is regarding whether the transfer of administrative funds from DVR to the Commission for the Blind would be a technical amendment or substantial amendment. Dr. Seanez said Ms. Martin wants to know what the \$9,642 will be used for, and Dr. Seanez said she will clarify that it would be used to provide the five independent living services including Independent Living Skills Training, Peer counseling, Individual and systems advocacy, and transition services. She said the transition services would primarily be to help persons at risk of entering an institution to remain in their own communities.

Dr. Seanez said this was a carryover item from the July 2 meeting, and that the SILC did talk about it extensively at the July meeting, and that the members have the minutes of that meeting.

9. Approval of the Statewide Independent Living Council Amending, through either a Technical Amendment or a Substantial Amendment, the Federal Fiscal Year 2025-2027 State Plan for Independent Living to Implement the Following Changes:

Reduce the Amount of Part B Funds Received by the New Mexico Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to Serve as the Designated State Entity from \$19,284 to \$9,642; and

Provide \$9,642 in Part B funds to the New Mexico Commission for the Blind (CFB) and Authorize CFB to use the \$9,642 to provide Part B services to Persons who are Blind or Low Vision.

Dr. Seanez read the action item, saying it was for the Approval of the Statewide Independent Living Council Amending, through either a Technical Amendment or a Substantial Amendment, the Federal Fiscal Year 2025-2027 State Plan for Independent Living to reduce the Amount of Part B Funds Received by the New Mexico Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to Serve as the Designated State Entity from \$19,284 to \$9,642; and Provide \$9,642 in Part B funds to the New Mexico Commission for the Blind (CFB) and Authorize CFB to use the \$9,642 to provide Part B services to Persons who are Blind or Low Vision. After reading the action item, Dr. Seanez asked for a motion to approve the item.

Ms. Hayes made a motion to approve the action item as read by Dr. Seanez, and Ms. McNiven seconded the motion. Dr. Seanez asked Ms. Hayes if her motion was the action item as read, and Ms. Hayes said yes. Dr. Seanez thanked Ms. Hayes for the motion. Dr. Seanez said she saw that Ms. McNiven seconded the motion, and Ms. McNiven said yes.

Dr. Seanez said there was a motion and a second, and she asked if there was any discussion. Dr. Seanez recognized Ms. Michaud from New Vistas.

Ms. Michaud asked Dr. Seanez if she had requested any input from the CILs on the motion. Ms. Michaud said the CILs were unanimously united in objecting to this action.

Dr. Seanez said she did not go directly to the CILs, but that the issue of amending the SPIL was discussed extensively at the July 2 SILC meeting, and that Michael Murphy made a motion to approve the amendment. Dr. Seanez asked for clarification from the SILC members.

Ms. Chavez said that Dr. Seanez was correct, and that during the July SILC meeting Michael Murphy made a motion to approve amending the SPIL and that the SILC approved the motion.

Dr. Seanez said that she has a meeting with Ms. Martin to clarify whether the amendment can be done through a technical amendment. Dr. Seanez again recognized Ms. Michaud.

Ms. Michaud said she understood, and that she also understands that 51% of the CILs must approve the state plan because if the CILs don't sign, the SPIL stands as is, and that no one from the SILC has reached out to her. She said she does not get any Part B funds, and that she will support the centers that do. She said this is kind of standard over the last 10 years of her experience as an executive director. She said the CILs don't get questions, and she wants to make sure their voice is heard. She said that if the CIL directors are in favor then she will support them. Ms. Michaud said her last conversation with center directors was full of concerns.

Ms. Chavez said she thought Dr. Scott was talking with the Part B centers and explaining this process with those Part B centers.

Mr. Trapp said that at the July 2 meeting the CIL directors from the San Juan Center, Choices, and the ILC were all present at that meeting when this issue was very thoroughly discussed. He said at that meeting the CIL directors indicated an appreciation of the information that was shared, and they did not voice any objections to this proposal. He said he wanted to clarify that point, and to say that this information is all captured in the minutes of the July 2nd meeting.

