**Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS)
Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB)
Statewide Committee of Blind Vendors
Minutes for June 13, 2023

Welcome and Roll Call: Chair Keith Haley called the meeting to order at 3:03 p.m.

Committee Members Present: Chair Mr. Keith Haley, Vice Chair Mr. Rich Braccia, Mr. Frank Roberts, Mr. Angel Torres, Mr. Amos Fatorma, Ms. Brandy Altergott, Mr. David Pelaggi,

Committee Members Absent: Ms. Sovey Ramirez, , Mr. Karan Punjabi

Agency Staff Present: Mr. Tyrell Sampson, Ms. Tracy Morin, Mr. Joel Garcia, Mr. Nick Faenza, Ms. Jessie Towle, Mr. David Walshe, Ms. Rayah Martin

Others Present: Ms. Shelley McDermott ,Adam Fairbanks

Minutes of March 7, 2023 and May 10, 2023 Meetings
MOTION: Brandy Altergott motioned to accept the minutes. Rich Braccia seconded. Motion carried.

Old Business

Budget update
Tyrell Sampson gave the budget update. The budget remains at 2.3 Million dollars. We are averaging about $80,000 in Pepsi deposits in addition to the $50,000 from the DOT. Income is stable, which is good for new opportunities and maintaining the assistance required to each of the facilities.

Schedule Cs
Mr. Sampson requested operators to please submit their Schedule Cs if they have not done so yet. Remember what the percentage is based off their annual responsibilities and the tier they were hired under.

Retirement Contributions
Mr. Sampson reminded operators to please make sure to pay their retirement contributions timely.
Chair Haley mentioned that they should be in by April 15th, and it’s each person’s responsibility to get them in in time.

New Business

Vending Pilot Opportunity Update
Mr. Sampson asked previously that anyone interested do a dry run of the route. He thanks folks for their interest. He has nine individuals who have said yes to the opportunity. He also appreciates feedback. There were some routes that went off without a problem and some where the machines were less accessible. There are challenges with getting access to some buildings. These will be hurdles to get over, which may include establishing contact with someone in the buildings where these machines are. There is still a July 1 start date, and he thinks we can meet that deadline. He asks everyone to identify any challenges before then.

Chair Haley asked about cases where the locations are difficult to get to. Not necessarily the machine themselves, but things such as being at a rest stop or similar location. Someone with ride assistance might have more ability to get there. He would like to make a more even opportunity across the board. He wishes people luck with the routes, but if someone is feeling frustrated, they’re not the only one, and it’s something to learn from.

Mr. Sampson pointed out that as a pilot program, we have the ability to fix these problems as we go. Getting to the locations is half the battle. He acknowledged the frustrations.

Shelly McDermott pointed out that getting to the locations and getting to the machines are two separate issues. Asked whether anyone should not pursue a route with those issues.

Mr. Sampson said that if someone wants to withdraw from a route, they can. But we’re doing this to see if this is something that can stick. We’re trying to expand what opportunities we can offer and maximize those.

Ms. McDermott asked whether someone could drop an individual site that doesn’t work out.

Mr. Sampson answered that you wouldn’t want to drop half the route. We can consider the challenges case by case, but if a site doesn’t work, maybe another one can be picked up.

Frank Roberts asked about the weekly audits and whether it would take into account someone being out of town for a week.

Mr. Sampson said that while things may come up they’ll be handled on a case-by-case basis. Field reps will not be running the route for anyone who can’t be there.

Further discussion was held among the committee members about how to maximize efficiency in the routes and file business reports. More information will be forthcoming regarding how to log everything properly.

Ms. Altergott mentioned that Uber has a ride program for visually impaired people that might help operators expand their routes further.

Danbury Federal Corrections Update
Mr. Sampson and Ms. Morin had a call with the secretary at the Corrections facility. The vending is part of the employees club. It appears to be a difficult location, and has 17 vending machines. Fairfield Vending is the current operator, and they are one of our subcontractors. Mr. Sampson reached out to Darren, the owner of Fairfield Vending. There is a lot of security. This is a seven day a week operation. He also made Danbury Federal aware of our interest.
More information will be sent out in the coming weeks. It’s a very interesting location and if we do take it, there could be some pushback from the employees club, but he thinks we can maintain a cordial relationship.

