**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**

**Draft Minutes**

**December 12, 2019**

**Members Present**

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

**Members Absent**

**Astread Ferron-Poole (representing the DSS Commissioner)**

**Others Present**

**Amy Porter, ADS Commissioner, Brian Sigman, BESB Director, Amanda Billiot, Pratt and Whitney and State Rehabilitation Council, Mary Burgard, Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor, Chris Lassen, Adult Services Supervisor, Andrew Norton, ADS Legislative and Administrative Advisor, Ed Owens, Business Enterprise Program Supervisor, Lori St. Amand, Volunteer Program Coordinator, Lisa Tanguay, Office Supervisor, Anita Benjamin, Sign Language Interpreter**

**Welcome and Introductions**

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

**Public Comment**

**Mr. Thal acknowledged Adult Services for distributing the 2020 large print calendars to clients in a timely manner. He thought it would be beneficial to include additional support groups for future calendars.**

**Old Business**

**Approval of Minutes**

**MOTION: A motion was made by Mr. Pride, seconded by Ms. Silverberg, to accept the meeting minutes from September 19, 2019. Motion passed unanimously.**

**New Business**

**Blind Americans Equality Day Workgroup Report**

**Chairperson Sylvestre presented a certificate of appreciation to Mr. Thal for his leadership and commitment to individuals who are blind and for coordinating the Blind Americans Equality Day activities. Mr. Thal acknowledged Mr. Gregoire, Ms. Guzman, Ms. Kathryn Wiseman from the Veterans Administration, and Ms. Diane Weaver Dunne from CRIS Radio for their assistance and efforts as members of the workgroup that planned the events. Acknowledgement was also given to other Advisory Board members for their contributions to the various events that were held. Mr. Thal submitted a detailed report to the Advisory Board of the events with recommendations for 2020. A workgroup was formed consisting of Mr. Thal, Mr. Gregoire, Ms. Akers, Ms. Giudice and Ms. Guzman who will meet on January 21, 2020 at 10:00 a.m. via conference call to discuss coordination of the 2020 events.**

**BESB Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) section of Unified State Plan**

**Mr. Sigman acknowledged the assistance that Ms. Silverberg provided in developing the draft state plan goals as a member of the joint workgroup comprised of representatives from the State Rehabilitation Council and the Advisory Board. Mr. Sigman detailed the process required to finalize the draft, that will include a public comment period, public hearing and review of the public comments by the Advisory Board and the SRC after the public comment period closes. The final draft must be submitted to the Rehabilitation Services Administration by March 1, 2020.**

**Mr. Sylvestre recommended that prior to finalization of the draft goals, an objective should be developed for inclusion in the plan that would create a system of networking between clients for the purpose of sharing strategies that helped them to achieve employment, and that would provide opportunities to obtain information from others who are employed in a wide variety of occupations.**

**MOTION: A motion was made by Ms. Akers, seconded by Ms. Rival to permit the draft BESB Vocational Rehabilitation section of the Unified State Plan to proceed to the public comment period. Motion passed unanimously.**

**Budget Update**

**Mr. Sigman provided an update on the BESB programs and their funding levels. He noted that the federally funded programs at BESB in VR and Adult Services have been receiving allotments under the continuing resolution that goes through December 20, 2019. He reported that both programs have adequate carry forward funds to maintain staffing and service levels. Mr. Sigman mentioned that the Deafblind Advisory Committee has been exploring strategies to address greater utilization of appropriated funds in that program.**

**Mr. Owens reported on the changes that have occurred in the Business Enterprise Program. The vending facility at 470 Capital Avenue has transitioned to a micromarket from a cafeteria. The cafeteria at Manchester Community College will become a vending facility location in December. With the retirement of the vending facility manager at the Danbury Court House, the Statewide Committee of Blind Vendors motioned to decline future operation of that location due to the limited income potential. After deliberation on the requirements to operate the food services at the newly renovated State Office Building, the Statewide Committee of Blind Vendors motioned to waive that location. Field Representative Nicholas Palermo has retired and there are plans to refill that position.**

**Ms. Burgard reported on the VR Program’s activities during the month of October, which was National Disabilities Employment Awareness Month. BESB VR was a co-sponsor of the Employment First conference and the 27th Annual Conference on Serving Adults with Disabilities. BESB VR also participated in a resource fair that was held in Hartford and a job fair that was held in Orange. Ms. Burgard noted that attendance was strong at all of these events.**

**Legislative Update**

**Mr. Norton reported that for the upcoming legislative session, there is a bill the agency is requesting to be put forth that would make technical adjustments such as deleting an out-of-date reference to the Department of Social Services (DSS) regarding the former Department on Aging, removing duplicative provisions within the ADS statutes, bringing the statutes from the various bureaus of ADS together into one location of the statutes, and making changes to the Connecticut Tech Act Project to improve the lending process for persons with disabilities to purchase needed assistive technology. Mr. Norton also reported that the Advisory Board for Persons who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing may request the introduction of a bill to expand services for children who are deaf or hard of hearing in school under 504 plans so that they are treated similarly to students served under Individualized Education Programs (IEP). The State Long-Term Care Ombudsman may request the introduction of a bill to prohibit nursing homes from issuing an involuntary discharge to a resident just because they fail to pay the “applied income” to the nursing home.**

**Board Vacancies and Appointments**

**Ms. Giudice announced that she has been reappointed to the Advisory Board by the Senate Minority Leader. Chairman Sylvestre announced the passing of former Advisory Board member Carry Saxon Perry.**

**Points to the Good and Welfare**

**Ms. Giudice attended the Northeast regional conference of the Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired. She reported the conference was very informative.**

**MOTION: On a motion by Ms. Giudice, seconded by Mr. Pride, the meeting adjourned at 12:07 p.m.**

**Next meeting – 19 March 2020, 10:00 a.m. to noon at 184 Windsor Avenue, Windsor, CT**