Dr. Seanez thanked Mr. Trapp for his comments and reminded the SILC members that the July 2nd minutes were sent out to the members and were posted on the DVR website.

Dr. Seanez recognized Ms. Minnaar, and Ms. Minnaar asked for clarification about Ms. Michaud comments that the CILs did not participate. Ms. Minnaar said she thought this regarded Mr. Trapp's complaint that the SILC was not in compliance with the Open Meetings Act and that the SILC was obligated to do follow up and take corrective action.

Dr. Seanez reminded the members to identify themselves when speaking.

Mr. Trapp said that the SILC took corrective action at the July 2 SILC meeting to implement the corrective action required by the New Mexico Department of Justice. He said that the SILC implemented all four of the corrective actions required by the NMDNJ. He said one of those was to revote on the State Plan for Independent Living because the June 10 meeting was found to have not been in compliance with the Open Meetings Act. He said that at the July 2 meeting the SILC voted to consider amending the SPIL, either through a technical amendment or a substantial amendment. He said that the method would depend on the results of the meeting with ACL.

Ms. Regan responded that this explanation helps her a lot. She said she wanted to make sure the SILC addressed Ms. Michaud's concerns and that we resolved the corrective action recommendations, and she asked Ms. Michaud if that was what the SILC was shooting for.

Ms. Michaud stated that it is her understanding that the corrective actions were handled by the votes. She acknowledged that there were some things that were tied to the complaints from the Commission for the Blind that had to be resolved. The actions related to the response to the NMDNJ had nothing to do with the decision around allocating funding to the Commission for the Blind. Ms. Michaud said the decisions were made when SILC initiated the SPIL. SILC can make that choice, but they are not obligated to make that choice. Ms. Michaud's pointed out that as a CIL director this is one of those key partnership areas and the centers have to agree. She said she has received no communication from center directors indicating that they are. She said, now, maybe they are, but I have not received any. Ms. Michaud again stated that it is very important to her as a center director to make sure they are consulted and that their desires on this point are used to make this decision. Ms. Michaud further stated that if we're in favor of it, great, but don't forget to talk to the centers and the challenge is that New Vistas is the only one in attendance at this meeting.

Mariah Regan stated that as a member, I just want to know which way we should be going with it. So, if I say yay or nay to something, I want to have that background to be sure that I'm making a constructive, like positive vote.

Ms. Michaud assured Ms. Regan that she is never going to tell her how to vote but again stated that she wanted the CIL viewpoint considered. Ms. Michaud said again, if it has, that's great. I just don't have any communication within the network to say that the position had changed.

Ms. Regan said that Ms. Michaud previously spoke about sort of negativity with some of the other offices that are not present today. Ms. Regan said, so, there was a connotation that perhaps there was some division going on. And she didn't want to be caught up in that. Ms. Regan said she wants to kind of be on target with what the right way to go is. And so, when she saw this issue come up and all those other issues that you had raised earlier and that you raising this now during this number nine on the agenda that that I know what I'm doing so thank you so much for both you and Mr. Trapp for helping me with that because you pointing out that it's no difference on whether the funding exists or not we're not making that decision now that's already made.