Mr. Roberts asked about security precautions for a blind operator working in the prison.

Ms. Altergott mentioned that an operator would never be unescorted in the population.

Mr. Sampson said also consider that if there’s a lockdown while you’re there, you would be affected by that. But Darren said there is a strong need of assistance in servicing some of these machines.**

**Darien Train Station Coffee stand Committee Vote
Chair Haley stated there’s a lot of responsibility there including cleaning toilets. You’re in charge of the whole building, not just the coffee stand.

Mr. Sampson said he did not feel that it was a very viable opportunity.

MOTION: Ms. Altergott made a motion to waive our rights to the Darien train station coffee stand while keeping our rights to vending. Mr. Pelaggi seconded.
A voice vote was taken, and the motion carried.

Community College Micro Market Update
With the semester being over, product is down, but will be up again in the fall. Mr. Sampson is happy about the operators realizing their abilities to stretch themselves. Operators are seeing new opportunities, even if it is not the same thing as it was three years ago.

Field Rep Responsibilities
Field reps remain responsible for supporting the operators, although the operators’ particular responsibilities may have changed. The field rep can assist you in getting things to your location while you’re there, but they do not replace your presence. Per regulations, vacation time needs to be five days consecutive.

Annual Meeting
Prior to Covid this meeting was held in person. Chair Haley wants to discuss whether to have an in-person meeting in September. Would still want a conference call option. Would like to determine whether enough people would be able to attend in person.

Mr. Sampson said he is open to any training topic but thinks that effective communication would be a topic that would be beneficial. If there’s anything in the NFB training log along those lines it might be helpful especially considering new routes, and new buildings, etc.

Chair Haley agreed it’s a timely topic post-Covid, and asked Mr. Sampson to send any information or links. He also would like to consider how many people would be needed to have an in-person meeting.

Committee Meeting Recordings
Chair Haley questioned why the minutes must be posted two weeks in advance and why the recorded minutes need to be posted publicly.

Mr. Sampson answered that if the meeting is fully virtual it needs to be posted for 45 days, but if it’s hybrid it does not. He will get more clarification about what constitutes a hybrid meeting.

Gillette Castle
Ms. Altergott withdrew her interest in running the Gillette Castle concessions this year, but our equipment remains there, and we can replace the operator.

Operator Spotlight
Mr. Sampson spotlighted Amos Fatorma. He represents our program in a great light. Feedback from Southern Connecticut State University has been great. They thanked us for connecting him with them. He has been highlighted by the college itself for his personality and ability to communicate effectively, which is a big compliment.

The committee extended congratulations to Mr. Fatorma.

Mr. Fatorma said the manager from Sodexo had spoken to him. He said the culture can be challenging there, so this was unexpected and welcome.

Next Mr. Sampson acknowledged our Chair Keith Haley. He and his girlfriend were selected to participate in a documentary called The Perfect Vision. It reflected their perseverance. The documentary just won an Emmy for best sports story in the Boston region. The story was handled very well. Mr. Sampson found it to be very encouraging and thinks it should get a broad view.

The committee extended congratulations to Chair Haley.

Agency Update
We continue to hire and replace retirees. Fiscal is a little light, but interviews are coming. Things take time in state government, but it’s picking up.

Open Forum
Mr. Roberts thanked the field reps for compiling the vending routes. What he was presented with was very clear and easy to read. He then asked whether train stations are something we are keeping on our radar.

Mr. Sampson answered that we should still be the first ones offered. We do communicate with DOT.**

 **Additional discussion was held by committee members about a couple particular locations.

Adjournment
MOTION: Mr. Roberts made a motion to adjourn.**

**Mr. Braccia seconded the motion.**

**Meeting adjourned at 4:29 p.m.**