**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 10, 2024**

**Members Present:**

**Chairman Mr. Rich Braccia, Vice Chairwoman Ms. Brandy Altergott, Mr. Karan Punjabi, Mr. David Pelaggi, Mr. Angel Torres, Mr. Keith Haley, Ms. Shelly McDermott, Mr. Tony Ford, Mr. Kevin Doyle, Mr. Frank Roberts**

**Others Present:**

**Mr. Tyrell Sampson Program Supervisor, Ms. Tracy Morin, Ms. Jessie Towle, Mr. Joel Garcia, Mr. Nicholas Faenza, Mr. David Walshe, Mr. Adam Fairbanks, Ms. Sovey Ramirez, Ms. Ashley Morgan**

**Members Absent:**

**None**

**Welcome:**

**The meeting has been called to order at 3:05pm by Mr. Tyrell Sampson.**

**Minutes of the Last Meetings**

**Chairman Mr. Rich Braccia asked for a motion to pass the minutes from the September 10, 2024, October 10, 2024, and November 14, 2024, meetings. Motion was made by Vice Chairwoman Ms. Brandy Altergott, seconded by Mr. David Pelaggi. Motion passed unanimously, no opposed or abstentions.**

**Old Business:**

**Budget Update**

**Mr. Tyrell Sampson stated that he received the budget overview, and it appears the budget is at about $3.5 million. This does not include some of the back expenditures owed out of the account, there is about $100,000.00 or slightly more in expenditures, but the budget is strong going into 2025.**

**Business Reports, Schedule C, Retirement Contribution**

**Mr. Tyrell Sampson stated that he had a meeting two weeks ago with the director of the retirement program. It was mentioned that if you are part of this program (Blind Vendors) then it is a mandate that you are part of the retirement program. Essentially that means that the participants are viewed as state employees. With that being said, retirement contributions and Schedule C’s must be submitted in a timely manner. If this does not happen and it comes to the time when you retire out of the program, you may not receive a pension or your retirement contribution as well as not be qualified for the retirement health insurance. Mr. Tyrell Sampson also stated that the retirement department does not want to receive massive amounts of checks from people at the last minute for the contributions since they invest those funds to make money for the retirement fund. Mr. Tyrell Sampson mentioned that he is waiting for written documentation once it is reviewed by legal with the exact parameters for this retirement contribution so that everyone that participates in the program knows what the exact expectations are for these contributions. Once he received that he would share with the participants. He also mentioned that they recognize participants that file for an extension. This must be done in a timely manner, with a copy going to him so he can forward this to them so they can put this extension on file. He clarified that as long as you pay whatever dollar amount the Schedule C says you need to pay at that time you should be alright.**

**New Business:**

**Blast Conference Overview**

**Mr. Tyrell Sampson, Vice Chairwoman Ms. Brandy Altergott, and Mr. Keith Haley all attended the recent Blast Conference in Tennessee last month. He went on to state this was one of the best Blast Conferences he has gone to. The sessions were excellent and produces good discussions and the topics discussed were pertinent to the program. They had many speakers that were great, a women’s issues in Randolph Shepard, a financial planner, a tax strategist, non-traditional method for micro-market opportunities, marketing discussions, AI technology usage, and food service consultants. Vice Chairwoman Ms. Brandy Altergott mentioned anyone that can attend one of these should really go as it gives vendors so many networking contacts and ideas to improve their micro-markets sales. The next one is in May 2025 in Las Vegas, Nevada. Mr. Keith Haley mentioned that it shows how well we are doing with this program as a State because some of the sessions they sat in on were gripe sessions from people in other States. He tried to get our name out there as a success story but didn’t get the chance to mention all the great thing we implement here in Connecticut. Mr. David Pelaggi asked if the stipend for these conferences could be changed from $500.00 to $1,000.00 so that other members who may not be able to attend because of the financial burden could attend next time. Mr. Tyrell Sampson stated he does not have a problem with that since the budget is good and will be able to support this if that is what members would like to do. Vice Chairwoman Ms. Brandy Altergott mentioned this would be good considering the registration for these conferences is around $250.00 so the increase would help members participate in these conferences. Mr. Tyrell Sampson mentioned this can be added to the next meeting agenda to discuss and vote on.**