Dr. Seanez thanked Ms. Regan for bringing this conversation back to the floor and stated that if she's not clear, we want to make sure everyone is clear. Dr. Seanez restated what Ms. Michaud said, which is that any amendments must be jointly developed by the chair of the SILC and the center directors. And that process should take place after public input is gathered and a majority of the CIL directors would have to sign off. She said the SILC is very clear on that, and that SILC will follow the state and federal regulations and are not trying to violate the regulations or the requirements. Dr. Seanez said she wanted to reiterate that during our July 2nd meeting because of the corrective action, the SILC retroactively approved SPIL on item 18 on the July 2nd meeting. Approval of the federal fiscal year 2025 to 2027 state plan for independent living with discussion and vote to approve and have the chair sign the most recent SPIL. Dr. Seanez said that was because it was a violation of the Open Meetings Act when the SPIL was developed. She said the SILC did not follow the Open Meetings Act and the requirements to go out to full public comment. She said the SILC took action at our July 2nd meeting to reapprove the SPIL And she wants to make sure that folks remember that we did take that action to clarify. Now we're moving forward to look at this action item and we will have a conversation and the guidance from Jennifer from the Office of Independent Living Programs, and we are not going against the regulations that I just read. Dr. Seanez said the SILC will follow whether it's a technical amendment or substantial amendment after getting guidance from Jennifer Martin. She said the SILC will proceed and definitely need to follow the requirements to get public input, which was a violation in the last development of the SPIL. She said the SILC is not going outside the regulations in developing the amendments to the SPIL. And we will follow the guidance provided by Jennifer Martin.

Dr. Seanez expressed that she hoped that that clarifies bringing this conversation back to the floor. If you're not clear, we want to make sure everyone is clear. I just want to restate what Sarah says said that any amendments must be jointly developed by the chair of the SILC and the center directors. And that process should take place and with public input after public input is gathered and a majority of the CIL directors CIL directors would have to sign off. We're very clear on that.

Dr. Seanez stated that we're not trying to go against regulations or not trying to violate the regulations or the requirements. She reiterated that during the SILC July 2nd meeting, the SPIL was approved again in response to the corrective action. It was item 18 on the July 2nd meeting. Approval of the federal fiscal year 2025 to 2027 state plan for independent living with discussion and vote to approve and have the chair sign the most recent state plan for independent living. Because that was a violation of the Open Meetings Act that the SPIL was developed, did not follow the Open Meetings Act and the

requirements to go out to full public comment. The SILC acted at the July 2nd meeting to reapprove the SPIL. And so, I want to make sure that folks remember that we did take that action to be in compliance.

She said now we're moving forward to look at this action item and we will have a conversation from Jennifer Martin from the Office of Independent Living Programs, and we are not going against the regulations that I just read. We will follow whether it's a technical amendment and again getting guidance from Jennifer Martin or we will, you know, we need to follow the requirements to get public input, which was not which was a violation from the last development of the SPIL Let's be clear on that. So again, we are not going outside the regulations in developing, in making any amendments to the spill. And we will follow the guidance provided by Jennifer Martin. She said she hopes that clarifies things

Ms. Regan stated, yes, it does and thank you so much. She asked if the SILC would know when we are all in compliance

Dr. Seanez responded that the SILC is in compliance. Our actions at our July 2nd meeting took care of a lot of those. She said she wrote a letter based on our actions from the July 2nd meeting to the Department of Justice and gave them the transcripts, provided them with the meeting minutes from those various meetings. Dr. Seanez thanked Ms. Regan for helping the SILC clarify this issue. We did take all those actions, those actions on those four compliance areas.

Ms. Regan stated that is awesome and it makes her feel a lot better.

Mr. Trapp responded, saying that Dr. Seanez is exactly 100% correct, and he appreciated her clarifying that information. He said he wanted to underscore the fact that at the July 2nd meeting, the SILC voted to approve the current state plan for independent living. He said all of us, the Commission, too, adding that the Commission for the Blind has received Part B independent living funds for 35 years. We were receiving funds for the first year of this SPIL and we're spending those funds pursuant to the SPIL and there's a two-year federal period of performance. He said that period of performance runs through September 30th.

Mr. Trapp said all of us were spending independent living funds based upon the SPIL which the Department of Justice had said was not adopted in compliance with the Open Meetings Act. He said to be clear, the SILC vote to approve the current SPIL essentially helps make sure that all our spending including the Commission for the Blind, the Centers for Independent Living, and DVRs spending is allowable. He said the retroactive approval of the SPIL corrected that. That is what happened at the July 2 meeting. He said the process that we're now considering would follow the federal requirements and state law requirements; and absolutely a majority of the Centers for Independent Living must agree with that. He said the SPIL development process will take place with Dr. Seanez, as chair of the SILC working with the center directors. He said that is a joint process and that it will absolutely be followed.

