**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 21, 2023

**Members Present: Mr. Phillip Magalnick, Mr. Scott Baecker, Mr. Jay Brown, Mr. John Carnemolla, Ms. Jennifer Jenkins, Ms. Lucretia Jones, Ms. Enaida Mendoza, Ms. Deborah Reed, Ms. Beth Reel, Ms. Kendra Valente, Mr. John McNickle, Mr. Dennis Regan**

 Others Present: Director Carol Jenkins, Ms. Jennifer Proto, Ms. Mary Burgard, Mr. Angelo Vitale, Ms. Lisa Drew, Ms. Rayah Martin, Ms. Honorata Kazmierczak, Ms. Homa Baniazizi-Etesam

 Members Absent: Ms. Brandy Altergott, Ms. Nicole Rico-Serrano, Mr. Frank Buonomo, Mr. Frank Losquadro, Mr. William DeMaio**, Ms. Nicole Rico-Serrano**

**Welcome and Introductions:**

**Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 10:02 a.m. by Chair Phillip Magalnick.**

**The roll call was conducted by BESB Director Carol Jenkins.**

**Public Comment:**

**Honorata Kazmierczak, client of BESB. Spoke to bring to the attention of BESB that the applications for mentoring that were sent were not accessible and they were Read-Only, so recipients were not able to make changes. She also expressed disappointment that AIRA did not go forward.**

**The council discussed ongoing efforts to make documents accessible. They offered a reminder to add a contact person by phone in the meantime.**

**Old Business**

**a) Review and Approval of Minutes from the March 22, 2023, meeting**

**b) Review and Approval of Minutes from the May 10, 2023, special meeting.**

**MOTION: Ms. Kendra Valente moved to accept minutes from both meetings with the correction to attendance on the May 10, 2023, minutes. Mr. John Carnemolla seconded, and the motion passed.**

**Workgroup Reports**

**a) Membership**

**Ms. Lucretia Jones did not have an update to give.**

 Chair Magalnick spoke about filling the vacancies on the council and encouraged attendance at meetings. The council’s bylaws require that if a member misses three consecutive meetings they must withdraw. The council extended thanks to Gary Allen for his service as a member of the council.

**b) Finance**

 Director Jenkins reported on the budget. We are in the last quarter of the 2022 fiscal year carryover and current fiscal year 2023.

 Another $3000 in OIB funds were received that are not part of our annual grant.

 Director Jenkins also gave a general overview of the total budgets per program and explained the Supplemental Services for Relief for the Blind fund.

 Mr. McNickle asked about the 2022 carryover funds and if they are lost if not used by the end of the fiscal year. Director Jenkins said that is correct, and explained the carryover funds, state, and federal funds, and how staffing vacancies affect these amounts.

 Chair Magalnick commended Director Jenkins for her explanations and transparency. The council discussed having budget reports sent to them and what information they would like to see.

 The budget report can be found at the end of these minutes in Appendix A.

 c) Consumer Satisfaction/Needs Assessment

 Ms. Deb Reed reported that the focus group said the survey questions that had been used in Nebraska were good, but some changes are needed so they conform to CT regulations.

 Director Jenkins reported that CCSU needs to get institutional approval on the Consumer Satisfaction survey before it can be sent out. A plan was also made to review the Needs Assessment survey before it is sent out.

**New Business**

**a) NCSAB and NSAVR Conferences**

**Chair Magalnick gave an overview of these two conferences which were held back-to-back in Maryland in April. He found that other states have similar problems as CT. He asked whether vendors from out of state can be used where the state cannot provide a particular service.**

**Director Jenkins gave her report on the conferences and felt it was a good refresher. She clarified that we do send clients out of state, and we do have out-of-state vendors.**

**Ms. Burgard added that there was a bigger emphasis on fiscal issues this year than they usually have. Added that the conferences are a good way to find out who the people are to go to for specific needs, and to make connections with VR programs in other states. She also spoke about VR closures. There were 52 closures during Covid, 76 last year, and 96 this year, which puts us back at pre-Covid numbers. She clarified that closure means the client has been successfully employed for 90 days.**

