

1                   **Postsecondary Education Services for Vocational Rehabilitation Customers**  
2                   **Discussion Paper**

3   **Background**

4 Section 361.50 of the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) regulations in 34 Code of Federal  
5 Regulations requires that states “develop and maintain written policies covering the nature and  
6 scope” of each VR service specified in §361.48. Per §361.48(b), “as appropriate to the vocational  
7 rehabilitation needs of each individual and consistent with each individual’s individualized plan  
8 for employment, the designated State unit must ensure that the . . . vocational rehabilitation  
9 services are available to assist the individual with a disability in preparing for, securing,  
10 retaining, advancing in or regaining an employment outcome that is consistent with the  
11 individual’s unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and  
12 informed choice.”

13 Under §361.48(b)(6), VR services are required to include vocational and other training services,  
14 including advanced training in, but not limited to, a field of science, technology, engineering,  
15 mathematics (including computer science), medicine, law, or business as well as books, tools,  
16 and other training materials. Postsecondary education is a VR service available to eligible VR  
17 customers who require a degree or credential to achieve their employment goal.

18 When purchasing postsecondary education services, the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC)  
19 must ensure that the services are appropriate for VR purposes and that funds are used  
20 appropriately, including comparable benefits. TWC VR rules detail parameters on the provision  
21 of these services in TWC Chapter 856 Vocational Rehabilitation Services rule §856.45.

22   **Issues**

23 VR purchases postsecondary education services from colleges, universities, technical colleges,  
24 private schools, out-of-state schools, and proprietary institutions. Postsecondary education  
25 services include, but are not limited to, assistance with tuition, fees, textbooks, and supplies and  
26 help customers meet their postsecondary goals and achieve quality employment outcomes.  
27 Consistent with the statutory scope of the program, VR supports postsecondary education  
28 services across the continuum of occupations and type of credential, certificate or degree, as  
29 appropriate for the VR customer. The services must assist the customer in achieving an  
30 employment goal.

31 Currently, as required by Vocational Rehabilitation Services Manual C-409: Maximum Payment  
32 for Training at a College or University, VR staff calculates the amount that VR may pay toward  
33 the cost of the customer’s tuition and fees and course-related textbooks and supplies based on  
34 maximum rates established in policy, the customer’s financial aid, and any costs that the  
35 customer is required to pay for services.

36 Financial aid, such as the Pell Grant and other needs-based grants, and any required customer  
37 participation in the cost of services are applied to the customer’s tuition and fees first, then to  
38 textbooks and supplies. Once these are applied, VR pays a maximum rate that is based on the  
39 type of Texas Institution of Higher Education (IHE) at which the customer is enrolled. VR uses  
40 the same IHE categories as the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, as follows:

- 41       • Public two-year institution (community college)
- 42       • Public technical and state college

- 1 • Public four-year institution (university)
- 2 • Health-related institution

3 The maximum rate for each type of IHE is the average cost for the IHE as published on the  
4 College for All Texans website plus one standard deviation. VR reviews and updates the rates  
5 each July. Exceptions to these limitations require VR supervisor approval.

6 Although the current maximum rates account for the average cost plus one standard deviation,  
7 not all public in-state schools are set at or below the limits. For example, relative to attendance,  
8 in State Fiscal Year 2022 (SFY'22), 25 percent of VR students attended Texas public colleges  
9 and universities that have tuition and fees greater than the maximum rates established in policy.  
10 Relative to money spent, in SFY'22, 29 percent of the money spent for the tuition and fees was  
11 paid to Texas public colleges and universities that have tuition and fees greater than the  
12 maximum rates established in policy. Similarly, the maximum rates for textbooks and supplies  
13 do not always cover the total cost, resulting in additional barriers for the counselor to request an  
14 exception and for the customer to participate in training.

15 VR has identified issues in current policy that, if addressed, will remove system constraints,  
16 maximize the use and expenditure of federal VR funds for customer service, and enhance  
17 customer opportunities to earn postsecondary education and achieve quality employment  
18 outcomes.

19 Staff seeks to address the following issues:

- 20 1. Current VR policy contains limits that are administratively inefficient and creates an  
21 unintended financial barrier for customers to attend certain degree programs in in-state  
22 public colleges and universities. Revising policy to allow VR to pay published tuition and  
23 fees at public in-state institutions would eliminate these barriers and encourage customers  
24 to pursue careers requiring completion of postsecondary education and training.
- 25 2. Current VR policy contains limits that are administratively inefficient and creates an  
26 unintended financial barrier for customers to obtain required textbooks and supplies for  
27 postsecondary education services. Revising policy to allow VR to pay for required  
28 textbooks and supplies would eliminate these barriers and encourage customers to pursue  
29 careers requiring completion of postsecondary education and training.

### 30 **Decision Point**

31 Staff seeks direction on amending the current policy for postsecondary education services in  
32 order to allow VR to:

- 33 • Pay the amount published by the institution for in-state tuition and required fees at public  
34 training institutions in Texas after financial aid and any required customer contributions  
35 are applied.
- 36 • Pay the entire amount for required textbooks and course-related supplies if these are not  
37 already included in the cost of tuition and fees.

### 38 **Rehabilitation Council of Texas**

39 The Rehabilitation Council of Texas reviewed the proposed changes to postsecondary education  
40 services, and modifications were made where appropriate based on feedback received.