**Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS)  
Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB)  
Statewide Committee of Blind Vendors  
Minutes for December 5, 2023 Committee Meeting**

**Welcome and Roll Call – Mr. Tyrell Sampson called the meeting to order at 3:10 p.m.**

**Committee Members Present: Chairman Mr. Keith Haley, Vice Chairman Mr. Rich Braccia, Mr. Karan Punjabi, Mr. David Pelaggi, Ms. Brandy Altergott, Ms. Shelly McDermott, Mr. Angel Torres**

**Committee Members Absent: Ms. Sovey Ramirez**

**Agency Staff Present: Mr. Tyrell Sampson, Mr. David Walsh, Mr. Nicholas Faenza, Ms. Jessie Towle, Mr. Joel Garcia, Ms. Pru Chapman**

**Minutes of the Last Meetings – Review and approval of last two meeting minutes: September 20th, 2023 and November 9th, 2023 Special Meeting.**

**A motion to accept the minutes was made by Mr. Pelaggi and seconded by Mr. Punjabi. The motion carried unanimously.**

**Mr. Sampson requested to add one item to today’s agenda: Jefferson Beach in Fairfield. Ms. Altergott made a motion to amend today’s agenda to add this item under New Business. Mr. Pelaggi seconded the motion, and the motion carried unanimously.**

**Old Business**

**a) Budget Update – Mr. Sampson reported that the budget is strong, with $2.9 million in the account and believes budget will remain positive during the remaining duration of the Pepsi contract as a result of Pepsi approved price increase.**

**b) Business Reports, Schedule C, Retirement Contribution – Mr. Sampson stated business reports need to be submitted in timely, and they must be accurate. Pilot vending figures, commissions, and any payments made by BESB must be identified within the reports. He also strongly recommended that everyone turn their Schedule Cs in timely and those whom participate in the retirement program submit their contribution payment timely with Schedule C’s to avoid financial penalty for late submittals in the future.**

**Chairman Haley asked for clarification of how vending commissions should be reported, and stated that he prefers to have separate business reports instead of lumping them together.**

**Mr. Sampson responded that you can do separate reports, or you can apply them to your primary location, however during the period of pilot the agency will use total earnings to report to RSA. Should the vending route become permanent in the future each route will have their perspective operation number requiring separate reporting.**

**New Business**

**a) Pilot Vending Route update – Tyrell communicated that the pilot vending route appears to be going well and seems to be something we can stabilize next year, though he has some concerns. When offered the pilot program, a set dollar amount of $20,000 was agreed upon. However, some operators are now projected to make over $30,000. Mr.Sampson wanted to bring it to the committee’s attention in the interest of fairness. He can have field reps run a report before the next quarterly meeting and then could discuss how to proceed with the possible need of establishing a financial cap.**

**Chairman Haley agreed that we’ll need to discuss moving forward, as it should be fair across the board, and acknowledges the trickiness of the situation.**

**Vice Chairman Braccia reminded the committee that it’s a pilot, which means that we have the chance to come up with solutions when we see that something is not working.**

**Mr. Sampson will send some of his thoughts and ideas to the committee.**

**Mr. Sampson reminded operators that while there may be challenges, everyone has been given a rare opportunity with this program. Now that people are back on their feet, the goal is to expand the program. If an operator cannot execute the responsibilities that come with this, they should let him know, as there are others who are very interested in the opportunity.**

**Chairman Haley raised that there may be some additional challenges during winter that are beyond our control. Some leniency would be appreciated due to weather situations.**

**Mr. Sampson agreed that regarding safety, it will be case-by-case.**

**Chairman Haley Keith brought up another issue: that some operators are having trouble getting in the door at their location. He suggested that a photo ID or business card identifying operators as vendors for BESB could help.**

**Mr. Sampson agreed to look into this and will discuss it with Director Carol Jenkins.**

**Chairman Haley asked if operators should be reporting by January or February if Pepsi has not adjusted prices for the items in their locations.**

**Mr. Sampson responded that yes, he would like to know this, and will send an email to the operators.**

**b) First Right of Refusal: Greenwich Golf Course – Mr. Sampson reported that Greenwich reached out regarding BESB’s first right, and he was able to get the RFP and forwarded it to the committee. The operation is seasonal, and bigger than what he anticipated in terms of roles and responsibilities. In addition to food, there is a full bar, which would require us to obtain a liquor license. The hours of operation are approximately 9am to 10pm Monday through Sunday during the season. They have a lot of live bands and host parties. Employment is challenging, according to the manager. Since you’re covering two shifts, the location has to be double staffed; anywhere from 10-12 employees are required. There are licenses and fees of $45,000 and up. He doesn’t feel we’re in the position right now to take on this opportunity.**

**Chairman Haley asked who would need to obtain the liquor license?**

**Mr. Sampson responded that we’d have to ask the Attorney General’s office for clarification.**

**Ms. Altergott noted that she has held a liquor license in the past and stated that the liquor license must be in the person’s name; it cannot be in an agency’s name. She added that the person must be able to pass a detailed FBI background check.**