Dr. Seanez asked if there were any other comments or questions.

Ms. Unser requested further clarification and expressed that she wanted to make sure the centers for independent living are funded and prioritized. She further stated that the Commission for the Blind is not a center and wants to make sure the CILs are prioritized.

Mr. Trapp stated that he totally understands and appreciates Ms. Unser's comments and questions. Mr. Trapp said the SILC discussed this thoroughly at the July 2nd meeting, and that he and Michael Murphy

had a really good dialogue back and forth about how that really plays out here. Mr. Trapp said Dr. Scott was saying that he is supporting additional state dollars going to the Centers for Independent Living. Mr. Trapp said he totally supports that. He said we are really trying to look at this from the point of how best the state of New Mexico can leverage and maximize the resources that are available. He said the small amount of Part B funds that the Commission is seeking, \$9,600, which he said would not come from any of the Centers for Independent Living, allows the Commission and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to leverage state dollars. He said that was actually very, very significant. He said the SILC discussed at the July 2nd meeting that this leveraging is very, very popular with the legislature.

Mr. Trapp said the state has been doing this leveraging now for about nine years. He said he thinks this is an important point because it really goes to Cody's point about how we can get additional funds.

Mr. Trapp said back around 2017, DVR had a surplus of what DVR calls Ticket to Work money, what the independent living centers call Social Security reimbursement funds, and what the Commission call program income. He said the regulations for the VR program call it program income. He said this is money that the VR agencies get when our services enable consumers to exit from Social Security Disability benefits. He said back in 2017, he recommended to DVR that they could give some of their program income to the Centers for Independent Living. He said, for example, the independent living program in California gets \$27 million in program income from the Department of Rehabilitation Services in California.

Mr. Trapp said that using program income has given the centers millions, literally millions of extra dollars over the last eight years or so. He said because DVR still had program income that they were needing to spend, he recommended that the commission could take some of that program income and in turn the Commission could give DVR \$100,000 of general fund that DVR could use to match vocational rehabilitation funds. He said the Commission had the ability to absorb \$200,000 of DVR's program income. He said the Commission uses that to fund the Commission's independent living services. He said that is about as much as a three quarters million dollar positive to the state of New Mexico.

Mr. Trapp said he intended that transfer to be a single time thing, but the legislature really liked that coordination, and they have put it in the DVR and Commission budgets ever since. Mr. Trapp said it is dependent upon the Commission's ability to spend program income in an allowable way, and it's the receipt of the Part B funds that makes that happen. He said the Commission can spend program income on the Older Blind program, adding the Commission gets federal funds from the Rehabilitation Services Administration to provide independent living services, which is a part of the SPIL, to people who are 55 and older. He said the Commission uses the Part B money for people of all ages, but predominantly people under 55.

Mr. Trapp said the legislature loves this way in which we coordinate and collaborate and utilize funds that are beneficial to the entire state of New Mexico. He said it would be beneficial when we work with the legislature to show that we're all collaborating. He said that ultimately, it's going to be easier to go to the legislature and ask for additional funds for the Centers for Independent Living if we can show that we are all collaborating.

Mr. Trapp said this was the conversation that took place at the July 2nd meeting and what led Michael Murphy to ultimately make the motion to do the amendment to the State Plan for Independent Living., He said it is a way that can give the SILC a better chance to get money to the Centers for Independent

Living. He said Dr. Scott said he is requesting General Funds, and those state funds have the advantage of not having federal strings. He said while this is a complicated question, the SILC thoroughly discussed it at the July 2nd meeting and ultimately as a body, it helps us to show how we're collaborating when we're asking for additional revenues. He said that is what the legislature is going to look for.

