

**State Of Connecticut**

**Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS)**

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

**Statewide Committee of Blind Vendors Meeting**

**DRAFT MINUTES**

**December 9, 2025**

**Members Present:**

**Keith Haley-Chairman, Karan Punjabi- Vice Chairman, Rich Braccia, Shelly McDermott, Kevin Doyle, Frank Roberts, David Pelaggi, Adam Fairbanks, Sovie Ramirez, Amos Fotorma, Angel Torres**

**Joined after roll call: Brandy Altergott, Yolanda Doak, Tony Ford**

**Others Present:**

**Tyrell Sampson- Program Supervisor, Tracy Morin, Jessie Towle, Joel Garcia- joined after roll call, Nicholas Faenza, David Walshe, Ashley Morgan, Lisa Drew, Carol Jenkins- Director**

**Program Members Absent:**

**Barbara Miller, Michael Heeney, Keith Deleo**

**Welcome:**

**The meeting was called to order at 3:02pm by Tyrell Sampson. Roll call was conducted, a quorum was present to take a vote.**

## **Minutes from September 9th, 2025, Meeting**

Dave Pelaggi made a motion to accept the minutes from the September meeting, seconded by Shelley McDermott. Motion passed unanimously with no opposition and no abstentions.

### **Old Business:**

#### **Budget Update**

Tyrell Sampson stated that the budget is currently at \$3.5 million, this amount does not reflect the expenses that are currently being processed through fiscal. The magnitude of the commission shares adjustment and the new extended contract with Pepsi will take about 3-6 months to really see the pluses and minuses of this new deal, so at this time the budget remains relatively the same. Frank Roberts asked if the new vending routes reflected in the budget, Tyrell Sampson stated that the budget is the real time amount, the vending routes changes won't be projected until the RSA-15 report is completed. Then we should have better projections of the impact the vending route changes have on the budget.

#### **Business Reports, Schedule C, Retirement Contributions**

Chairman Keith Haley stated that these three (3) topics are staples on the agenda and will be on every quarterly meeting as a reminder. Everyone should know about these requirements. The Schedule C's are due by May 15<sup>th</sup>, after you do your taxes. The retirement contributions are followed right after that; it is a percentage of your bottom-line on your Schedule C. The Business reports are expected to be sent at the end of each month, except for the Over-the-Counter sales, those should be weekly. Chairman Keith Haley ask Tyrell Sampson if there was anything regarding these that he wanted to elaborate on. Tyrell Sampson stated that he is working with the retirement division to establish a document that gives clarification on late payments, contribution requirements, etc. so that members can understand it better and contribute in a timely manner. He stated in the past there were questions on whether members had to contribute to the retirement fund, and it was a gray area. Once he receives more information or the finalized document explaining these items he will

share this with members. Once this document is created this will be the staple used by the program for retirement contributions. Dave Pelaggi asked if the amount for the contribution had changed. Tyrell Sampson stated as to date they are still the same. They do not change every year, sometimes it periodically changes based on the tier and he shares that information with the members of that tier.

### **New Business:**

#### **Blast Conference Overview Atlantic City**

Chairman Keith Haley stated this was the national event that took place in October in Atlantic City. He stated Vice Chairman Karan Punjabi wanted to share his thoughts on the event as it was his first time attending an event like this, he turned the meeting over to him. Vice Chairman Karan Punjabi stated that it was an eye-opening event to see so many people with similar issues that we face daily was enlightening. They had great guest speakers, one being Jimmy Newsom, he gave great advice on handling businesses, people skills, and those kinds of things. He met so many people and to see all the merchandise and technology was exciting. He stated listening to some of the stories from others in different states made him realize how lucky we are as a program to have the contract with Pepsi that we do, that other states don't have this. Overall, it was a great experience. He also stated seeing fellow members Keith Haley and Brandy Altergott in person was one of the best parts of attending.

Chairman Keith Haley stated he went last year to the Nashville Blast, and he thought the Atlantic City one was just as good. Seeing all the merchandise that is available to purchase was nice, and all the goodies they were able to take home were great. He stated that they went as representatives of the BEP and were looking at the micro market, over the counter sales, and self-fill vending options to see what would work for the group not necessarily just for them individually. He also mentioned that it was nice to see Karan Punjabi and Brandy Altergott in person and to learn more about each other was nice.

He then asked if Brandy Altergott had anything to mention about the blast. Brandy Altergott reiterated that she loves going to the Blasts and she tries to go every year. She meets new people, loves seeing all the merchandise and technology options, always learns new stuff, and overall, it's always just a great time. She mentioned that at the NAMA conference in April next year in Los Angeles Ron Howard would be a guest speaker there.

