Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS) Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB)

Advisory Board for Persons who are Blind or Visually Impaired

March 21st,2024

Draft Minutes

Members Present:

Chairwoman Eileen Akers; Katherine Guzman; Beth Rival; Stephan Thal; Mary Silverberg; Andrea Giudice

Members Absent:

Samuel Pride, Astread Ferron-Poole, Ex-Officio for the Commissioner, Department of Social Services

Others Present:

Carol Jenkins, BESB Director; Mary Burgard, Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor; Catherine Summ, Children Service Supervisor; Chris Lassen, Adult Services Supervisor; Jennifer Proto, Legislative Liaison; Lisa Drew Administrative Assistant

Public Present:

Honorata Kazmierczak

Chairwoman Akers called the meeting to order at 10:01 a.m.

Old Business

Minutes from the meeting from September 21st, 2023, for action.

MOTION: Mr. Thal moved to accept the minutes,and Ms. Silverberg seconded the motion. Vote: Yes – 6, No – 0, Abstained – 0

Minutes from the meeting from December 21st, 2023, for action.

MOTION: Ms. Giudice moved to accept the minutes,and Ms. Silverberg seconded the motion. Vote: Yes – 6, No – 0, Abstained – 0

Minutes from the meeting from January 25th, 2024, for action.

MOTION: Ms. Giudice moved to accept the minutes, and Ms. Rival seconded the motion. Vote: Yes – 6, No – 0, Abstained – 0

New Business

Follow-up on motion made at the special meeting on January 25, 2024:

To continue with ABPBVI as an Independent Advisory Body that requires recruitment and appointment of members to fill board vacancies and expired terms.

Chairwoman Akers stated that at our special meeting in January, a motion was passed to continue with ABPBVI as an independent Advisory Board that requires the recruitment and appointment of members to fill board vacancies and expired terms. We received a comprehensive update from Jennifer Proto, our legislative liaison, regarding who was appointed by whom and by which entity. Obviously, all our terms have expired.

 [[1]](#endnote-1)Report by Jennifer Proto, Legislative Liaison, ADS, including specific procedures for filling Board vacancies and continuation of terms

Ms. Proto confirmed that members will remain on the board until their terms expire or until a successor is appointed. She stated that five positions are currently available. However, once Mr. Thal resigns, four positions will be vacant.

Ms. Proto stated she met with Mr. Scanlon, the governor's coordinator, for the governor's appointments, and he is happy to follow the board's recommendations to fill the appointments. However, some paperwork needs to be completed to screen candidates for appointments, which is currently in PDF and not easily accessible for screen readers. Mr. Scanlon is willing to assist people over the phone in completing the forms, and they are working on making the forms more accessible.

Ms. Porto's highlights that the law requires that one of the governor's appointments be the parent of a child who receives services provided by ADS (BESB). In addition, at least two of the members appointed by the Governor must be blind. There are no other qualifications listed in statute. Another thing to keep in mind is that the Governor must designate the board chairperson out of the members that he appoints. Regarding member attendance requirements, the law says:

* **Any appointed member who fails to attend three consecutive meetings or fifty percent of all meetings held during any calendar year shall be deemed to have resigned.**
* **Regarding quorum requirements, the law says," A majority of the members in office shall constitute a quorum.”**

Intentions of members to continue the Board

Chairwoman Akers raised a query regarding the members' willingness to continue serving on the board. She clarified that she had temporarily taken up the position to evaluate the current state of the board and further added that she would remain on the board until all the positions have been filled. Additionally, she confirmed that Mr. Thal, who was earlier presumed to resign after this meeting, will be serving on the board until October 2024.

Ms. Giudice mentioned that she has expressed her willingness to stay until a replacement is found for her position on the board. While it is not her sole responsibility to find a replacement, she has taken the initiative to brainstorm and identify potential candidates who she believes would be a good fit for the board and serve as her successor. To find a suitable replacement, she plans to pitch the idea to interested individuals who are familiar with the board's existence and committee. They can submit their names and learn more about the selection process. As for her current position, she will continue to serve until a successor is appointed. It is worth noting that several other vacant positions are available on the board and need to be filled. Therefore, it is crucial that we begin the search for potential candidates to fill these positions as well.