Dr. Seanez mentioned that item 15 on the agenda is to talk about SILC orientation and training that has been requested to be provided by the IL Technical Assistance and Training Center. We are talking about Part B funding, and the SILC needs to understand what Part B funding is and which CILs receive Part B funding. She said the SILC will discuss an orientation for new members and for existing members on item 15 to cover this information.

Dr. Seanez recognized Samantha Rendon from DVR. Ms. Rendon said Dr. Scott is having conversations with the CIL Directors. She reminded the SILC that Dr. Scott is meeting with the CIL Directors. Ms. Rendon responded to Ms. Unser's earlier comments about prioritizing the CIL funding, saying the \$9,600 would decrease DVR's administrative costs. She said this funding to the Commission for the Blind would not have an impact to the CILs at all. It would be reducing DVR's administrative costs. She expressed that that hopefully clears up those two points.

Ms. Unser thanked Ms. Rendon and said it clears things up and said her question was why the SILC was in a standstill over \$9,600.

Dr. Seanez stated that the Commission for the Blind had made this proposal some time ago, yet the SILC was not informed, nor was the SILC allowed to discuss and decide on the compromise. Dr. Seanez said she wanted to be very direct that the SILC was not informed of this compromise of \$9,642. As a member of the SILC, Dr. Seanez expressed that she was not aware of this compromise. It was a very doable compromise that we're acting upon here. At the July 2nd meeting, the SILC was very transparent about the amount of money and the compromise. But prior to July 2nd, the SILC was never informed about this amount of money that we were proposing to, that the Commission for the Blind has been working with the designated state entity to address.

Dr. Seanez stated that we are at a standstill, partly because we didn't have all the information and now we are going back and correcting things. She said after July 2nd, we had more information and we're continuing to have a better understanding. She said at the July 2nd meeting, there was a lot of conversation about this, and it was made very clear that our decision would not reduce the Centers for Independent Living funding. DVR is our designated state entity, so they get those administrative costs. She said the funds would not come from the CIL, I want to repeat that, it will not come from the CIL's budget, it will come from the amount that DVR, just as Ms. Rendon has also made very clear, their administrative costs, that's where it would come from.

Dr. Seanez said the SILC's decision would benefit all the partners with this additional funding that this would draw down. She said we are moving forward, and the SILC is clarifying what needs to be done here.

Ms. Chavez clarified that the Commission for the Blind is not a center, but they do provide the core services for independent living. She reflected on her previous role with the Client Assistance Program (CAP), saying she saw firsthand what those independent living services meant to people. She said she knows that the Commission for the Blind receives a lot of money, but that Mr. Trapp would say not

enough money for folks who just need independent living services like cane travel and daily living skills and all of that, adding that those are crucial services.

Dr. Seanez stated that the SILC is moving forward in the right direction. This motion clearly states the action we're going to take, which is either a technical amendment or a substantial amendment. And we will meet with Jennifer Martin and get guidance on that, and we will follow the regulations to include the CILs on this decision and we are not excluding the CILs in this decision.

Mr. Trapp stated that I would add that the decision is not being made today to take that action. It's only to start the process which would allow the conversation to be had to allow Dr. Seanez, as chair to jointly develop the SPIL amendment with the center directors, to gather public input on this before this amendment would be drafted. If it is considered a technical amendment, the process is easier because the SILC does not have to have public hearings. Mr. Trapp stated that he thinks ACL will probably say that a substantial amendment is required, which would mean that the SILC would need to have public meetings throughout the state in order to gather public input on this issue. What the SILC does today is just vote to have that conversation, and then ultimately the SILC will come back and decide in conjunction with the centers whether this is a good idea or not, with 51% of the center directors agreeing, or not. He said this is a decision to basically have that conversation.

