

1. Why do you wish to be a member of the State Rehabilitation Council.

I am committed to serving my cross-disability community by bringing my lived experience to the SRC table. My goal is to integrate disability justice, culture, and firsthand experiences into SRC's decision-making process. Additionally, I want to ensure that rural communities and families with disabilities are heard, valued, and well-represented.

2. What do you perceive are the roles and responsibilities of a member of the State Rehabilitation Council.

State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) members advise and review the vocational rehabilitation (VR) program, advocate for people with disabilities, and ensure that the community's voice is heard.

3. Given your understanding of the roles and responsibilities as a member of the State Rehabilitation Council, why do you believe that you are qualified for the position?

Please include a brief statement of your skills, expertise, and knowledge that would aid you as a member of the board.

I am a person with disabilities and a mother of individuals with disabilities. With lived experience spanning the entire disability continuum, I have been a dedicated disability advocate for over 30 years. As a mental health therapist, blogger, and social media influencer, I use my platform to amplify voices within the community. Raised in the Pacific Basin, I bring a unique perspective to my work.

4. What do you hope to accomplish during your term of service?

I would like to see the SRC include more community members and expand its membership. Additionally, I want to ensure that the tools available to the SRC are actively utilized to their full potential. My goal is for the SRC to be more effective in advising VR, ultimately enhancing both the quality and reach of its services.

5. Name three qualities that best describe you and how these qualities will the State Rehabilitation Council.

I am resourceful, highly adaptable, and driven by a strong sense of justice. In any organization I support, I integrate what I learn to enhance its capabilities, promote fairness and transparency, and amplify its voice for greater impact.

6. Name a previous experience you've had that will be beneficial as a member.

With 30 years of experience in disability advocacy and justice, my work spans organizations such as UC Berkeley, DREDF, and the California SRC, as well as my own lived experience

7. Can you foresee any possible conflicts of interest that could arise during your service on the State Rehabilitation Council. How would you overcome conflicts of interest?

No.

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February 26, 2025

TO: The Honorable Senator San Buenaventura, Chair
Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

FROM: Ryan I. Yamane, Director
Lea Dias, Administrator, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

SUBJECT: **GM 629 – RELATING TO CONSIDERATION AND CONFIRMATION TO THE STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL, GUBERNATORIAL NOMINEE, MERIAH NICHOLS, FOR A TERM TO EXPIRE 06-30-2027.**

Hearing: Friday, February 28, 2025, 1:00 p.m.
Conference Room 225 & Via Videoconference, State Capitol

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: The Department of Human Services (DHS) strongly supports the nomination and confirmation of Meriah Nichols to the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC).

PURPOSE: The SRC was established by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. The SRC works in partnership with the DHS Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) on services that address the employment needs of individuals with disabilities.

Ms. Nichols is seeking her second term appointment to the SRC as a representative of Current or Former Recipient of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services per section 348-8(a)(7), Hawaii Revised Statutes (HRS), established under section 796d of 29 U.S. Code § 725, et seq., and she resides in Hawaii County, satisfying the requirement of section 348-8(a), HRS, that the "council shall include at least one member from each county."

Ms. Nichols is a former recipient of VR services and has children with disabilities. Ms. Nichols has first-hand experiences with the challenges of having a disability and navigating

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within a world of misconceptions of what a youth or an adult with a disability can do. She now advocates for persons with disabilities, especially those within the deaf and hard of hearing community. Ms. Nichols formerly served on the California State Rehabilitation Council and therefore is familiar with the mission and goals of the State Rehabilitation Council.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in strong support of Ms. Nichols' nomination to the State Rehabilitation Council.