Ms. Silverberg emphasized the importance of recruiting new members and suggested that informal and formal measures should be taken to achieve this goal. She suggested that the (BESB) should consider creating a transitional team to help new members make a smooth transition into the Board. This team would be responsible for providing assistance to new members by offering guidance, support, and resources to help them acclimate to their new environment. The goal of this team would be to ensure that new members feel welcomed and supported and that they are able to quickly integrate into their new roles within the Board. She also raises the question of who would oversee the recruiting initiative at BESB.

Ms. Jenkins will provide some assistance with the recruitment process. She put forward a request that if anyone is aware of someone who has submitted an application or is interested in applying for the BESB board, they should send her an email that contains the individual's complete name, email address, and phone number. She will work with Mr. Scanlon and inform him directly that the person mentioned has shown interest in becoming a part of the board.

Work Group

Mr. Thal mentioned the 2024 Blind Americans Equality Day and the preparations leading up to it. He also asked who the contact for BESB staff assistance would be.

Ms. Jenkins mentioned she would be the main person anyone can contact for any queries. At the moment, her staff is quite occupied and cannot serve on a planning committee. Therefore, the board and/or the SRC would need to lead the committee.

Mr. Thal informed us that he took responsibility as a program host last year. As part of his half-hour show, he interviews various programs in ADS. This year, he plans to continue interviewing people who are actively working on different projects.

[[2]](#endnote-2)Bureau Program Updates

Children's Services

Ms. Summ, the Education Supervisor, reported supervising twenty-nine Education Consultants, Three O&M instructors, and one Rehabilitation Instructor. She is also a resource for fifteen itinerant teachers and oversees (949) active Children's Services clients, an increase of (33) new clients since the September 2023 Advisory Board meeting. The caseload analysis report issued on January 9th,2024, identified the need for nine BESB Education Consultants based on the statutory point system. The report took into account the number of children receiving services from BESB Education Consultants at that time and the number of students being served by itinerant teachers in Bristol and Meriden. This is a constructive step towards meeting the educational needs of children with visual impairments, ensuring that the right number of consultants and teachers are available to support them. By highlighting the number of professionals needed, the report is helping to ensure that every child gets the education they deserve. We have received an inquiry from a third itinerant town that is interested in utilizing the services of BESB Education Consultants in the upcoming year. We are currently discussing the details, and if everything goes according to plan, we may need to hire an additional teacher to accommodate their needs. This will bring the total number of required teachers to ten.

[[3]](#endnote-3)Adult Services including OAA Regulations Update

Mr. Lassen reported the Adult Services program reports that work on the ongoing consultancy with OIB-TAC, the Older Individuals with Blindness Technical Assistance Center, is nearing completion. Three aims were initially adopted: to revise the Adult Services Policy & Procedures Manual, to develop a standard assessment tool that members of each of the four disciplines would use to guide the development of goals with clients when constructing Independent Living Plans, and to devise a Client Satisfaction Survey. All three drafts have been completed by the staff and revised by Mr. Lassen, the program supervisor, and the volunteer program coordinator, Lori St. Amand, who undertook a pilot of the Client Satisfaction Survey. Staff will shortly begin to use their section of the assessment tool, and the Policy and Procedures Manual has been submitted to the Director for Review with the ADS Commissioner. He added that planning is underway for the first BESB Silver Summit in Connecticut, a conference held for fifty to seventy ILOB clients

in May of this year. Blind Savvy, a national training consultancy with experience in holding similar events to assist clients in adjusting to vision loss, will provide assistance for the summit. The participants who register for the conference will be given a gift card in advance or reimbursement for transportation costs to the individuals.

Ms. Jenkins added that we are currently working through the hotel proposals for the Silver Summit Conference because we are required to do that for the State of Connecticut procurement standards. Depending on the hotel that is selected, the dates for the conference will vary accordingly. She does not have that information now. However, she hopes to have it finalized within the next couple of weeks. She is thrilled about this conference as it is going to be a comprehensive training workshop consisting of various types of skills training, peer mentoring, keynote speakers, and fun activities.