**b) “Could Have Done Better” Story**

**Honorata Kazmierczak has been a BESB client since 2013. She had been working as an art teacher since 2003 and became legally blind. She was pursuing MA in Instructional Design and Technology but dropped out due to her sight declining. She found encouragement in the first visits from BESB staff including a social worker, rehabilitation teacher, orientation and mobility specialist, and vocational rehabilitation counselor. This initially inspired her to continue her work. Looking back, she feels the agency could have done more to offer Braille instruction and a transition to blindness program. She found difficulty scheduling with BESB with her teacher’s schedule and needing to work extra hours due to her sight. She was also told that there was no assistance for her to retain her job. She experienced a long delay in technology help, which she did not receive until the end of the school year. She lost her job and retired with a disability. She redirected her career and will be starting an internship with the city of Stamford as an ADA coordinator and is hoping to be a success story after this.**

**Ms. Mendoza offered to connect her to a benefits counselor and a community rehabilitation provider.**

**Ms. Reed and the council thanked her for sharing her story. Ms. Kazmierczak and her husband Chair Magalnick described not having a grievance process explained to them.**

**c) VR Success Story**

**Mr. Vitale introduced Homa Baniazizi-Etesam, who enrolled in VR in 2016. She described her combined use of magnification with a computer monitor to be able to keep her job as a virtual job coach. She expressed her enjoyment in her work and how BESB helped her continue to do her job with these accommodations.**

**The council thanked her and wished her continued success.**

**Report from BESB Representative**

**a) Program Update: Director Jenkins reported on hiring. There are several positions open or in the process of being filled. Interviews have taken place for the Children’s Services Quality Control Reviewer. A recommendation has been made and is awaiting approval.**

**In VR they are reposting the jobs for both Transition Counselor positions. Interviews were held for a Bilingual VR Counselor and recommendations have been made. Interviews are being scheduled for the Rehab Technology position.**

**In clerical hiring, Lisa Drew, the new Administrative Assistant has started, and interviews are coming up for the Secretary 2 position. Director Jenkins is working with HR on reclassifying a vacant position as a Processing Technician.**

**In Adult Services, interviews for a second Rehab Technology position are in process. There is also a vacant social worker position, and Director Jenkins is looking to see if this can be switched within the Bureau to make federal funds available for client services without hiring a new person.**

**Director Jenkins also reported on using Jotform software to make forms accessible. BESB hopes to test it on two internal forms soon.**

**Ms. Reed asked about the results of the OIB evaluation that was done in May.**

**Director Jenkins answered that the OIB Technical Assistance Center came onsite in May. Three goals were set: to update our internal policies and processes; to create a pre-and post-assessment to better evaluate our services and measure outcomes; and to create a satisfaction survey for Adult Services.**

**b) Legislation Update:**

**Jennifer Proto provided the 2023 legislative update. Her report can be found at the end of these minutes in Appendix B.**

**She informed the council of bills that update language and requirements regarding service animals and another regarding Accessibility Parking Permits. There is also an omnibus bill with several provisions affecting persons with disabilities. She also gave an overview of the biennium budget bill and implementer which expands Husky C and allocates additional funds for the Elderly Nutrition Program among other benefits.**

**Chair Magalnick asked about Ms. Proto’s background.**

**She answered that before becoming the Legislative Liaison for ADS she worked for the legislature in non-partisan positions for 15 years. She began at the Office of Fiscal Analysis, then moved to do long-term research on the performance of state programs, and for the past six years worked at the Office of Legislative Research.**

**Chair Magalnick asked about how to approach issues with the buses and navigating public transportation. Ms. Proto answered that the ownership of the buses can be complex and is not always managed by DOT. She will investigate this further.**

**Chair Magalnick asked about changes to FOIA and his concerns about the use of personal emails for council work. Ms. Proto offered to send a list of the changes.**

**Director Jenkins added that our IT department said that non-state employees cannot have a ct.gov address. We could have an email address for the council, but an ADS staff person would have to control it.**

**Report from Chair:**

 a) Concerns

 Chair Magalnick followed up on council member meeting attendance.