### **Vacation Payment**

Chairman Keith Haley turned the floor over to Frank Roberts regarding the vacation payments. Frank Roberts stated he had a few questions for Tyrell Sampson. Frank Roberts asked if the incentive program was still operating and how much was being used if so. Tyrell Sampson stated yes, the incentive program is still being utilized as it is part of the regulations, and that one (1) vendor currently qualifies for it as to date. Frank Roberts then proceeded to ask if the vacation payments could be increased from one (1) week to be more in line with what state employees get. Tyrell Sampson stated this would have to go back to the committee as the vacation payments were only given because of Covid. It was a way to cover vendors that were sick during the Covid pandemic and was not really an incentive to join the BEP program. He stated that he has concerns about increasing this as most vendors are only at their locations one to two (1-2) days per week (excluding the over-the-counter sales locations). He is not in favor of increasing vacation payments to entice anyone to the program. Vacation payments were not created as an automatic payout or to be looked at as some sort of savings. He stated RSA is due for an audit in the coming year and he doesn't want the vacation payments to raise a flag as most vendors are in a partnership, and it doesn't justify more vacation pay. He would like to committee to consider restructuring this to better align with the reality of the program. But the time is now that we make sure that we operate in a manner that looks respectable, and the payments that we pay out from an agency's perspective are aligned with the duties and responsibilities that each and every one of you have. That's the whole purpose of an incentive program. That's the area of enticement. In addition, we don't have anyone to entice. That's an issue across the

country. He and Director Carol Jenkins were on a meeting last week, it's a true and real concern across the country. The Randolph Shepherd program is being minimized by no fault of the program, just lack of interest or lack of certain opportunities available. He stated he believes technology has played a factor in this as well, and that some states don't have the opportunity to partner with companies like Pepsi. He again reiterated his belief that the vacation payout not been increased since there is no reason to merit an increase.

Frank Roberts stated that he has concerns that the lack of interest is because people were stuck at the same locations for years and did not see it be profitable. He is concerned with the members that are at the bottom right now who may be struggling with this. Tyrell Sampson interjected and asked if he had anyone reaching out regarding that as he had not heard anything about this before, Chairman Keith Haley stated the same that if someone reached out to please let them know via email after the call so that they can reach out to better align their wishes and needs in the program.

Chairman Keith Haley expanded on this that the vacation payments were never meant as free money. He also stated that state employees don't get vacation payments, they get vacation time. He stated if someone is comfortable with their route and doesn't want to put in more effort or increase their route that is the vendors prerogative. The program and the committee do not exist to cheer on other vendors and motivate them to do more, that's what the incentive program was created for. He stated that he doesn't feel it is anyone's job to motivate others, they are either motivated by earning money and being an entrepreneur or they are not. He stated looking at some of the other states, do they have pension or retirement programs, do they have health insurance programs, maybe their states don't and that is how they are getting higher vacation payments.

Shelley McDermott stated that this program is a choice, that we all signed on to be entrepreneurs. She went on to state that everyone is presented with the same opportunities at the same time and whether they want to pursue them or not is up to the individual. She stated, historically it's the same thing, some people want to go out and earn a

living and others don't want to put in too much effort and that is their choice. She stated she doesn't want anyone to feel slighted by this and if they do they need to speak to Tyrell Sampson or their field representatives so that the problems can be addressed and resolved if needed.

Vice Chairman Karan Punjabi stated that he has not heard from anyone either stating that they are unhappy with the program. He wanted everyone to know that he and Keith Haley are always available to speak to with any concerns or issues they may have so that they can be rectified. He went on to state that he came into this program to become an entrepreneur. He has had full and part time jobs in the past and the vacation pay is very fair compared to other jobs he has had in the past. He does not see a need to increase or change this amount.

Kevin Doyle stated that as one of the newest members he is very motivated to do more and very happy with his vending route and the opportunity with the over-the-counter sales he had. He just wanted to let people know that he thinks the program is great and it offers great opportunities. Amos Fotorma seconded this, stating that the program has been a tremendous blessing to him. He is grateful for the vacation so that if he goes on vacation, he uses it, but he doesn't think of it as a guaranteed payout. He gets motivated by listening to others on these calls to do more and push himself to earn more.

Frank Roberts stated he just feels sad that not more people are motivated to join the program and that it seems to be the same people on the calls. Chairman Keith Haley stated that thirteen (13) out of the sixteen (16) members are on this call so that was something since in the past it's only been a few members and the committee. There is no move to increase the vacation payments at this time.