Ms. Jenkins also stated that the goal of this training program is to provide assistance statewide and throughout the state. Rehabilitation teachers are working diligently to create a list of consumers who would be suitable for this training program. The list will consist of people who are 55 years or older, currently have an open, active case in adult services, and would benefit from the program. Once the list is complete, it will be submitted to Blind Savvy USA along with the contact information of the consumers. Blind Savvy USA will then reach out to these individuals and explain the event, what it entails, and what they should expect from the program. It is important to note that the Older Individuals Who Are Blind Program funds (OIB), so only individuals who meet the aforementioned requirements will be eligible.

Ms. Jenkins added the Silver Summit Conference aims to conduct training for the first time, and she would love to do it again in the future. The Adult Services Program staff will attend this training to observe and learn, and then they will organize more regional workshops and trainings to focus on different areas of the state for consumers. This training is like a kickoff, and it will help the BESB staff to move forward with smaller regional trainings and continue the group training and peer mentoring. However, the intent of this program is not for clients to train each other.

Mr. Lassen mentioned that he is currently leading the Low Vision Support Group at a retirement community that requested a village. One of the biggest concerns for older people is the need for more resources or technology.

While some companies provide expensive items, a few can help with smaller devices such as video magnifiers to assist people in their daily activities. Many older people use iPhones but have difficulty using them due to their vision impairment. One of the services offered is to develop and combine technological resources that will help people in each state region.

Mr. Lassen added the technology training that would be organized regionally. They plan to start with clients currently using iPhones, but arranging something for Android phone users is more complicated. The rehab technologist's curriculum is focused on iPhone training. They are informing as many clients as possible who are 60 or over and those who have disabilities they are able to receive a tablet. BESB aims to encourage as many clients as possible to request a tablet while the benefit is still available.

Ms. Silverberg questioned why this iPhone is only right now and not Android.

Ms. Jenkins answered the differences between iPhones and Androids are notable, especially when it comes to accessibility features like voice-over. The iPhones are a closed platform, which means that the information is not open to anyone to use. It uses the same gestures and platforms across all its devices. On the other hand, Android phones are an open platform, meaning that Google, Samsung, Sony, and others can have access to it and manipulate it. Android phones come with Talkback, but every single phone is different, which makes it difficult to have a group training session to teach the gestures and other accessibility features. One-on-one training sessions with each individual and their specific Android device would be necessary. So, if you have a group of individuals who have Androids, every single person's phone is going to be different, and it is hard to have a class to teach gestures and other features as a group.

Ms. Silverberg asked if there would be an opportunity for that and if there is somewhere in the budget or some grant for that to happen, the one-on-one equally.

Ms. Jenkins responded we introduced two new positions for rehab technology teachers and adult services. Previously, we had none, but now we

have two individuals to cover the entire state and offer personalized guidance on any technology-related matters to our adult services consumers. Mr. Lassen added that we refer all our clients with blindness, for example, to the Access Through Technology program that the Federal Communications Commission funds for our Deafblind clients.

[[4]](#endnote-4)Director's Report.

The state plan for BESB for 2024-2027

Ms. Jenkins's report in Appendix D contains information on the draft State Plan that has been submitted. Once there is federal feedback, comments, and RSA changes, she will work on those and get the state plan submitted for final federal approval.

Progress on Filling Vacant and Anticipated Positions

The Appendix D report provided by Ms. Jenkins highlights the current job openings at VR, which include six positions. The available positions are VR Secretary I, VR Secretary II, two Special Assistants, and two Education Consultants (TVI's). The interview process for the Secretary I position has been completed, and we are waiting for the selection of the candidate. Ms. Burgard and Ms. Jenkins will assess the need for a Secretary II position to determine if it is necessary. The two Special Assistant roles will be open for applications soon, and Ms. Jenkins and Ms. Drew are working on the posting information. As for the two Education Consultant (TVI) positions, Ms. Summ is working on the posting information, and the hiring process is currently underway.

