**State of Connecticut**

**Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS)**

**Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB)**

**State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) to BESB**

# DRAFT MINUTES

## June 24, 2020

**Members Present: Mr. Gary Allen, Mr. Scott Baecker, Mr. Nathaniel Barnes, Mr. Michael Bartley, Mr. Jay Brown, Mr. John Carnemolla, Ms. Lucretia Jones, Mr. John McNickle, Ms. Enaida Mendoza, Ms. Deb Reed, Ms. Eileen Rose, Ms. Dawn Russell, Mr. Brian Sigman, and Ms. Kendra Valente.**

**Others Present: Ms. Mary Burgard, Mr. Andrew Norton, Ms. MaryAnn Melley, and Ms. Tara Brown-Ogilvie.**

**Members Absent: Ms. Brandy Altergott, Ms. Amanda Billiot, and Ms. Beth Reel.**

**Call to Order: Mr. Michael Bartley, Chair of the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC), called the meeting to order at 10:03 a.m.**

**Public Comment: Mr. Bartley asked the public in attendance to hold their public comments regarding the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Policy for Personal Adjustment Programs until later on in the meeting when that topic is addressed specifically as an agenda item. Ms. Reed inquired about the number of Orientation and Mobility Instructors BESB has which was answered by Mr. Sigman.**

**Old Business**

**Review and Approval of Minutes from the March 25, 2020 minutes: MOTION: A motion was made by Mr. Barnes, and seconded by Ms. Jones to adopt the minutes from the March 25, 2020 meeting. Motion carried unanimously.**

**Workgroup Reports**

**Membership: Mr. Bartley thanked Mr. Barnes for his term with the SRC which is ending June 30 and his leadership in overseeing the Membership workgroup. On behalf of the SRC, Mr. Bartley wished him the very best going forward. Mr. Barnes thanked everyone and said he enjoyed the whole overall learning experience while serving. Mr. Sigman updated the members on the appointments and current vacancies since the last meeting.**

**Finance: Mr. Baecker reported on the funding commitments for the federal fiscal year that started October 2019: Consumer Satisfaction Survey, National Federation of the Blind (NFB) Newsline, National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB) membership dues, Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) membership dues, and a laptop computer for the Windsor Technology Lab.**

**Consumer Satisfaction: Mr. Bartley and Mr. Sigman reported no new information has taken place since the last meeting.**

**Technology: Nothing to report at this time.**

**New Business**

**VR Success Story: Ms. Krystal Kelly, BESB Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, introduced Ms. Vicki Caldwell. Ms. Caldwell spoke about her employment history and the challenges she has experienced. With guidance and assistance from Ms. Kelly, her resume was posted on an employment website which led to an interview and a job offer. She is employed at the world headquarters for Bluecrest Inc. in Danbury in a customer service position. Ms. Caldwell was provided with low vision aids that allows for better and more efficient job performance, whether working from home during these times or at the office.**

**Comprehensive Needs Assessment Update: Mr. Sigman stated the proposal from the Center for Public Policy and Social Research at CCSU is $17,833.37 to perform the Comprehensive Needs Assessment and he will be drafting a memorandum of agreement to move it through the internal contracting process of the agency. Mr. Sigman inquired if the SRC desired for CCSU to complete the FY 2021 Consumer Satisfaction Survey. Mr. Bartley noted the challenges of switching vendors which had been discussed at prior meetings as well as the advantages of continuity in using the Center for Public Policy and Social Research at CCSU.**

**MOTION: A motion was made by Mr. Allen, seconded by Mr. Barnes, to permit the Center for Public Policy and Social Research at CCSU to conduct the Consumer Satisfaction Survey for FY 2021. Motion passed unanimously.**

**VR Policy for Personal Adjustment Programs: Mr. Sigman gave a brief history regarding the Personal Adjustment Policy and the revisions which became effective in July 2018. A resolution from the NFB of CT asks the Vocational Rehabilitation Program to modify the policy on Personal Adjustment Programs. The current policy identifies “*personal habits, attitudes, and skills*” as training focus areas while the granting of extensions to the duration of the service is only based upon the acquisition of “*skills*”. Further, this policy requires the State Director to grant extensions of the service duration while the VR Supervisor is the level that is identified in other policies for approvals and exceptions. Also, since each Personal Adjustment Program has its own curriculum and a timeframe for the delivery of that curriculum, Mr. Sigman asked the SRC if the policy would benefit from an update in wording to align the timeframe with the curriculum of the specific program the client is attending.**

**Ms. Brown-Oglive from the Helen Keller National Center gave a brief description of their program and curriculum that runs nineteen weeks. Ms. Melley from the NFB of CT shared her concerns about the current policy’s language, particularly as it relates to the duration of the training and the requirements that need to be met to get an extension. The members of the SRC deliberated on the current policy language, obtaining clarifications and discussing potential revisions to the current wording.**

**MOTION: A motion was made by Mr. Allen, seconded by Mr. Baecker, to have the State Director develop a draft revision to the policy on Personal Adjustment Training to bring before the SRC for review and discussion at their next meeting. The draft revision is to include personal habits, attitudes, and skills, address the duration of services, approval levels, and retain a requirement for the provision of progress reports from the vendor. Motion passed unanimously.**

**Slate of Officers for FFY 2021: Mr. Bartley sought a slate of officers to be elected at the SRC September meeting. Nominations were sought for Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary, and Treasurer. Anyone interested in one of the positions should contact Mr. Bartley at** **Michael.bartly@ct.gov****. Nominations will be taken from the floor at the September meeting and then an election of officers will occur at that meeting.**

**Report from BESB State Director**

**Program Update: Mr. Sigman reported that the majority of BESB staff are full-time teleworking and services are being provided to clients remotely using technologies such as Microsoft Teams. Services will continue this way for the foreseeable future. Most summer camps are now offering virtual camps rather than an on-site option and clients are registering for these virtual opportunities. The Children’s Services Program holds an in-service training every Fall for the staff of Connecticut school districts, and for this year the decision has already been made to have this as a virtual training. The main focus in VR in the past three months has been in job retention services, helping clients to transition to a virtual working environment. Job placement activity has been slowly ramping back up, but purchased services are down considerably due to the number of providers that have ceased community-based services during the pandemic. There is concern that the VR Program may not be able to meet the federal Maintenance of Effort requirements. Most of the VR Programs across the country are having the same concern. NCSAB and CSAVR have both written to Rehabilitation Services Administration, detailing these financial concerns. The Secretary of Education has written a letter to Congress requesting certain waiver authorities be granted.**

**Legislation Update: Mr. Norton reported that the current legislative session was cut short due to Covid 19 and has officially adjourned. This affected an ADS bill that was moving through before the Legislature shut down in mid-March. This coming July 1 starts the second year of the two-year budget cycle.**

**Report from Chair: Mr. Bartley thanked everyone for their active participation in this meeting and he encouraged the members to continue to have these active and productive discussions in future meetings.**

**Adjournment:**

**MOTION: A motion was made by Mr. Barnes, seconded by Ms. Reed, to adjourn. Motion passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 12:04 p.m.**