 He spoke about his concerns regarding the Randolph-Sheppard Act, which gives first rights to blind people for vending and concessions in State properties. Chair Magalnick asked whether the program has outlived its usefulness. He questioned having no blind person working in Stamford when there is $36,000 from vending machines going into the BEP program. He also questions there being no blind staff, and income going to sighted staff and not blind vendors. He asked for members to begin a workgroup to investigate these issues.

 b) In-Person or hybrid meeting for September?

 Chair Magalnick requested an in-person meeting in September. The council discussed this idea, and whether we could have a hybrid option. Transportation to and from the meeting was also discussed.

 Director Jenkins asked the SRC to add an agenda item in September regarding the use of any VR dollars that could be used for SRC purposes that could help with transportation. Chair Magalnick agreed.

**Adjournment**

**MOTION: Ms. Reed made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Ms. Jones.**

 Chair Magalnick adjourned the meeting at 12:10 p.m.

**Next Meeting: September 13, 2023, at 10:00 a.m.**

**Appendix A: BESB June Budget Report**

VR FFY 2022Remaining balance:

* 1. $ 1,805,254.95
  2. VR Encumbered $ 787,107.81
  3. Potential Remaining (payroll needs to come out): $ 1,018, 147.14

1. Supported Employment FFY 2022

Part A:

* 1. Adults:
     1. Remaining balance: $ 2,478
  2. Part B: Youth:

Remaining balance:

* + 1. $ 22,500
  1. Encumbered (Authorized): $ 20,022

1. BEP FFY 2023
   1. Remaining: $2,252,210.31
2. OIB (55 and older) FFY 2023
   1. Remaining for client services: $ 16,461.63
   2. Encumbered (Authorized): $ 5,872.34
   3. Potential remaining for client services: $ 10,589.29
3. Adult Services to the Blind State Funds

Remaining balance:

* 1. $ 13,600.59

1. Children’s Services SFY

Remaining balance:

* 1. $ 690,399.18
  2. Encumbered (Authorized): $ 219,060.17
  3. Potential remaining (June payroll needs to come out): $ 471, 339.01

**Appendix B: 2023 Legislative Session Update**

**to the**

**State Rehabilitation Council to BESB**

**by Jennifer Proto, ADS Legislative Liaison**

**June 21, 2023**

**Service Animals**

1. One new law, which revised the domestic animal laws, updates the term “guide dogs” with “service animals,” conforming with federal law. It also eliminates the requirement that the animal be wearing a harness or an orange-colored leash and collar ([PA 23-17](https://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/cgabillstatus/cgabillstatus.asp?selBillType=Bill&which_year=2023&bill_num=1069), § 9). The animal must still be identifiable as a service animal.
2. The 2nd new law allows the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection to establish a sea- and shorebird protection program along the state’s public coastal areas and makes it an infraction to disturb the areas from March to September. The act exempts service animals from the requirement that a pet or other animal under a person’s control be kept from coming within 100 feet of an identified protection area ([PA 23-155](https://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/cgabillstatus/cgabillstatus.asp?selBillType=Bill&which_year=2023&bill_num=6813)).

**Windshield Parking Placards**

**The act revising the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) laws makes some changes to windshield parking placards used by people with certain disabilities or blindness by updating their name from “parking permit for persons with disabilities” to “Accessibility Parking Permit.”**

**It also creates an Accessible Parking Advisory Council and charges it with developing a strategy to deter, detect, and prevent fraud and misuse related to these placards. The council consists of nine specified members, one of whom is appointed by the ADS Commissioner (**[PA 23-40](https://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/cgabillstatus/cgabillstatus.asp?selBillType=Bill&which_year=2023&bill_num=994)**).**

**Resources and Support Services**

**A wide-ranging omnibus set of new laws,**[PA 23-137](https://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/cgabillstatus/cgabillstatus.asp?selBillType=Bill&which_year=2023&bill_num=5001)**(formerly HB 5001), that was primarily focused on persons with an intellectual or developmental disability, has several provisions that apply more broadly to people with physical disabilities. For instance, the act:**