**DAS/BEP Statewide Vending Contract Update**

**Mr. Tyrell Sampson mentioned that we are in the last year of the Statewide Vending Contract with Pepsi. Initially the mindset was to reach out to RFP and test the waters to see where things stood but there is a slight change of events in that thought process, that this is more or less curated by DAS now. They will be reaching out to Pepsi to see if they would like to extend this contract to another five years with negotiation to the existing contract that will be of maximum benefit to the program. He will keep everyone updated as things progress with that.**

**Pepsi Commission Report- Update**

**Mr. Tyrell Sampson stated that in September’s report form Pepsi had some unreported figures in key locations. This was an internal system transition issue at Pepsi. It only impacted some of the locations within our contract, but it was a system wide issue at Pepsi and impacted other programs as well not just BEP’s program with them. They were able to identify the issue and assured himself and Ms. Tracy Morin that any funds due would be sent to us and appropriate reporting would follow this. He mentioned that if you did not get the correct figures reported to reach out to him so he can look into it once he receives the correct figures from Pepsi.**

**The Pepsi and Servomation transition is about 90% completed at this time he reported. This was a learning experience for both companies and now that it is almost completed the reporting should be correct going forward. Servomation does an excellent job in listening to concerns and keeping everything stocked. Once the transition is complete it will be a great value to the program going forward should we resume business with Pepsi in the new contract.**

**Facility Update- Hybrid Concept**

**Mr. Tyrell Sampson mentioned that while he was in Tennessee at the Blast Conference, they were talking to the people over in Virginia. They have introduced a hybrid kind of concept; it has the usual fare, but they introduced like a hot offering. This is similar to what you see at Cumberland Farms or Dunkin Donuts with a high-speed toaster oven for hot offerings that can be executed by a blind person and does not require a special skill set. He is challenging everyone in the program to come up with an idea or a product/service for the micro-markets, working with their field representatives, to enhance the micro-markets offerings/choices of items and have this ready for discussion at the next meeting. This will hopefully keep the micro-markets ahead of the game so to speak.**

**RSA-15 Federal Report**

**Mr. Tyrell Sampson is currently working on the RSA 15 report. This is due by the end of the month. He stated everyone is looking good, profits have increased. Overall, everyone’s profitability has increased in this previous fiscal period.**

**State employees telework allowance (update)**

**The Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS) has just updated the state employees telework allowance for another six-month extension Mr. Tyrell Sampson reported. He believes this is the case across the State agencies. With that being the case, the State buildings will remain with lower occupancy than normal from January to June 2025.**

**Agency Matters: Agency Update**

**Director Jenkins brought up the possibility of hiring a fiscal person for BEP, stated Mr. Tyrell Sampson. He mentioned he does not believe BEP needs this as a full-time position, he thinks if we hire someone that can be shared between BEP and VR then that might be more beneficial. He mentioned that Director Jenkins will discuss this with the Commissioner and let him know if that comes to fruition.**

**Open Forum**

**Ms. Shelly McDermott wanted some clarification on the over-the-counter bottle deposit, she wanted to know if that was just for people with existing person to person contact. Mr. Tyrell Sampson asked is she meant the case rebate; she stated yes. He clarified that yes that rebate is only for the existing person to person contact vendors.**

**Ms. Shelly McDermott also asked in more information regarding the next Blast Conference could be shared as she likes to book thing in advance. Mr. Karan Punjabi also wanted this information. Vice Chairwoman Ms. Brandy Altergott mentioned that you could join the National Association of Blind Merchants (NABM). They provide a multitude of information, not just on improving sales but Social Security seminars and so forth. Mr. Tyrell Sampson mentioned as he gets more information, he will happily share it with members.**

**Mr. Karan Punjabi asked is the vacation pay due was processed yet. Mr. Tyrell Sampson mentioned that this would take place in January to ensure that no last-minute vacations get missed. He stated this was acknowledged by the previous Chairman Mr. Keith Haley. Mr. Keith Haley stated that yes January was the time this would be going out because it made more sense to look back at the year and see who took what and who was due funds.**

**Mr. Tyrell Sampson stated he would be emailing everyone tomorrow with their annual notice, where you receive your transfer promotion information. He asked that everyone acknowledge these notices in a timely manner, so if you do not see the email from him by end of next week to call him. Mr. Keith Haley stated that these responses need to be in by January because the subcommittee meets in February to go over the list.**

**Adjournment**

**Chairman Mr. Rich Braccia asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting, motion made by Mr. David Pelaggi, seconded by Ms. Shelly McDermott. Motion carried unanimously with no opposition or abstentions. Meeting adjourned at 4:13pm.**