**A motion was made by Ms. Altergott and seconded by Mr. Pelaggi to waive the Greenwich location but retain the vending rights. The motion carried unanimously.**

**c) Facility Update: Camp Nett- Greenwich Beach-Norwalk CC – Mr. Sampson announced that Camp Nett has launched with Ms. Altergott as operator, and he thinks it will do well. Ms. Altergott is working with Camp Nett to add garments.**

**Mr. Sampson reported that he’s still waiting to hear back about the amended proposal to operate at Greenwich Beach in 2024. One of the changes asked for is the ability to include a disability group in Fairfield County, Abilis. They are willing to provide staff to Sovey for the North Stand at Greenwich Beach. A reduction in the annual fee was also asked for. The Greenwich Beach staff was extremely satisfied and looking forward to Sovey resuming operations, and Mr. Sampson believes we’ll be able to proceed with a third season.**

**Mr. Sampson also said he is in communication with Abilis on the possibility of offering hands-on training for individuals with an interest in operating larger concession opportunities. This will help operators to be prepared when these municipalities reach out with big opportunities and little notice.**

**d) Vacation Payments – Mr. Sampson stated that vacation payments have been made.**

**Chairman Haley asked if moving forward we will need to vote on this every year, and what month should it happen?**

**Mr. Sampson replied that the payments should ideally fall the following year, which would allow people to satisfy a year before being paid. This would mean waiting until March or having a special meeting in January.**

**e) State Employees Telework Allowance (update) – Mr. Sampson reported that the agency has been allotted the opportunity to telework from January to June 2024.**

**Chairman Haley added that this will probably remain true until the contracts are up.**

**f) Mini Randolph Sheppard State Regulations update – Mr. Sampson stated that he, Carol Jenkins, and Andrew Norton have finished their edits to the draft presented by the committee, and it will be returned in the coming weeks. The next process would be to forward it to the new attorney, then to Commissioner Porter, and finally to the RSA before bringing it for legislation change.**

**g) Jefferson Beach in Fairfield – Mr. Sampson stated that Jefferson is a beautiful beach in Fairfield with a nice concession stand offering above-quality beach food; the current operator is associated with a restaurant in town. The town missed acknowledging to us our first right, and the current operator’s agreement is up, and they’re looking for someone to resume in 2024. Mr. Sampson requested profit and loss information, but they were unable to provide this. The monthly rental fee paid in 2023 was $28,810.18. While this seems like a viable location, we do not currently have an operator qualified in that area to execute the roles and responsibilities for this location – it’s a pretty aggressive location.**

**Chairman Haley added that the monthly fee is slated to go up in 2024. They also had stipulations on the staff; that they must have at least two years’ experience in cafeteria services.**

**Mr. Sampson stated that in his mind, the goal is to get ourselves prepared for future similar opportunities. This might include individuals without past kitchen or restaurant experience obtaining it personally by taking part-time jobs to learn process at larger companies like Subway or McDonalds, outside of what BESB is able to provide.**

**Ms. Altergott offered to make room for someone at her location this summer for training, as Rich doing this for her contributed to her own success.**

**Chairman Haley stated that his opinion is that due to late notice, no profit and loss statement, and $30,000 per month fee, it might be in our best interest to waive.**

**A motion was made by Mr. Pelaggi and seconded by Vice Chairman Braccia to waive the Jefferson Beach Fairfield opportunity while retaining the vending rights. The motion carried unanimously.**

**Agency Matters**

**a) Agency update – Mr. Sampson wanted to let everyone know that fiscal is continuing to have staff shortage issues, but they have hired and are training new people. He asked everyone to remain patient, and if anyone has any questions regarding payments they are waiting for, they can check in with him.**

**Open Forum**

**Chairman Haley asked if anyone has concerns or questions?**

**Vice Chairman Braccia raised that there is no one to fix the vending machines at this time. He asked for assistance, as he has three machines currently having issues.**

**Mr. Sampson replied that they have not yet been successful identifying repair companies. Servomation has told him that vending machine technicians are extremely difficult to find. As of right now, there is not a solution, but he is continuing to look. He also recommends making this a collective effort and asks that if anyone knows someone with a legitimate business who could repair these machines to let him know, and they can be reimbursed.**

**Ms. McDermott raised that on one of her routes there was a company providing meals. She said they are not continuing to do this, but they never did an RFP. She asked Mr. Sampson if she should have her building contact him?**

**Mr. Sampson replied that yes, they should contact him. He would like more information about who is violating our first right.**

**Mr. Pelaggi asked if there are any updates on Danbury Prison.**

**Mr. Sampson said there are no updates, as they are being unresponsive. He will follow back up in the new year and push harder.**

**Adjournment**

**A motion was made by Ms. McDermott and seconded by Mr. Pelaggi to adjourn the meeting. The motion carried unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 4:48 pm.**