**Department of Rehabilitation Services**

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

# Advisory Board for Persons who are Blind or Visually Impaired

## Draft Minutes

### June 20, 2019

**Members Present**

**Al Sylvestre, Chairman, Eileen Akers, Astread Ferron-Poole (representing the DSS Commissioner), Andrea Giudice, Katherine Guzman, Beth Rival, Mary Silverberg, Stephen Thal, Samuel Pride, and Randa Utter.**

**Members Absent**

**Darcy Jones and David Gregoire.**

**Others Present**

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

**Welcome and Introductions**

**Chairperson Sylvestre called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m.**

**Public Comment**

**Mr. Thal inquired about the status of the 2020 large print calendars. Mr. Lassen reported that he has been communicating with the Department of Administrative Services print shop and requested an early start on the printing.**

**Old Business**

**MOTION: A motion was made by Ms. Akers, seconded by Ms. Rival to approve the draft minutes from March 21, 2019. Chairperson Sylvestre inquired about the use of an acronym for the agency’s new name of “Department of Aging and Disability Services,” expressing concern for what one of the possible acronyms could spell out. Mr. Norton indicated that there are no plans to use an acronym for the agency but rather to refer to the agency by its full name or possible as “Aging and Disability Services” to help educate the public on the client populations served in the new agency structure. Under “Points to the Good and Welfare," Mr. Thal requested that the first two sentences that summarized his report be modified to read “Mr. Thal and other Scouters who are Masons took the opportunity to present a certificate and letter from the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of CT A.F.& A.M. to the new Eagle Scouts at their Eagle Courts of Honor statewide. Mr. Thal was able to speak about facing his challenges of blindness and hearing impairment and how the principles of Masonry and Scouting have helped him continue on his life’s path.” The proposed changes were accepted and the minutes were passed unanimously as amended.**

**Blindness-Community Outreach Workgroup Proposals**

**Mr. Thal reported that the task of the workgroup was to propose draft wording for the 2019 proclamation for Blind Americans Equality Day and to make recommendations for possible public awareness events to coincide with this day. The workgroup’s recommendations were discussed and further revisions to the draft proclamation were incorporated. There was a recommendation for three activities during the week of October 15th and the members asked the workgroup to proceed with further discussions with representatives from the three event locations to finalize proposed activities. The Advisory Board members commended Mr. Thal for his diligence and leadership on this topic.**

**MOTION: Ms. Giudice made a motion, seconded by Ms. Utter, to have the workgroup move forward with the ideas that have been brought forth with the understanding that the workgroup will have flexibility in finalizing the activities that can be ready in time for Blind Americans Equality Day in October.**

**Daily Living Aids Workgroup Update**

**There was no update to report on at the meeting.**

**New Business**

**Bureau Update**

**Ms. Morin reported on the Business Enterprise Program (BEP). The renovations to the State Office Building will be completed by the end of this year. BEP will take over the cafeteria in late December. The Comptroller’s Office has been meeting with BEP staff to discuss healthy meal and snack options for this new cafeteria location. In March, the operation at the Hartford Post Office transitioned to vending machine services only. BEP is working with the Department of Administrative Services to transition the cafeteria at 470 Capitol Avenue to a micro-market. This will provide services closer to the population size and a sustainable profit for the BEP Manager. BEP will be assuming the operation of the Manchester Community College cafeteria in mid-December. Currently there are 32 facilities and 28 managers.**

**Ms. Burgard reported on the Vocational Rehabilitation Program. This state fiscal year’s employment outcomes are higher than last year. The program is working with a new community rehabilitation provider contract for DORS that has 13 providers. A training seminar was conducted with 10 of these providers on blindness sensitivity, mobility, and adaptive technology. Two of the Rehabilitation Technologists did a training session on adaptive technology for staff of the State College and University System. One of the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors participated in a panel presentation at a national conference that discussed the successful collaboration with the American Job Center in New Haven. There was also a statewide conference in June that brought members of the Business Service Teams together to learn about labor market trends, adaptive technology solutions in the workplace and other topics of relevance to employer engagement strategies.**

**Advisory Board Membership Status**

**Mr. Sigman provided an update on the membership status of the Advisory Board. Two members have terms that have expired and their appointment letters do not contain language that grants continuation until a successor has been named. Mr. Sigman recommended that these members should consider reaching out to their appointing authorities.**

**Budget Update**

**Mr. Sigman reported that the FY 2020 state budget that was passed has no reductions in line items for DORS programs. CRIS received a significant increase of $50,000 and the Independent Living Centers received an increase of $303,000 to be divided among the five centers. The Business Enterprise Program is benefitting from some additional funds through the New Haven Cotton Fund to assist with program costs for facility locations in New Haven County. Mr. Sigman provided a budget update for the Vocational Rehabilitation Program, expressing concern that the margin of projected carry forward funding from FFY 2020 into FFY 2021 is barely sufficient to cover all of the projected costs in FFY 2021. Mr. Sigman is concerned that an Order of Selection may be needed for FFY 2021 unless the fiscal projections improve. He will provide an updated report at the September meeting. By then it should be known how much funding was obtained through the reallotment process.**

**Legislative Update**

**Mr. Norton provided an update on the recently concluded legislative session. He reported that the budget for FY 2021 contains funding for the Department of Transportation to re-open or expand the hours of some rest stops and welcome centers. The Business Enterprise Program has vending machines located along I91, I84, I95, and the Merritt Parkway so an increase in the operational hours of these rest stops would likely increase the revenue to the Program. Four bills of interest that did not pass in the legislative session were health insurance cost coverage for a service animal; requiring that State Government make agency websites auditory accessible; requiring motorists to yield to a pedestrian approaching a crosswalk; and expanding the definition of a service animal for people with disabilities in public places.**

**Points to the Good and Welfare**

**Mr. Pride announced that the city of Norwalk now has accessible roll-out pathways for pedestrians, wheelchair users, strollers and walkers to access the beaches. These mats provide a firm, safe and stable pathway to maneuver on by providing a smooth continuous surface without gaps.**

**Ms. Akers stated that she will encourage members of BCAC to get involved with the October events for Blind Americans Equality Day and to come up with their own ideas as well.**

**MOTION: On a motion by Ms. Giudice, seconded by Mr. Pride, the meeting adjourned at 12:00 noon.**

**Next meeting – 19 September 2019, 10:00 a.m. to noon at 184 Windsor Avenue, Windsor, CT**