

**111—10.8 (216B) Dispute resolution process.** This rule defines the procedures under which the dispute resolution process, required by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, shall be conducted by the department.

**10.8(1) Definitions.**

“*Administrative review*” means a procedure by which the department may provide an opportunity for an applicant or eligible individual to express and seek remedy for dissatisfaction with a decision regarding the furnishing or denial of services.

“*Formal hearing*” means a procedure whereby an applicant or eligible individual who is dissatisfied with the findings of an administrative review or mediation concerning the furnishing or denial of services may request a timely review of those determinations before an impartial hearing officer.

While the department encourages the use of the administrative review process to resolve grievances, the administrative review process is not to be used as a means to delay mediation or a formal hearing before an impartial hearing officer unless the parties jointly agree to a delay. An applicant or eligible individual may elect to proceed directly either to mediation or to the formal hearing process. The department will not suspend, reduce, or terminate vocational rehabilitation services to any applicant or eligible individual throughout the administrative review, mediation or formal hearing process before a final agreement or decision is made, unless the applicant or eligible individual or, as appropriate, the applicant’s or eligible individual’s representative so requests, or the department has evidence that the services have been obtained through misrepresentation, fraud, collusion, or criminal conduct on the part of the applicant or eligible individual.

“*Mediation*” means an alternative which an applicant or eligible individual may choose if the applicant or eligible individual is dissatisfied with the findings of an administrative review concerning the furnishing or denial of services.

**10.8(2) Administrative review.** An applicant or eligible individual may request review of a decision regarding furnishing or denial of services with which the applicant or eligible individual is dissatisfied by submitting a letter to the program administrator of field operations.

*a.* The program administrator shall acknowledge receipt of the letter and arrangements shall be made for the administrative review to be held at a mutually convenient date, time, and place which shall be within ten days after receipt of the request for review. The applicant or eligible individual shall also be notified of the applicant’s or eligible individual’s right to obtain assistance through the Iowa client assistance program.

*b.* The administrative review shall consist of review of the case file and any other documentation involved in the subject matter of the review; interviews with the service specialists for the blind and any others directly involved with the subject matter of the review; and an interview with the applicant or eligible individual or, as appropriate, a representative of the applicant or eligible individual.

*c.* The program administrator shall issue a written decision within five days of the review. The decision shall set forth the issue, principle, and relevant facts established during the review; pertinent provision of law, administrative rule or department policy; and the reasoning upon which the decision is based. The letter transmitting the decision shall advise the applicant or eligible individual that the applicant or eligible individual shall inform the program administrator within seven days that either: (1) the applicant or eligible individual accepts the decision; or (2) the applicant or eligible individual does not accept the decision and wishes to proceed either to mediation or to a formal hearing.

*d.* A record of the decision and any action resulting from the decision shall be sent to the applicant or eligible individual by mail. The decision and a record of any action resulting from the decision shall be entered into the case file.

**10.8(3) Mediation.** An applicant or eligible individual who is dissatisfied with the findings of an administrative review or who has elected to bypass the administrative review process may request

mediation by submitting a letter to the program administrator. This letter must be received within seven days of the date of determination of the administrative review, if an administrative review has been conducted.

*a.* The program administrator shall acknowledge receipt of the request for mediation and shall make arrangements for mediation to occur within 30 days of the request to initiate the dispute resolution process. The date, time, and place shall be mutually agreeable to all parties. The applicant or eligible individual shall be notified in writing of the right to submit evidence or information to support the applicant's or eligible individual's position and to obtain representation to be present during the mediation sessions. The applicant or eligible individual shall also be notified of the applicant's or eligible individual's right to obtain assistance through the Iowa client assistance program. All mediation sessions shall be held in a timely manner and shall be concluded within 45 days of the date that the applicant or eligible individual initiated the dispute resolution process, unless an extension of this time is agreed upon by all parties. The department will pay costs for the mediator and, when appropriate, transportation, meals and lodging expenses for the applicant or eligible individual which are directly associated with the mediation process. The program administrator will determine who will represent the department during mediation sessions.