1. establishes a Human Services Career Pipeline Program to ensure sufficient trained providers are available to serve the needs of residents who are elderly or have disabilities, ADS, along with several other agencies and advocacy organizations, will be consulting on this pipeline (§ 11)
2. requires the Department of Transportation and each transit district to jointly develop plans to modernize and maintain Connecticut’s bus stops and shelters to:
   1. ensure compliance with ADA’s guidelines;
   2. include sidewalks, appropriate curb cuts, and ramps, shelter from weather conditions, and lighting and signage that give real-time transportation service information; and
   3. consider installing solar energy systems to operate the lights and allow the charging of mobile electronic devices (§ 22)
3. requires the DMV to create a video presentation that instructs and gives best practices on ways to appropriately interact with certain people with disabilities. Applicants for a public passenger license endorsement must then watch the video to obtain or renew their license (§ 25)

**Numerous provisions in the act pertaining to special education, and particularly transition services as students prepare to leave the education system. For instance, the act aligns state law with federal requirements for interpreters, including a registered interpreter for persons who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deafblind, at PPT meetings and translated IEP documents to ensure student, parent, and guardian understanding (§ 39).**

**The act requires ADS to employ enough vocational rehabilitation staff to provide transition services for students requiring special education if determined that they may be eligible to receive services from ADS (§ 44).**

**It authorizes a personal income tax deduction of up to $5,000 for individuals or $10,000 for joint filers for contributions made to ABLE accounts; establishes a credit against the corporation business and personal income taxes for contributions employers make into employees’ ABLE accounts, capped at $2,500 per employee per year; exempts ABLE accounts from claims by the state against the estates of Medicaid beneficiaries (§§ 56-59)**

**The act also increases the age up to which a court may issue support orders for adult children with certain disabilities, from up to age 21 to age 26 (§ 64).**

**Highlights from the Budget Bill & Implementer**

**Beginning October 1, 2024, the biennium budget expands eligibility for HUSKY C, which provides Medicaid coverage to people who are age 65 or older, blind, or living with a disability, by raising the income limit from 143% of the TFA cash benefit to 105% of FPL, after any authorized income disregards. To put that into context, the HUSKY C monthly income limit is $700 for an individual and $946 for a two-person family. whereas under the bill it will be $1,276 per month for an individual and $1,725 for a two-person family (**[HB 6941](https://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/cgabillstatus/cgabillstatus.asp?selBillType=Bill&which_year=2023&bill_num=6941)**, as amended, § 318).**

**The budget also:**

* Allocates $2.25M in FY 24 from federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds for the Elderly Nutrition Program (including Meals on Wheels) and appropriates an additional $1.5M for that program in FY 25
* Funds 10 service navigators (2 at each of the 5 Area Agencies on Aging)
* Provides $100,000 in FYs 24 & 25 for the Communication Advocacy Network for the hiring of an executive director

**Study Bills & Working Groups**

**A few of the proposals needed further research and policy development and so became a task force or working group:**

1. to study and make recommendations concerning the elderly nutrition program. This includes a review of the (1) program eligibility requirements, (2) types of meals provided, (3) costs of meal prep and delivery, (4) comparing the number of program participants to the estimated number of people needing nutritional services, (5) looking at funding level adequacy, and (6) process for contracting with elderly nutrition providers ([SA 23-17](https://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/cgabillstatus/cgabillstatus.asp?selBillType=Bill&which_year=2023&bill_num=1053))
   1. a representative from ADS is a designated task force member

1. to study minimum standards for the timely repair of motorized wheelchairs, including improving timelines for assessing and repairing them by a manufacturer or authorized service provider (HB 6855 as amended by [LCO 9474](https://www.cga.ct.gov/2023/amd/H/pdf/2023HB-06855-R00HA-AMD.pdf))
   1. a representative from ADS, as well as several other state agencies, are designated task force members

1. concerning any revisions necessary to nursing home waiting list requirements
   1. the LTC Ombudsman and the Public Health and Social Services Commissioners, or their designees, are part of the working group ([SB 989](https://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/cgabillstatus/cgabillstatus.asp?selBillType=Bill&which_year=2023&bill_num=989))