Update on the building, including staff occupancy and phone system Ms. Jenkins reported that employees are allowed to request a telework

schedule every six months, which would entail working remotely 80% of the time and being present in the office for 20% of the time. For instance, if employees work five days a week, they can work from home for four days and come to the office for one day. However, with BESB, all employees are expected to visit clients three or four days a week, whether or not they are working remotely.

Logo

Ms. Jenkins informed us that the State of Connecticut has recently implemented a universal logo for all state departments, agencies, and bureaus. This logo is intended to create consistent and recognizable branding across all state services. Also, a major initiative was rolled out to improve the experience of customers seeking services across state agencies.

It is called "No Wrong Door," and it aims to provide a seamless and consistent experience to customers seeking services across various state agencies. This initiative ensures that customers are directed to the appropriate agency for their needs, regardless of the agency they initially interact with. This has been implemented under the governor's direction, aiming to improve the experience of customers seeking services in Connecticut.

[[5]](#endnote-5)Budget Update

Ms. Jenkins explained that the state has met the 15% reserve for pre- employment transition services for federal fiscal year 2022, so there is no penalty. However, there is a maintenance of effort penalty based on the amount spent for the match two years prior.

Ms. Jenkins added the VR program has to maintain effort and meet a match, but the numbers are not always the same. For federal fiscal year 2024, the maintenance of effort penalty is $4206.00, which will be deducted from the annual grant.

She explained the state's goal of successful employment outcomes is measured by six common performance indicators that are negotiated with RSA every two years. With WIOA, the focus has shifted from quantity to quality, so job quality, earnings, level of the job, and whether clients are staying at their jobs are measured.

Ms. Jenkins believes that several challenges exist, including how to communicate effectively, serve clients with limited funding, and take on new schools that will require more staff. With funds received from a Social Security reimbursement, she has upgraded the low-vision and technology room.

[[6]](#endnote-6)Legislative Update Jennifer Proto, Legislative Liaison, ADS

Points to the Good and Welfare

No Reports

Adjournment: Chairwoman Eileen Akers adjourned the meeting at 11:56 am.

The next meeting will be held on Thursday, June 20, 2024, at 10:00 a.m.

1. **Appendix A**

**BESB Advisory Board Qualifications for Membership**

	* **qualification for membership**
		+ **(b) (1) The Advisory Board for Persons Who are Blind or Visually Impaired shall consist of members appointed as follows: Six appointed by the Governor, one appointed by the president pro tempore of the Senate, one appointed by the speaker of the House of Representatives, one appointed by the majority leader of the Senate, one appointed by the minority leader of the Senate, one appointed by the majority leader of the House of Representatives and one appointed by the minority leader of the House of Representatives and all shall be residents of the state. The Commissioner of Social Services shall be an ex-officio member. One of the members appointed by the Governor shall be the parent of a child who receives services provided by the Department of Aging and Disability Services, and not less than two of the members appointed by the Governor shall be persons who are blind.**
	* **terms for membership**
		+ **(2) Three members appointed by the Governor shall serve a term of four years. Three members appointed by the Governor shall serve a term of two years. The three members appointed by the president pro tempore of the Senate, the majority leader of the Senate and the minority leader of the Senate shall serve a term of four years. The three members appointed by the speaker of the House of Representatives, the majority leader of the House of Representatives, and the minority leader of the House of Representatives shall serve a term of two years. Thereafter, all members shall be appointed for a term of four years, commencing on January fourth of the year of the appointment.**
		+ **(3) One of the members appointed by the Governor shall be designated by the Governor as the chairperson of the advisory board. The advisory board shall meet annually in the month of September and may meet at any other time upon the call of its chairperson; and the chairperson shall call a meeting at the request of two or more members. Any appointed member who fails to attend three consecutive meetings or fifty per cent of all meetings held during any calendar year shall be deemed to have resigned. A majority of the members in office shall constitute a quorum. The appointing authority may, for reasonable cause, remove any appointed member and appoint another person to fill the vacancy for the unexpired portion of the term. Any vacancy in the advisory board shall be filled by the appointing authority for the unexpired portion of the term.** [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. **Appendix B**