### **RSA-15 Federal Report**

Tyrell Sampson reported that he will be starting work on the RSA-15 report this week. He stated he will share the report once he submits it. What he has seen so far, everyone seems to be going upwards for

earnings, no one has gone down or lost money. He stated that he believes many of the members are making more post the pandemic than prior to the pandemic. He stated this goes back to making sure all business reports are submitted in a timely manner and are accurate, and commissions are listed regardless of when you received it so that he can create the RSA-15 report. If this is done, it eliminates him having to back track and find all commissions/payments. Frank Roberts asked if there was a comparison of prior years reports that Tyrell Sampson could share, Tyrell Sampson stated he would share this once he submits the report.

#### **State employees telework allowance (update)**

Tyrell Sampson reported that the agency has been granted another six (6) months of telework extension. BEP staff still report into the office on Thursdays. He stated this extension is specific to BESB as each state agency and each union has different requirements, but BESB continues to operate with remote work.

#### **South Benson Marina- Fairfield, CT (update)**

Kevin Doyle stated earlier that he would be giving up the South Benson Marina location. Tyrell Sampson reported that this was the first ever marina for the program. It was a learning experience. The first year was to get his feet wet and learn about the population, get clarity on the consumer base, and the management of the property. The second year they were better able to identify the pros and cons. Kevin Doyle stated that he was able to look at the two years and see that the amount of time spent there versus the profit was not worth the time expenditure. The town has certain requirements with this location; it needs to be open 8am to 8pm seven (7) days a week from Memorial Day to Labor Day. He had four (4) employees. The location is only accessible to towns people that have a beach sticker. The fuel system was rather archaic and only sold premium fuel. Kevin Doyle looked at the math and he was making less than minimum wage with this location. Tyrell Sampson wanted to bring this to the committee to discuss dissolving this agreement with the town of Fairfield. Chairman Keith Haley asked for a motion to be made. Dave Pelaggi

made a motion to waive the South Benson Marina location in its entirety, seconded by Frank Roberts. Motion carried unanimously, with none opposed and no abstentions.

#### **Greenwich Beach Concession- First Right of Refusal**

Tyrell Sampson approached the committee to discuss the extension of the agreement with the Greenwich Beach Concession. This location is currently run by Sovie Ramirez, and the town always raves about the work she does there. Since this is a municipality, they do not operate under a memorandum of understanding like state entities. Greenwich is asking the committee to accept an extension of this agreement. Legal is working on the formal agreement since again this is a municipality. Shelley McDermott made a motion to extend the agreement with the Town of Greenwich for the Greenwich Beach Concession for as long as there is an operator interested in this location. This was seconded by Dave Pelaggi. Motion carried unanimously, with none opposed and no abstentions.

#### **Training Fee Reimbursement**

Tyrell Sampson mentioned that the committee approved \$1,000.00 reimbursement to cover members looking to attend training meetings like the Blast Conference. He stated he wants to clarify that the \$1,000.00 reimbursement was for the calendar year, January to December and was not per event. If a member chooses to attend two (2) training courses that exceed \$1,000.00 cap, the member is responsible for the difference. He also stated that for those who attended the October blast, he processed the reimbursements so they should receive them by the end of the month, if they do not receive them by then contact him.

#### **Coast Guard Academy- New London, CT**

Tyrell Sampson was notified by the Coast Guard Academy of a food service contract that would be expiring soon. He stated that the Coast Guard acknowledged the BEP's first right and that BEP would be looking to submit a competitive bid. The committee would need to vote on accepting this opportunity to move forward if it comes to fruition. Vice Chairman Karan Punjabi made a motion to accept this



opportunity with the Coast Guard Academy, seconded by Frank Roberts. Motion carried unanimously with none opposed and no abstentions.

#### **Agency Matters/Updates:**

Tyrell Sampson reported that there were no agency updates at this time. He asked Director Carol Jenkins if she had any, she stated none at this time as well.

#### **Open Forum**

Chairman Keith Haley opened the meeting to members of the program for any questions or concerns they wanted to address. Frank Roberts asked if there was an update on the holiday meet-up after the new year. Vice Chairman Karna Punjabi stated that everyone has shown interest in meeting up, he is currently looking for a location that everyone would be able to travel to. The locations he is looking at right now are Hartford, New Haven, and Middletown. If anyone has any input on locations, please email him.

Shelley McDermott asked regarding the program offering email documents they received, when is it due back. Chairman Keith Haley stated to send it back as soon as possible, preferably prior to January 1<sup>st</sup> as the subcommittee needs to meet on this.

Chairman Keith Haley also stated to stay tuned as a special meeting regarding the vending routes will be coming up after the first of the year. He stated this is not a committee meeting, just a meeting for the vending members but he wanted to let everyone know it would be coming up soon.

#### **Adjournment**

Chairman Keith Haley asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Motion was made by Dave Pellagi, seconded by Kevin Doyle. Motion carried unanimously, none opposed and no abstentions. Meeting was adjourned at 4:22pm.