Dr. Seanez recognized Ms. Michaud, and Ms. Michaud stated that the sticking point for her in all of this is as a center director, is, as Greg Trapp spoke very eloquently a moment ago about coordination and collaboration, and saying she was very clear on this point when we wrote the last SPIL. Ms. Michaud stated that coordination and collaboration currently does not exist between the Commission and the Centers. She stated that in 10 years at New Vistas, we have received 0 referrals from the Commission. She stated that the other centers have very similar statistics. So, if we are going to move forward and we are going to embrace coordination and collaboration, then she would ask the SILC and the Commission for the Blind to commit to that, to follow through with that, to have ongoing conversations about coordination of services, because that's really, really key to her as a center.

Ms. Michaud said up until this last SPIL, there was an entire goal in the state plan that was only commission focused. As a center director, I have to report on every single goal in the state plan to my funding agency. And for years, all I could say was this goal has nothing to do with me. She said it was very specific to the Commission. She said that was not okay. She said if we are going to coordinate every goal we set and everything that we have to do truly has to be focused on coordination. She said that has been a major sticking point for the centers. She said as a state agency; the Commission has the ability to go to the legislature and ask for funding. She said that the centers don't and only get what the designated state entity asks for. She said when the Commission takes this \$9000, they will be able to leverage that absolutely into hundreds of thousands of dollars of Social Security reimbursements, and that's great. She said it's important, and that she will never, ever, ever minimize the importance of blind services. She said she has gone on record saying those are hugely important. She said but from a center standpoint, as an executive director, as a provider, what is a sticking point for me, is that there is a lot of conversation about coordination when it comes to the money, but that money never actually gets to the centers. She said the coordination doesn't happen. She said if we are going to do this from my perspective, I need a commitment that that will change and that we will move forward and there will actually be conversations; there will actually be referrals moving back and forth and that when I send a referral to the commission, I don't have to know with almost 90% accuracy that it will be denied. She

said now we can do services, and we do, but she needs to know as a center director, and she has heard the same thing from other center directors about this particular conversation and coordination, and put your money where your mouth is - sorry.

Dr. Seanez thanked Ms. Michaud for her comments. She said she knows there's a lot of new members on the Council. She said she also wants to say that she represents the Navajo Nation. She said the Navajo Nation has set aside independent living funding to provide services directly, again, it's all identified by the Navajo Nation Council. Dr. Seanez said she was here representing rural communities and tribal communities. She said in the SPIL, it talks about underrepresented groups, rural communities. It's not just about blind individuals. It's about commitment to rural communities, underserved communities, tribal communities.

Dr. Seanez expressed that with regards to coordination and collaboration, she has not seen the outreach that needs to be done in tribal communities, although this outreach is clearly stated in the SPIL. Dr. Seanez reminded the SILC that each member of the SILC represents diverse groups. It is not about Commission for the Blind and not just about blind services. It's about services to all counties in the state of New Mexico.

Mr. Trapp asked to address one thing that Ms. Michaud said, adding that Charlie Phelps had also brought this issue up at the July 2nd meeting. Mr. Trapp said he is committed to working with the centers and that he has written all the centers. He said he has asked Juan Haro to meet with the center directors. Mr. Trapp said we really do need to look at how we make referrals back and forth. He said the Commission looked at case service data going back about 10 years, and that it showed that 49 individuals had been referred from the centers to the Commission. He said that the numbers show that over half of those individuals were provided vocational rehabilitation services and had cases open.

He said they also had independent living cases open, and that some had both independent living and vocational rehabilitation cases open. He said that all 49 of those individuals received some kind of service from the Commission. He said the Commission wants to make sure that when people are referred they are eligible for Commission services, and that it could well be that there might be some individuals who are referred to the Commission who are not eligible. He said the statistics and the Commission's federal reports show that the Commission does work with people referred to the Commission. He said the Commission also refers people to the centers. Mr. Trapp said he has personally done that a half dozen times over the last six months. Mr. Trapp said he thinks there are fewer referrals to the centers because the Commission provides the five core IL services, but we definitely do refer people to the centers. Mr. Trapp expressed that he is committing now to work with the Centers to improve those relationships and to really make sure that we're making referrals in a way that is clear and most effective.