*b.* The department will maintain a list of individuals who are impartial, qualified mediators and knowledgeable in laws (including regulations) relating to the provision of vocational rehabilitation services.

*c.* A mediator will be selected at random or by agreement of the director and the applicant or eligible individual or, as appropriate, the applicant's or eligible individual's representative from the list described in paragraph "b."

*d.* Discussions which occur during the mediation process shall be confidential and shall not be used as evidence in any subsequent due process hearing or civil proceeding.

*e.* All agreements reached by the parties to the dispute in the mediation process shall be set forth in a written mediation agreement. This agreement shall be prepared by the mediator and mailed within seven days to all parties. The decision and a record of any action resulting from the decision shall be entered into the case file.

*f.* Either party to the dispute may request a formal hearing. This request must be in writing and must be submitted to the director within seven days of the date of the written mediation agreement.

**10.8(4) Formal hearing.** An applicant or eligible individual who is dissatisfied with any determinations made concerning the furnishing or denial of vocational rehabilitation services, or the findings of an administrative review or mediation if an administrative review or mediation took place, may request a formal hearing by submitting a letter to the director.

*a.* The director shall acknowledge receipt of the request and make arrangements for a formal hearing to be held within 60 days of the request of the applicant or eligible individual to initiate the dispute resolution process at a date, time, and place mutually agreeable to both parties. The applicant or eligible individual shall also be notified of the right to have a representative present at the formal hearing and to seek assistance through the Iowa client assistance program. Reasonable time extensions shall be granted for good cause shown at the request of a party or at the request of both parties.

*b.* The impartial hearing officer shall be an individual who is not an employee of a public agency other than an administrative law judge, hearing examiner, or employee of an institution of higher education. (An individual is not an employee of a public agency solely because the individual is paid by that agency to serve as a hearing officer.) The impartial hearing officer: (1) is not a member of the commission for the blind; (2) has not been involved in previous decisions regarding the vocational rehabilitation of the applicant or eligible individual; (3) has knowledge of the delivery of vocational rehabilitation services, the state plan, and the federal regulations and state rules governing the provision of services; (4) has received training with respect to the performance of official duties; and (5) has no personal, professional, or financial interest that would be in conflict with the hearing officer's objectivity. The director may also request that other designated department personnel be present at the formal hearing. At the request of the applicant or eligible individual, a representative of the applicant or

eligible individual and a representative of the Iowa client assistance program may also be present. Any of these persons shall have the opportunity to present relevant evidence.

*c.* An impartial hearing officer must be selected on a random basis or by agreement between the director and the applicant or eligible individual or, as appropriate, the applicant's or eligible individual's representative from a pool of persons qualified to be an impartial hearing officer.

*d.* The impartial hearing officer shall inform those present of the confidentiality of matters discussed. The proceedings shall be recorded and, if necessary, transcribed.

*e.* Within 30 days of the completion of the formal hearing, the decision of the impartial hearing officer shall be mailed to the applicant or eligible individual or, if appropriate, the applicant's or eligible individual's representative, and to the director. A representative of the Iowa client assistance program who has attended the formal hearing shall also receive a copy of the decision. The applicant or eligible individual may receive a copy of the transcript of the hearing upon written request to the director. The decision and a record of any action resulting from the decision shall be entered into the case file.

The decision of the impartial hearing officer shall be based upon the provisions of the approved state plan, the federal Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973, federal vocational rehabilitation regulations, and state rules and policies.

*f.* The decision of the impartial hearing officer is final.

**10.8(5) Documents provided.** Transcripts, notices, responses, and other documents which are an integral part of the dispute resolution process shall be provided to involved parties in standard print format. An applicant or eligible individual, or representative of an applicant or eligible individual, or other involved party may request provision of documents in an alternative medium. Documents in the alternative medium shall be provided in a timely manner.