**State Of Connecticut**

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

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

**Statewide Committee of Blind Vendors Special Meeting**

**DRAFT MINUTES**

**July 16, 2024**

**Members Present:**

**Chairman Mr. Keith Haley, Vice Chairman Mr. Rich Braccia, Mr. Karan Punjabi, Mr. Dave Pelaggi, Ms. Sovey Ramirez, Mr. Angel Torres, Ms. Brandy Altergott, Ms. Shelly McDermott**

**Others Present:**

**Mr. Tyrell Sampson Program Supervisor, Ms. Tracy Morin, Mr. David Walshe, Ms. Jessie Towle, Mr. Joel Garcia, Mr. Frank Roberts, Ms. Ashley Morgan**

**Members Absent:**

**None**

**Welcome:**

**The meeting was called to order at 3:03pm by Mr. Tyrell Sampson. He took attendance and all members were present.**

**Transfer and Promotion Process for Teaming Partners (Micro Markets)**

**Chairman Haley stated how since COVID, the program has been pivoting with what they have been doing for work and turning some locations into micro markets. The regulations are in the process of being updated and this could take another year before it is officially updated since it is a lengthy process. Before the new regulations, the program is currently under the present regulations, which gives seniority regarding the promoting transfer list. This gives the person who has been with the program the longest rights first and so on down the list. We are finding with respect to the micro markets that the person on top could just start taking every single one that comes their way, and this could create it so the person at the bottom of the list never gets an opportunity. Essentially, someone could have ten (10) micro markets and somebody at the bottom could have zero (0) and the program is here to make money for all blind operators not just the ones that have been in the program the longest. We need to establish some type of cap on how many can be run at a time, say three (3). In theory, we want to have everyone at the same number of micro markets and then if new ones come up, we could offer a fourth or fifth. This in theory will give all the operators an opportunity to earn a living at some of these new spots.**

**Mr. Tyrell Sampson agreed with what Chairman Haley was saying regarding a cap. Mr. Tyrell Sampson stated the program has become creative in opportunity, but we also need to maintain the mindset of being able to provide opportunity for those maybe at the lower end of the seniority list. In addition, we have several new individuals interested in the program as of late and they are being told nothing is available at this time. He stated he doesn’t think it is due to how things are operating now, it’s just that nothing is available. This brought up how the program can provide upward opportunity while still allowing new participants to the program. We need to develop a system that will facilitate this since seniority is going to be going away. By capping the amount, it will essentially still give you the opportunity for a new prospect that might be better and then dropping one so that the trickledown effect can take place giving the old opportunity to a new member or someone with less. The seniority-based method is going away, with support from NFB and RSA. A different grade of measurement needs to be put forth to create better operator opportunity. With that said he opened it up to the committee members for their ideas.**

**Chairman Haley reiterated that this is strictly for micro markets not larger teaming partners like the Coast Guard for example, just the micro markets. Mr. Rich Braccia stated that a time limit should be set forth with this to limit people from taking three (3) and then two (2) weeks later a better opportunity comes up, they cannot take that one and drop an old one. They should be in those locations for at a six (6) month period before they can be offered a different opportunity. This way the people below can still get good opportunities offered to them. Mr. Tyrell Sampson agreed with this and asked for other members thoughts and opinions. Ms. Shelly McDermott suggested putting a regional component to this. She referenced someone that lives over in the eastern half of the state is not going to want to take an opportunity in the western half of the state. If it was offered to the members in that region first, then to others outside of the regions should be a factor. She also stated she liked the idea of the cap of three (3). Mr. Karan Punjabi stated location would be a main factor for him as it can be difficult with a location outside of the area regarding the amount of time and skill level spent at the locations. He agreed with the cap idea and the required time period at each location. Mr. Dave Pelaggi stated that income should also play a role in this. If someone is not making a lot of money at one location, they should be able to take one a new one that could potentially make more and drop a low-income producer. Ms. Sovey Ramirez stated she thought the current seniority plan was unfair because when she first joined, she could only have a small concession and she wanted to grow and couldn’t because of the seniority process. Mr. Angel Torres wanted to know what would happen once you reached the cap; would you be able to drop a lower performing one in favor of a better opportunity or can they add a fourth if no one else wants the opportunity. Mr. Tyrell Sampson stated he was alright with that if the opportunity had been offered to all first and no one accepted it then could potentially have four (4) micro markets but again we must establish how this would come about for who is offered what. Ms. Brandy Altergott liked the idea of regionally offering it first as Ms. Shelley McDermott suggested and the income aspect as well.**

**After much discussion about whether to set income or number of locations as the first guideline, a motion was made that the location cap of three (3) would come first then an income cap of $80,000.00 would come next.**

**MOTION: A Motion was made by Mr. Rich Braccia and seconded by Mr. Karan Punjabi.**

**Vote: Yes – 8, No – 0, Abstained – 0**

**Pilot Vending Program Policy Recommendations**

**Mr. Tyrell Sampson addressed that this was a pilot vending program that was started a year ago. This is not part of the micro markets he mentioned and will not be included in those caps. He stated there were a few things that were not in the current outline for the program that he would like to see implemented such as seeing vendor audits, stronger language regarding the time in which we receive these reports. Since this is an audit, we need to see these reports in real time not a month later. He would also like to see some language that strengthens the programs’ ability to initiate conversations and actions if necessary to individuals that are not treating this responsibility with the level of urgency and seriousness in which is required. There have been a lot of good things taken out of this and many things brought to the attention of the program in which in turn have been forwarded to the teaming partner. This resulted in corrective action that we probably never would have found without members feedback and notification in a timely manner. Mr. Tyrell Sampson would like the committee to weigh in on setting limitations on the dollar amount. The budget is strong, but it is the budget for the program. It is not earmarked for any one individual and cannot be viewed as a split into existing operators because that’s not the intent of the program. The intent is to provide new opportunities, it’s not intended to just take and pay everyone equally. Its design is to generate profits for the individual directly from that machine.**