Dr. Seanez then called for a vote on the motion for item 9. She called on Ms. Minnaar, Ms. Unser, and Ms. Regan, who each asked for more time to consider their vote. Dr. Seanez then called on Ms. Hayes, Ms. Curtiss, Ms. Chavez, and Ms. McNiven, who all voted yes. Dr. Seanez then called on Ms. Regan, who voted yes. Dr. Seanez then asked Ms. Unser, who said she was still at a loss. Dr. Seanez said she could also abstain or vote no. Ms. Unser said she understood that this vote was just to get the conversation started and she thanked Mr. Trapp for the clarifications and said she wanted to echo what Ms. Michaud said. Ms. Unser then voted yes. Dr. Seanez then called on Ms. Minnaar, who voted yes. Dr. Seanez

summarized that all eight voting members voted yes and that there were no nays or abstentions, and that the motion passed.

10. Discussion on the FY 2028-2030 State Plan for Independent Living Development Process

Dr. Seanez reported that this is the last year of the current SPIL. She said the SPIL will end on September 30, 2027. She said the SILC needs to develop a SPIL development process including timelines and processes to develop the SPIL for 2028 – 2030. Dr. Seanez proposed that a task force be established to develop this workplan process, saying, again, this work group would really be studying the requirements of developing a state plan for independent living and coming up with that process and timelines would really be what would be tasked for the group. It is important for the SILC to follow the Open Meetings Act (OMA), State and Federal regulations.

Bernadine Chavez shared that Section 704 c2 guidebook will be sent to SILC members so that they can review to have a better understanding of the SPIL development process. She shared that there's a guidebook that is very helpful.

But the main sections of the SPIL will include the state goals, objectives and strategies, a detailed description of how the state subchapter B funds will be spent. An account of outreach efforts to identify unserved and underserved populations, a detailed report of services currently provided in the state, a description of the state's network of CILs, including a plan for how the network will develop statewide services in the future, and a plan for any new IL funds to be used. So it goes through a comprehensive outline of this, and I can send this to the task force or and see if this helps but you know there has to be timelines and responsibilities that have to be assigned and working along with the CILs and receiving public input. There are requirements for public input that need to be advertised and public hearings and so it's quite a process and it's really an important document. Ms. Chavez said it's not an application, but it is something that should be used and be as a guide to services. She hopes that this would be helpful, and she can send this section to everyone or to just the task force.

The SPIL will state goals objectives and strategies of how state how Part B funds will be spent and outreach efforts to unserved and underserved populations. A SPIL Amendment Ad Hoc task force was established with Ms. Unser and Dr. Seanez.

11. Update on the Designated State Entity Provision of Administrative Support

Dr. Seanez said during the last meeting she reported that the contract for the SILC coordinator ended on June 30, and that the SILC would assess the administrative duties and support that is necessary for the SILC to do our work.

Bernadine Chavez reported that the Executive Committee reviewed and assessed the duties of a SILC Liaison. She said we divided it into financial and reporting, policy formulation and implementation, and strategic planning. Based on this review, a work plan was developed that outlined duties and responsibilities. She said that the budget and grant management would all fall to DVR. She said DVR

assigned a staff member to serve as the SILC Liaison. Ms. Chavez summarized the duties that DVR will provide as administrative support, including handling logistics like finding a meeting location, posting legal notice on the DVR website and newspapers. She said the SILC executive committee will work on agendas and making sure that the time frames for the Open Meetings Act are followed. She said that DVR will post items on the web page, adding that there was a glitch last time which is why the August meeting had to be canceled and moved to today. She said DVR will help with the SPIL, assist with finding meeting places and advertising them in compliance with the Open Meetings Act. She said the Designated State Entity will collaborate to let the SILC know where things are at with the budget.