**BESB Advisory Board**

**3-21-24**

**Children’s Services Program Updates**

**Staffing and student updates:**

	* **There are twenty-nine education consultants, three O&M instructors, and one rehabilitation instructor in children’s services, all supervised by the education supervisor.**
	* **Fifteen itinerant teachers utilize the Education Supervisor as a resource.**
	* **There are currently (949) active Children’s Services clients. At the September 2023 Advisory Board meeting there were (916). There has been an increase in enrollment of (33) children.**
	* **Children’s Services now considers children for BESB services if an eye report submitted on their behalf indicates they are functionally visually impaired (FVI). This policy was implemented this past fall. This means the eye report indicates a child does not meet the statutory requirements to receive specialized services and instruction through BESB, but does indicate they have functionally impaired vision, even if they do not meet the legal threshold of legal blindness or visual impairment. As a result, a functional vision assessment (FVA) is performed by a certified teacher of the visually impaired (TVI) to 1) assess how the child uses their vision in their learning environment, 2) decide if the child needs any visual adaptations and accommodations or specialized instruction, and 3) make a final determination regarding eligibility of services from BESB.**
		+ **As of March 14, 2024 there have been twenty-three FVI referrals this school year.**
		+ **Fourteen of the referrals have qualified for BESB services.**
		+ **Three have not qualified.**
		+ **Six of the referrals are in the process of being assessed.**
	* **Bristol and Meriden have chosen to utilize BESB Education Consultants for the 24-25 school year and will no longer employ their own certified teachers of the visually impaired.**
	* **Staffing and caseload needs were analyzed on January 9th, 2024, using the points system specified in state statute. This analysis includes absorbing Bristol and Meriden.**
	* **The statutory language: Sec. 10-295. Specialized vision-related instruction, educational programs, goods and services. Expense of services. Teachers and educational resources; funding. Adult home instruction. Adaptive equipment.**
		+ **(2) The Commissioner of Aging and Disability Services may use funds appropriated to said account to provide specialized books, materials, equipment, supplies, adaptive technology services and devices, specialist examinations and aids, preschool programs and vision-related independent living services, excluding primary educational placement, for eligible children.**
		+ **(3) The Commissioner of Aging and Disability Services may, within available appropriations, employ certified teachers of the visually impaired in sufficient numbers to meet the requests for services received from school districts. In responding to such requests, the commissioner shall utilize a formula for determining the number of teachers needed to serve the school districts, crediting six points for each Braille-learning child and one point for each other child, with one full-time certified teacher of the visually impaired assigned for every twenty-five points credited. The commissioner shall exercise due diligence to employ the needed number of certified teachers of the visually impaired, but shall not be liable for lack of resources. Funds appropriated to said account may also be utilized to employ additional staff in numbers sufficient to provide compensatory skills evaluations and training to blind and visually impaired children and special assistants to the blind and other support staff necessary to ensure the efficient operation of service delivery. Not later than October first of each year, the Commissioner of Disability and Aging Services shall determine the number of teachers needed based on the formula provided in this subdivision. Based on such determination, the Commissioner of Aging and Disability Services shall estimate the funding needed to pay such teachers’ salaries and related expenses.**
	* **Based on the statutory point system, the caseload analysis report dated January 9th, 2024, indicates that nine BESB Education Consultants are needed. This report reflects the number of children receiving services from BESB Education Consultants on January 9th, 2024, and the number of students served by itinerant teachers in Bristol and Meriden on January 9th, 2024.**
	* **A request to fill two vacant Education Consultant positions was submitted, and those two positions should be posted soon.**
	* **The Children’s Services budget does not have sufficient funds to support a request for additional Education Consultant positions, nor does it have sufficient funds to add management or supervisory positions. In addition, the Children’s Services program lacks the necessary resources to continue supporting additional program activities. Some examples of programs and activities are Expanded Core Curriculum activities, parent events, in-service trainings, program representation at and collaboration with external partners, Et cetera.**
	* **A third itinerant town has expressed an interest in utilizing BESB Education Consultants next year. Discussions are in progress. If this happens the number of teachers needed will likely increase to ten.****A sampling of past ECC Student Events this school year:**

