**State of Connecticut**

**Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS)**

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

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

**DRAFT MINUTES WITH MOTIONS**

# June 21, 2017

**Members Present:  Ms. Nyema Pinkney, Mr. Brian Sigman, Ms. Ellen Telker, Mr. Alan Gunzburg, Mr. Patrick Melfi, Mr. Nate Barnes, Ms. Diane Weaver-Dunne, Ms. Diann Murray, Mr. Gary Gross, Ms. Jeannette Rodriguez-Perez, and Mr. Michael Bartley.**

**Others Present: Ms. Mary Burgard, Mr. Andrew Norton, and Dr. Diana Cohen.**

**Members Absent: Ms. Beth Reel, Ms. Kathleen Marioni, Mr. Carl Noll, Mr. Steve Famiglietti, and Ms. Colleen Hayles.**

**Call to Order: Ms. Pinkney, Chair of the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC), called the meeting to order at 10:10 a.m.**

**Old Business**

**Review and Approval of Minutes from the March 22, 2017 and May 16, 2017 meetings: The Council unanimously adopted the meeting minutes of March 22, 2017 and May 16, 2017.**

**Workgroup Reports**

**Membership: Mr. Barnes updated the Council members on the vacancies and the re-appointments that are in process.**

**Finance:  Ms. Murray reported on the recent expenditures for Council activities including the Comprehensive Needs Assessment and co-sponsorship of the Youth Leadership Forum.**

**Consumer Satisfaction: Mr. Sigman reported that the Center for Public Policy and Social Research at Central Connecticut State University has been informed that they were selected by the SRC to conduct the Consumer Satisfaction Survey and Comprehensive Needs Assessment. The survey will be initiated in July.**

**Technology: Ms. Pinkney gave a first-hand perspective on the Aira glasses that Mr. Gunzburg spoke about at the last SRC meeting.**

**Legislative: Mr. Norton announced the passing of two bills: One bill creates a misdemeanor charge for harassing a service dog or its owner. The second bill updates the DORS statutes to implement “person-first” language.  Part of the bill changes the name of the Advisory Board from the “Board of Education and Services for the Blind” to the “Advisory Board for Persons who are Blind or Visually Impaired.”**

**An overview of House Bill 7237 was provided which will restructure the Commission on the Deaf and Hearing Impaired and also change its name to the Advisory Board for Persons who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing.  The new Advisory Board would no longer only advise DORS but would advise all of state government about issues concerning persons who are deaf.  Mr. Norton provided an overview of each of the proposed budgets from the Governor, the House and Senate Democrats, and the House and Senate Republicans.  He described the effects of each proposal on the funding for the programs within the Bureau. The legislative session ended on June 7th, and a budget was not passed by that date. The legislature will need to have a special session in order to complete a budget for the fiscal year that begins on July 1st.**

**New Business**

**Pre-Employment Transition Services: Mr. Sigman discussed the language in the federal regulations regarding the age at which Pre-Employment Transition Services may commence. The language has been interpreted to indicate that in states where there are two vocational rehabilitation programs, the age when these services may commence must be the same for both programs. At the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS), the minimum age is 16. Their program has neither the staffing nor the funding to serve individuals who are younger than that age. Therefore, BESB must align the age for the onset of Pre-Employment Transition Services to match the age of onset at BRS. Mr. Sigman did further clarify that BESB may continue to serve eligible clients who are age 14 or 15 using basic Title I and state matching funds under the category of “Transition Services” but the use of the Pre-Employment Transition Services reserve funding cannot be accessed until the client turns age 16. Much discussion took place after Mr. Gunzburg expressed his concern regarding this.**

**Motion made, seconded, and accepted unanimously to align BESB Vocational Rehabilitation policy language to be consistent with the BRS age of 16 for Pre-Employment Transition Services.**

**Person-First Language in BESB Mission Statement: Mr. Sigman indicated that with the passage of Senate Bill 796, the mission statement for BESB that was previously developed by the Board needs to be modified to reflect person-first language.**

**Motion made, seconded and accepted unanimously to support the Advisory Board’s passed motion to modify the current wording of the Mission Statement from “Connecticut’s blind and visually impaired children” to “Connecticut’s children who are blind or visually impaired” and from “Connecticut’s blind adults” to “Connecticut’s adults who are legally blind.”**

**Vocational Rehabilitation and Children’s Services Policy Manuals- Remaining Action Items: Mr. Sigman indicated that at the recent Advisory Board meeting one area of the policy manual for the Children’s Services Program was changed to use the words “high school exit” instead of “high school completion.”**

**Motion made, seconded and accepted unanimously to substitute the word “exit” in place of “completion” from high school in the Children’s Services policy manual.**

**Slate of Officers:  Ms. Pinkney is seeking a slate of officers to be elected at the SRC September meeting. Nominations include Alan Gunzburg for Chair, Diane Weaver-Dunne for Vice-Chair, Nate Barnes for Secretary, and Diann Murray for Treasurer. SRC members who have additional nominations should contact her.**

**Comprehensive Needs Assessment Discussion: Dr. Diana Cohen was invited to the meeting to get the perspective of the SRC members on where there are needs and gaps in the VR Program. Constructive comments were brought forth and discussed. Dr. Cohen urged the SRC members to contact her if they have additional ideas, observations and recommendations.**

**Distribution of Legal Benefits Information: Discussion took place on supporting the Advisory Board’s motion that a document on legal benefits should be provided to all applicants for services in each of the BESB Programs.**

**Motion made, seconded, and accepted unanimously to support the initiative to make sure every applicant is distributed a copy of the legal benefits information.**

**Report from BESB State Director**

**Program Update: Mr. Sigman reported about a requirement that if an SRC member would like to attend a conference using federal funding, the request must be pre-approved by Rehabilitation Services Administration. Effective July 1, there is a new quarterly reporting system going into effect for all Vocational Rehabilitation Programs across the nation. The reporting is a detailed accounting of services provided to each client over the past fiscal quarter. Mr. Sigman also reported on changes with assignments among staff within the Vocational Rehabilitation Program which will take effect on July 1st. The Pre-Employment Transition Services caseloads will be assigned to Jenifer Eukers and Yesenia Rodriguez. Erik Jones and Jeannette Rodriguez-Perez will be taking over regional caseloads. Recruitment is underway to refill the federally funded vacancy created by the retirement of Marion Lynch who served the eastern region.**

**Transition Coordinator Barry Rita is working in collaboration with BRS for an Oak Hill camp coming up in August that will not only have a paid work component, but also a technology component for transition age clients.**

**Budget Update:    Mr. Sigman reported that BESB will not know until September, 2017 if any federal re-allotment funds are awarded to the Vocational Rehabilitation Program.  While the program has sufficient funds to meet expenses in Federal FY 18, additional funding through the re-allotment process is essential for the Vocational Rehabilitation Program to avoid an Order of Section in FY 19.**

**Report from Chair: Ms. Pinkney reminded everyone to do their due diligence in the recruitment of new members to fill existing vacancies. Also, if Ms. Pinkney’s travel schedule allows it, she will be attending the luncheon for the students at the Youth Leadership Forum and will be able to report on that at the September meeting.**

**Adjournment: Motion made, seconded, and accepted unanimously to adjourn at 12:02pm.**

**The next Council meeting is scheduled for September 20, 2017 from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon at BESB**