12. Update on SILC Membership and Committee Assignments

Dr. Seanez reported that the SILC membership includes 12 members. The SILC has an Executive Committee and a Bylaws committee that includes Peggy Hayes, Bernadine Chavez, and Dr. Stephon Scott. She said a task force has been formed to work on the SPIL development process for 2027, and that the task force will also focus on the process of amending the current SPIL. She said the task force will consist of Cody Unser and Dr. Seanez.

13. Update on the Building partnerships in creating access to housing and resources

Ms. Chavez said she represents SILC on Building Partnerships. Many programs for seniors and people with disabilities. Many providers are available and programs for individuals with disabilities. New Mexico was recently selected to participate in what's called a partnership accelerator for seniors and people with disabilities who are unhoused or experiencing housing instability.

They emphasized that the Centers for Independent Living are key stakeholders for people with disabilities. At the last meeting they showed some model programs and best practice programs. It is a coalition of all these folks that provide services to people with disabilities and to seniors. They separated them, which was smart because there's very specific senior programs out there and they were able to provide services to people who were not seniors but had disabilities. These programs leveraged some HUD funding, and New Mexico was one of the states that doesn't have much HUD funding except for providing the direct Section 8 and low-income housing, but they don't have any kind of other advocacy programs.

And the one that was the best practice was mental health providers, they had Medicaid providers, VR providers that if their folks did not have housing, they could not participate in VR programs. They had veterans and independent living programs. And it looks like the best practice was for the independent living centers to bring in the funds from HUD that would help them develop some kind of referral sources and pull all of these services together. So, they were really looking at it as a whole, which I thought was really good and we have two more that I'm supposed to attend, but I'll let you know how those go. But it was Kansas was the one that seemed to be most on the ball and we're leveraging all these funds to help people. She said it's the first housing project they called it, but that housing included referrals and bringing other folks in that would help with other kinds of resources. Ms. Chaves opened it up for questions.

14. Update on Request for Open Meetings Act Training from New Mexico Department of Justice

Dr. Seanez reached out to the New Mexico Department of Justice and requested for TBD for Open Meetings Act (OMA). An OMA training will be scheduled as part of the agenda at the October or November meeting. In preparation for the training, Dr. Seanez encouraged SILC members to read the OMA which can be found on the New Mexico Department of Justice website.

15. Update on Orientation for New SILC members

Dr. Seanez reported that she requested training from the Independent Living Training and Technical Assistance Center at (ilttacenter.org). The Independent Living Training & Technical Assistance (IL T&TA) Center is a national resource center funded by the Administration for Community Living (ACL). We are dedicated to advancing the work of Centers for Independent Living (CILs), Statewide Independent Living Councils (SILCs), and Designated State Entities (DSEs) by providing training, technical assistance, and peer connection grounded in the values of the Independent Living movement to improve outcomes for people with disabilities.

While the IL T& TA center provided an overview for the SILC, Dr. Seanez recommended that training be provided as there are several new members. The response from the IL T& TA Center was that there is no funding to provide individual training, the SILC can access the IL T& TA Center website and review the peer learning and resources. It is also recommended that the SILC members could pair up and review and material and discuss.

16. Date and Location of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on October 13, 2026, at 10:00 AM, with a location in Albuquerque to be determined.

17. Public Comments

Urja Lansing commented positively on the meeting. She stated that the connectivity allowed for all information could be heard loud and clear.

Juan Haro, IL Counselor for New Mexico Commission for the Blind provided an update on the independent living program. The program has 1 vacancy in Albuquerque. New members are coming to Santa Fe area. The Commission for the Blind is able to cover all New Mexico counties.

18. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 12:52pm

Approved and Electronically Signed this 13th day of October 2026.

Paula Seanez, Ph.D., Chairperson

Statewide Independent Living Council