**Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS)**

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

**Advisory Board for Persons who are Blind or Visually Impaired**

# Draft Minutes

## December 13, 2018

**Members Present**

**Alan Sylvestre, Chairman, Eileen Akers, Andrea Giudice, David Gregoire, Katherine Guzman, Beth Rival, Mary Silverberg, Stephen Thal, Samuel Pride, and Randa Utter.**

**Members Absent**

**Darcy Jones, Astread Ferron-Poole (representing DSS Commissioner Bremby)**

**Others Present**

**Brian Sigman, BESB Director, Chris Lassen, Adult Services Supervisor, Catherine Summ, Education Supervisor, Edward Owens, Business Enterprise Program Supervisor, Mary Burgard, Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor, Lisa Tanguay, Office Supervisor, Lori St. Amand, Volunteer Program Coordinator, Andrew Norton, Legislative and Administrative Advisor.**

**Welcome and Introductions**

**Chairperson Sylvestre called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. and welcomed new board member Samuel Pride.**

**Public Comment**

**Steve Thal complimented the Adult Services Program for expediting the mailing of the 2019 large print calendars to clients and made a recommendation that an Advisory Board member should work with the Adult Services Program in 2019 to assist with completion so that the 2020 large print calendars can be issued by October of this year. It was suggested that the agency issue a proclamation for Blind Americans Equality Day sooner than October to allow a longer period for public awareness, with the possibility of having individuals with blindness share personal stories to help promote public awareness. Mr. Thal will reach out to the DORS public relations manager to discuss his ideas.**

**Old Business**

**MOTION: A motion was made by Ms. Akers, seconded by Ms. Giudice to adopt the minutes from the September 13, 2018 meeting. Motion carried unanimously.**

**Daily Living Aids Workgroup Update**

**Mr. Thal reported that the workgroup discussed options for the best way to proceed on how to identify resources that could be shared with others. Suggestions were provided as to the best way to develop a list of vendors and providers. NEAT (New England Assistive Technology) is one of the resources available. The phone number for NEAT is 860-286-3106. Ms. Giudice reported that a home on wheels, equipped with smart-home technology is available through NEAT for demonstrations and assessments. The Lions Clubs have low vision centers. The Adult Services Program will work in conjunction with the Daily Living Aids Workgroup to compile a resource list.**

**New Business**

**VR Policy on Order of Selection for Action**

**Mr. Sigman reported that there were four people who attended the public hearing on the proposed update to the Vocational Rehabilitation policy on Order of Selection. No public comments were submitted.**

**MOTION: On a motion made by Ms. Rival, seconded by Ms. Silverberg, the motion passed to adopt the proposed policy update on Order of Selection. There was one abstention.**

**Bureau Update**

**Ms. Burgard reported on the Vocational Rehabilitation Program. One Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor was hired on November 9, 2018 and is assigned to the Bridgeport/Waterbury territory. Although Mr. Farrington returned as a 120-day retiree, his last day of work was December 6th. October was National Disability Employment Awareness Month. Vocational Rehabilitation was a co-sponsor and helped plan the second annual Employment First Conference with the Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE), and also collaborated with the Governor’s Committee on the Employment of People with Disabilities, the Department of Labor and the Capitol Workforce Board in organizing the 6th annual Disability Resource Fair. The Transition Coordinator helped plan a Disability Mentoring Day event at the UTC Aerospace Facility in Windsor Locks where 7 students attended. Based on input from the counselors, there are approximately 65 clients that have registered with the American Job Centers. Counselors actively participate in the five Business Services team meetings that are held at least quarterly in each region. These groups are made up of Job Developers from the American Job Centers as well as community provider agencies and serve as an excellent opportunity to share resources.**

**Mr. Owens reported on the Business Enterprise Program (BEP). The RSA-15 Report for FFY 2018 which ended September 30, 2018 listed 35 vending facilities and 31 BEP facility managers. Gross sales for the period were $5 million. The average income for BEP facility managers was $41,410. BEP facility managers had 79 employees in FFY 2018. Rest stop income decreased by $6,700 compared to the prior fiscal year. The rest stop buildings at the 7 locations serviced by the vending contract remain open one shift daily. Two field representatives have retired but due to budget projections, only one position was refilled. The BEP account balance is down $98,000 from FFY 2017. BEP is working with Vocational Rehabilitation for possible referrals of clients to become future facility managers.**

**Mr. Sigman reported that the DORS website is undergoing a significant redesign. The new website will be available in the first quarter of 2019. In addition to BESB, the State Unit on Aging of DORS also offers volunteer services. BESB’s Volunteer Coordinator, Ms. St. Amand, has begun the process of collaborating and coordinating overall recruitment of volunteers for DORS where she will help determine the best fit for each new volunteer candidate. The NFB Newsline was renewed for another year, with co-sponsorship by the National Federation of the Blind of Connecticut.**

**Budget Update**

**Mr. Sigman reported that the Vocational Rehabilitation Program received $430,000 in federal reallotment funds in September. With these additional funds, it is projected that FFY 2020 will end with approximately $600,000 to carry over into FFY 2021. It is hopeful that the cost savings measures that were put in place may prevent the need for an Order of Selection in FFY 2021.**

**Legislative Update**

**Mr. Norton reported that Mr. Ned Lamont was elected the new Governor of Connecticut and that Susan Bysiewicz was elected Lieutenant Governor.   Mr. Norton reported that the deficit for next year is predicted to be $1.7 billion.  The Governor and the legislature may consider new revenues as well as spending reductions that could potentially affect DORS.  Mr. Norton said that the agency is reviewing potential new names for the agency to reflect the recent addition of the former Department on Aging.  He also reported that, owing to fiscal constraints and the current transition, DORS is not proposing any agency bills for the next session of the legislature.**

**Points to the Good and Welfare**

**Mr. Norton mentioned how he ran into Carol Taylor who is the former director of the Library for the Blind in Connecticut. Ms. Giudice provided information regarding the RAY Vision App which operates with smart phone technology. For information, contact Patrick Olsen, Director at 203-274-6401. The website link is:** [**http://project-ray.com/products/ray-app/**](http://project-ray.com/products/ray-app/)**.**

**Mr. Sylvestre reported that he and Mr. Lassen met with Amy Lynch to determine the final distribution amounts of the Blackford trust funds which are used for community inclusion programs for individuals who are blind.**

**MOTION:  On a motion by Ms. Giudice, seconded by Ms. Silverberg, the meeting adjourned at 11:48 a.m.**

**Next meeting – 21 March 2019, 10:00 a.m. to noon at 184 Windsor Avenue, Windsor, CT**