	* **Parent Education Program: Hartford Braillers Event: 03-09-24**
	* **BESB annual ski event at Ski Sundown: 02-29-2024**
	* **Preschool Field Trip - The Lutz Museum: 02-24-2024**
	* **Skip into Skills Committee Splatter Room and Do-it-Yourself event at Pinspiration in East Lyme: 12-27-23**
	* **Leap into Life Ridgefield Holiday Stroll: 12-02-2023**
	* **Fire Safety & Awareness at Wilton Fire Dept.: 11-05-2023**
	* **Parent Education Program- Miracle league Trick or Treat: 10-28-2023****The BESB Buzz:**

**Twice yearly Children’s Services newsletter, published electronically and in print. The newsletter is also translated into Spanish.**

**Link to the fall 2023 English edition:** [**https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/AgingandDisability/BESB/BESB-Buzz-Fall-2023.pdf**](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/AgingandDisability/BESB/BESB-Buzz-Fall-2023.pdf)

**Link to the fall 2023 Spanish edition:** [**https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/AgingandDisability/BESB/El-Zumbido-Fall-2023Spanish.pdf**](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/AgingandDisability/BESB/El-Zumbido-Fall-2023Spanish.pdf)

**The spring edition will be published soon.**

**Past in-service events:**

	* **Children’s Services conducted its annual series of fall in-services for education team members in Cromwell and Wethersfield.**
		+ **Para AND P-K/K: 9-27-23 Cromwell location**
		+ **Braille AND Large Print: 9-28-23 Cromwell location**
		+ **MI/VI Day (teachers and paras): Oct. 2-3, 2023 Wethersfield location**
		+ **CVI Phase III: 10-17-23 Wethersfield location**
	* **Children’s Services conducted a spring MI/VI in-service on 3-19-24 at the Pitkin Center in Wethersfield** [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. **Appendix C**

**ADULT SERVICES PROGRAM REPORT, MARCH 21, 2024**

**The Adult Services program reports that work on the ongoing consultancy with OIB-TAC, the Older Individuals with Blindness Technical Assistance Center, is nearing completion. Three aims were initially adopted: to revise the Adult Services Policy & Procedures Manual, to develop a standard assessment tool that members of each of the four disciplines would use to guide the development of goals with clients when constructing Independent Living Plans, and to devise a Client Satisfaction Survey. The drafts of all three have been completed by the staff and revised by the Supervisor, and a pilot of the Client Satisfaction Survey was undertaken by Volunteer Program Coordinator Lori St. Amand. Staff will shortly begin to use their section of the assessment tool, and the Policy and Procedures Manual has been submitted to the Director for Review with the ADS Commissioner.**

**In addition, planning is underway for the first BESB Silver Summit in Connecticut, a conference to be held for 50 to 70 ILOB clients in May of this year. This will be undertaken with the assistance of Blind Savvy, a national training consultancy with experience in holding similar events to assist clients in open plan status in adjusting to vision loss. As regards staffing, in just in the past two months, Kara Brewer joined previous new hire Gary Allen as the second Rehabilitation Technologist. They will work together for much of the coming several months as Adult Services builds out its Rehab Technology program. Meanwhile, the three Rehab Teachers are continuing to serve clients while doing much of the planning for the Silver Summit, with Jonathan Gansfried primarily responsible for coordination. The three Orientation & Mobility Instructors have recently completed a lengthy planning effort to equip themselves with a robust demonstration kit of canes, shades, and monoculars. This effort was spearheaded at the initiation of the O&M staff but was shepherded through a series of meetings with Fiscal Services by Director Carol Jenkins. Additionally, there are four Social Workers conducting intakes and constructing independent living plans. The ILOB program has benefited from a major influx of funding from Social Security Reimbursement Funds that the VR program is not presently in a position to use.**

**Chris Lassen, Adult Services program supervisor** [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. **Appendix E**