**Chairman Haley stated he would like to get members opinions on how this was growing and how to get other operators at a similar level across the board. Some are making significantly more than others and not because they are not doing the same amount of work. He stated he was speaking to Mr. Tyrell Sampson about how if we did try to earmark it for the program and give everyone the same amount. Audit-wise, this could get the program in trouble. Mr. Tyrell Sampson stated that this is where it could be said that the program is not entrepreneurial earnings and that members are just receiving paychecks. The program needs to be based on what you earn.**

**Chairman Haley discussed how the initial divide of these machines was based on the seniority list. With that being said and seniority going away it sounds like caps need to be placed on this as well so that everyone can try to be at the same level. Ms. Brandy Altergott stated that she feels there should not be a cap on income because if she is putting in more work and researching what is wanted at these sights and that increases her profits it would penalize her and not allow for other opportunities for her because of this. Chairman Haley stated that a lot of members reported problems with machine, that the machines are not being stocked or working properly and having to email or call the team partner to address it is a challenge. Mr. Rich Braccia stated he has not had the same issues that many reported with his machines, they work and are full and it might seem like he is not putting in as much work because of the luck he has had with his route. Mr. Frank Roberts spoke up about the team partner not always responding in a timely manner to refill machines or fix problems like he had at one of his locations which is not far from the partner’s plant. Ms. Shelley McDermott stated she is in a similar situation to Mr. Rich Braccia and that her machines don’t really have any problems. She was informed by a security guard at one of her sites that the product was coming out hot. Upon inspection the machine looked fine, if not for the guard mentioning this to her, she would have never known to address the issue. She stated certain things are going to be missed and it’s not because everyone is not doing their due diligence. Chairman Haley discussed that this is important to do these weekly checks on the machine and to identify these problems that this is part of getting your commission checks and if the partner does not do it, then we are to make sure sales are still profitable. If the partner is not responding to emails or calls, contact your field representative for assistance.**

**Mr. Tyrell Sampson went back to the capping idea to try to level the field. He would like to see a cap on the quantity of machines per operator. He also stated that in order to allow for newcomers to this, maybe a determination is made on an annual basis and that field representatives can create routes based on this for newcomers. Ms. Brandy Altergott also stated that we need to address price increases on an annual basis. Mr. Tyrell Sampson stated this would all be impacted by the contracts with the partners, that this is all based on the current contract and that next year’s contract could be drastically different. Mr. Rich Braccia proposed that a mindset should be imposed that this is revisited annually as well based on contracts. Mr. Tyrell Sampson agreed that an annual overview would be a good thing to implement. He stated with the budget that exists now the program could potentially add three (3) new opportunities. Chairman Haley questioned if we put the machine cap at 20 and the earnings cap at $20,000.00 could he potentially get more machines if he wasn’t making the earning cap. Ms. Brandy Altergott mentioned that switching machines was a possibility among the members. Mr. Tyrell Sampson agreed that switching machines was possible, but the members had to be at that location for at least a 3-month period. This way more accurate reporting could be given for that location. Mr. Tyrell Sampson was not opposed to having more than the twenty (20) machines to make up for the earning cap, but something needs to be in place so that everyone is meeting the minimum. He proposed a twenty (20) machine minimum per operator be placed. He stated we should put a financial cap into the best of the program’s ability and revisit this annually. The current contract is in place until June 30th, 2025, and the new one would be started on July 1st, 2025. This would be so that we are prepared with a plan before this new contact gets into place so there is a policy to follow going forward that is not based on the seniority model.**

**MOTION: A motion was made by Mr. Rich Braccia to implement the policy being a permanent, annual review of twenty (20) machines minimum and an earning cap of $30,000.00 per operator reviewed and adjusted annually with $90,000.00 designated for three (3) more vending routes. This was seconded by Mr. Dave Pelaggi.**

**Vote: Yes – 8, No – 0, Abstained – 0**

**Riverside Railroad Station, Greenwich CT First Right of Refusal**

**Mr. Tyrell Sampson brought up the Riverside Railroad Station, when he went there to review the location it was very small like the Coscom Railroad station that was recently waived on. There were old books in the venue, it was not necessary for travelers to even step into the venue as stairs were located on both sides that lead directly to the trains. The heaviest hours of operation would be from 6:00am-9:00am and then again from 4:00pm-7:00pm. There was a small parking lot near it, maybe thirty to forty car capacity. There was not a person in sight. There is one vending machine there already that we operate. Mr. Sampson does not recommend this opportunity. There is not much profit in the operational hours. Tickets are not purchased in the venue.**

**MOTION: Ms. Shelley McDermott made a motion to waive this location and retain the vending rights to this location. This was seconded by Mr. Rich Braccia.**

**Vote: Yes – 8, No – 0, Abstained – 0**

**Mr. Frank Roberts asked if an email could go out yearly with the committee members listed and any promotions or transfers. Mr. Tyrell Sampson did not have a problem with sending this to him.**

**No Further discussion**

**Adjournment**

**Mr. Pelaggi made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Ms. Brandy Altergott. Motion passed and meeting was adjourned at 5:02pm.**