**BESB Updates**

**March 2024**

	1. **Staff Vacancies**
		1. There are six vacancies: VR Secretary I, VR Secretary II, two Special Assistants, and two Education Consultants (TVI’s)
		2. The secretary 1 position had interviews, and we are waiting to see who will be hired.
		3. Mary and I will be discussing and evaluating what position VR needs to see if a Secretary II is what is actually needed.
		4. The two special assistant positions will be posted soon. Carol and Lisa are working on the posting information.
		5. The two Education Consultant (TVI) positions are in process. Catherine is working on the posting information.
	2. **BESB Phone Call Tree**
		1. Carol and Lisa are working with IT and AVIA to develop a phone call tree to allow consumers to have choice and options of the department or services they are trying to get in contact with.
		2. We will be at the recording stage of the messages once the database is built. We are going to have an English option as well as a Spanish option because we have many consumers who are Spanish speaking.
	3. **Large Print Calendars**
		1. In May, we will begin working on the 2025 large print calendars. The State of CT has a new logo and guidelines we must follow, so the new State of CT logo will be on next year’s large print calendars.
	4. **State Plan**
		1. The draft State Plan has been submitted. Once there is federal feedback, comments, and RSA changes, Carol will work on those and get the state plan submitted for final federal approval.
	5. **VR Satisfaction Survey**
		1. The SRC workgroup, Carol, and Mary will need to begin work on the contract, questions, and such for the VR annual satisfaction survey.
	6. **CSAVR and NCSAB**
		1. Mary, Jonathan R., and Carol will be attending the spring conferences that will be held in April in Bethesda, MD.
	7. **Pre-ETS Blind Astronomy Program**
		1. VR is working on bringing the blind astronomy program to Connecticut for blind and visually impaired Pre-Employment transition aged students (16-21). The plan is to have this program this summer. Pre-ETS VR Counselors will be contacting them for any potential interest in this program. More information to come. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. **Appendix E**

**BESB Budget Report**

**March 2024**

	1. **Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) FFY 2022**
		1. Returned: VR: $396,852.00 and SE: $45,000 (full award)
		2. Met 15% Pre-ETS reserve
	2. **Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) FFY 2023**
		1. Original FFY 23 VR Grant: $3,584,073Maintenance of Effort (MOE) Penalty: $444,034

VR Grant after MOE penalty: $3,140,039

Reallotment: $750,000

Total VR Grant with Reallotment: $3,890,039

VR Remaining Balance: $$2,218,819.50

	* 1. Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS)
			1. Pre-ETS Total 15% Reserve including Reallotment: $583,505.85
			2. Pre-ETS Remaining Reserve: $$334,425.27
		2. Supported Employment (SE) FFY 2023
			1. Part A: Adult Remaining balance: $2,672.00
			2. Part B: Youth Remaining balance: $22,156.20
	1. **Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) FFY 2024**
		1. Original FFY 24 VR Grant (Currently Received): $1,219,755.00Maintenance of Effort (MOE) Penalty: $4,206.00

Total VR Grant: Not received at this time

	1. **Business Enterprise Program (BEP)**
		1. Remaining Balance: $2,748,606.32
	2. **Independent Living/Older Blind (IL/OB) FFY 2023 (Adults Over Age 55)**
		1. Beginning balance: $361,314.00
		2. Remaining balance: $ 225,589.16
	3. **Independent Living/Older Blind (IL/OB) FFY 22024 (Adults Over Age 55)**
		1. Beginning Balance: $121,958.00
		2. Remaining Balance: Haven’t Received Full Grant
	4. **Independent Living (IL) SFY 2024 (Adults Under Age 55)**
		1. Beginning balance: $27,244.00
		2. Remaining balance: $7,055.34
	5. **Children’s Services SFY 2024**
		1. Beginning balance: $ 3,620,556.00
		2. Remaining balance: $411,731.77 [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. **Appendix F**

**2024 Legislative Session Update**

**to the**

**Advisory Board to BESB**

**by Jennifer Proto, ADS Legislative Liaison**

**March 21, 2024**

The following proposals which may be of interest have had a public hearing. Please note that this is not an exhaustive list, and these proposals are subject to change. Summaries of final enacted legislation will be provided after session adjourns on May 8, 2024.

**DEAF, HARD OF HEARING & DEAFBLIND SERVICES**

H.B. 5241: AN ACT ESTABLISHING A BUREAU COORDINATING SERVICES FOR DEAF, HARD OF HEARING OR DEAFBLIND PERSONS

	* Creates a new independent bureau within ADS for administrative purposes and directs the Commissioner to hire an executive director and one administrative assistant
	* Requires new director to
		+ oversee ADS employees who provide counseling, interpreting and other assistance to persons who are deaf, hard of hearing and deafblind, except for federally funded vocational rehab employees;
		+ annually update and publish on the ADS website a resource guide for persons who are deaf, hard of hearing or deafblind;
		+ maintain and publish an online registry of interpreters, categorized by the setting in which they are qualified;
	* Requires new director to assist PURA in telecommunication relay service program implementation and work with the Governor’s office and CT television stations to make broadcasts more accessible
	* Requires new director to consult with the Advisory Board for Persons Who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or Deafblind to identify needs and address policy changes that may be necessary to better serve such persons
	* Adds several new areas of services which ADS does not currently provide, including
		+ partnering with civic and community organizations serving deaf, hard of hearing, or deafblind persons to provide workshops and information sessions regarding new laws, regulations, or developments regarding services, programs, or health care needs, and coordinating education and training initiatives with public safety and health officials; and
		+ training for sign language interpreters, oral interpreters and interpreters who are trained to interpret for deafblind persons to maintain or enhance their skills in a variety of settings; and increase opportunities for mentorships, internships, apprenticeships, and specialized training for people who are deafblind
	* Requires an annual leadership roundtable meeting to discuss best practices and gaps in services for persons who are deaf, hard of hearing or deafblind; refer complaints concerning the qualification and registration of interpreters; and make recommendations to the Governor and certain legislative committees
	* Makes various membership changes to the Advisory Board for Persons who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing or Deafblind, including removing ADS Commissioner and replacing her with the ADS Human Services advocate, adding a representative of the Connecticut Tech Act Project within ADS, as well as other membership changes
	* Requires each state agency to appoint an employee to serve as a point of contact for concerns related to persons who are deaf, hard of hearing or deafblind**SERVICE ANIMALS**

H.B. 5288: AN ACT ALIGNING STATE LAW WITH FEDERAL LAW CONCERNING SERVICE ANIMALS

	* Aligns state law with federal law concerning service animals, and (2) within available appropriations, makes available through the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities educational materials concerning service animals, emotional support animals and therapy animals**HEALTH CARE**

S.B. 425: AN ACT PROHIBITING DISCRIMINATION BY HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS IN THE PROVISION OF HEALTH CARE SERVICES IN THE STATE

	* Deems as a discriminatory practice the refusal of any health care provider to provide health care services on account of a person's race, color, religious creed, sex, gender identity or expression, marital status, age, national origin, ancestry, intellectual disability, mental disability, learning disability, physical disability, including blindness, veteran status or status as a domestic violence victimH.B. 5200: AN ACT CONCERNING HEALTH CARE ACCESSIBILITY FOR PERSONS WITH A DISABILITY

	* By January 1, 2025, expands access to medical diagnostic equipment and examination rooms for people with a disability by requiring each health care facility with two or more exam rooms to (1) purchase only medical equipment that complies with technical standards for accessibility, and (2) ensure that at least one exam room has the necessary (A) dimensions to enable a patient using an assistive device, including a wheelchair, to easily enter, exit and maneuver around, and (B) staff and equipment, including a lift, to assist a patient with a disability in accessing any medical diagnostic equipmentS.B. 205: AN ACT ELIMINATING INCOME AND ASSET LIMITS IN THE MED-CONNECT PROGRAM FOR EMPLOYEES WITH DISABILITIES

	* Eliminates income and asset limits in a program providing Medicaid benefits for employees with disabilities**STATE BUDGET**

H.B. 5049: AN ACT MAKING DEFICIENCY APPROPRIATIONS FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2024

	* Reduces the biennium budget’s (PA 23-204) appropriation to ADS for FY 24 by $200,000 in the following BESB account: Educational Aid for Children [↑](#endnote-ref-6)