**Department of Rehabilitation Services**

**Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind**

**Advisory Board Meeting Minutes**

**DRAFT**

**March 16, 2017**

**Members Present**

**Alan Sylvestre, Chairman, Eileen Akers, Patrick Johnson, Terri- Lynn Johnston (representing DSS Commissioner Bremby), Beth Rival, Mary Silverberg and Randa Utter**

**Members Absent**

**Darcy Jones, Andrea Giudice, Carrie Perry, Stephen Thal**

**Others Present**

**Brian Sigman, BESB Director, Chris Lassen, Adult Services Supervisor,  Andrew Norton, Legislative and Administrative Advisor, Edward Owens, Vending Facility Supervisor, Jonathan Richmond, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Coordinator, Catherine Summ, Education Supervisor, Lisa Tanguay, Office Supervisor, Lori St. Amand, Volunteer Program Specialist**

**Old Business**

**MOTION: Motion made by Ms. Akers, seconded by Ms. Rival to accept the minutes from the December 8, 2016 Advisory Board meeting. Motion passed unanimously.**

**New Business**

**Legislative Update**

**Mr. Norton provided an overview of some of the bills that have been introduced during this legislative session.  One bill would waive the normal municipal dog license fee in the case of a guide dog or service animal.  One bill would allow a person who is blind to have two accessible parking hangtags if they owned two vehicles.  Another bill would create a penalty for harassing a service dog or its owner by making such actions a Class C Misdemeanor.  Another bill would create a study of the specific transportation needs of senior citizens, veterans and people with disabilities. Mr. Norton also discussed another bill which would update the DORS statutes to implement “person-first” language.  Part of the bill would change the name of the Advisory Board from the “Board of Education and Services for the Blind” to the “Advisory Board for Persons who are Blind or Visually Impaired.”  Mr. Norton did point out that this is the early stage of the legislative session and while these bills have had a public hearing and the transportation study was additionally successfully voted out of the Aging Committee, all of these bills still have other required actions that would be necessary before they could become laws.**

**Mr. Sigman reported on Senate Bill 1002 which would designate October as National Disability Employment Awareness Month. Current law designates the first full week in October.  Mr. Sigman also informed the Advisory Board members of HR 1327, which was reintroduced in Congress this year and would, over a period of time, eliminate the option of subminimum wage employment.**

**Budget Update**

**Mr. Sigman gave an overview on the status of the Bureau’s budget for FY 17 and the proposed budget for FY18 and FY 19. The proposed State budget for FY 18 and FY 19 incorporates the reductions that were implemented for FY 17 as the baseline for funding levels in FY 18 and FY 19. In addition, the Children’s Services program is proposed to have $200,000 in reductions and the Employment Opportunity fund, which is an account utilized by the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services and this Bureau has a proposed reduction of $395,000. Mr. Sigman described the strategies that would be utilized to minimize the impact of these reductions on the programs.**

**Bureau Updates:**

**Mr. Sigman announced that the Vocational Rehabilitation Program will be rolling out the use of Career Index Plus, a web-based career exploration and job matching tool that is fully accessible for use with screen readers. Julie McLean, Rehabilitation Teacher in the Vocational Rehabilitation Program will be available to teach clients how to use it. Mr. Sigman also stated that the State Rehabilitation Council is exploring methods for improving access to transportation, inviting LYFT and Uber to address the Council at their upcoming meetings.**

**Ms. St. Amand reported that the month of April is National Volunteer Appreciation Month.  Volunteers working with BESB consumers will be receiving thank you cards for their commitment to assisting BESB consumers.**

**Mr. Lassen reported that Human Services Advocate Donna Gore transferred from the Business Enterprise Program to Adult Services in January.  Ms. Gore has begun compiling resource lists of publicly available CCTVs in towns throughout the state, of sources for housing assistance, of the locations and hours of Lions Low Vision Centers, and Low Vision Support Groups. She will continue to assist the former Industries clients and will also provide assistance to BESB’s Volunteer Program Coordinator.**

Mr. Owens reported that the Business Enterprise Program has 35 facilities with 33 operators.  Both of the facilities that were located at the State Office Building have been relocated to their new locations at Columbus Boulevard.  Last year, the program reached $5.6 million in sales. Facility upgrades have occurred at the Hamden Motor Vehicle Department and Middlesex Community College. Ms. Akers asked about the status of the question raised by the State Auditors pertaining to the BEP Managers contributing three percent of their income toward the cost of health insurance in retirement. Mr. Sigman advised that guidance from the Governor’s Legal Counsel has been obtained, affirming the Agency’s position that no legal requirement exists for the Agency to collect a three percent health insurance increase from the BEP Managers, since these individuals are not state employees and do not fall under the terms of the SEBAC agreement.

**Ms. Summ reported on Children’s Services events. The Student Advisory Council (SAC) had a get together with a college student in December, a Metro-North train travel day in early March, and in April the group will experience the Fast Track bus transportation system in New Britain and Hartford. There was an adaptive skiing event at Ski Sundown in February for students of all ages. The Children’s Services Rehabilitation Technologist Jessie Mabry initiated a partnership with “Girls Who Code” to help make their club coding curriculum accessible. In addition, the Rehabilitation Technologist is working on a pilot project to help determine the accessibility of electronic testing material used by school districts. A number of professional development events and student field trips are being planned for the coming months.**

**Mr. Richmond reported on behalf of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program. Through the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation, there is a national employment team for all Vocational Rehabilitation agencies. Through this national team, BESB and BRS have been chosen to participate in a pilot program with Prudential.  The goal is to be a resource to Prudential on disability topics as well as to help them with their recruitment needs. Rehabilitation Technologist Michelle Laramie presented at a national assistive technology conference on the capabilities of budget friendly adaptive devices.  Ms. Enaida Mendoza was recently hired as a Vocational Rehabilitation Assistant Counselor to cover the Southwestern part of the State.**

**Vocational Rehabilitation and Children’s Services Policy Manuals**

**Mr. Sigman detailed the public comment process for the proposed updates to the Vocational Rehabilitation and the Children’s Services policy manuals. The public hearing for the Vocational Rehabilitation policy manual updates is on Tuesday, March 21, 2017 from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. and the public hearing for the Children’s Services policy manual updates is on Wednesday, April 12, 2017 from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. A Preamble that gives an overview of the proposed changes to each of the policy manuals is posted in the Upcoming Events and Announcements section in the BESB section of the DORS website** [**www.ct.gov/besb**](http://www.ct.gov/besb)**. Once the public comment period has closed, the Advisory Board and the State Rehabilitation Council will meet to review the comments that were received and make recommendations to the Bureau on the final language to be incorporated into each of the policy manuals.**

**MOTION: Ms. Akers moved, seconded by Ms. Rival, to hold a joint special meeting with the Advisory Board and State Rehabilitation Council to review and discuss the public comments that are received. The motion unanimously passed.**

**Board Membership Discussion**

**Chairman Sylvestre shall notify the Governor’s office that efforts to reach Advisory Board member Perry to assess if she wishes to continue as a member of the Advisory Board were not successful. There are two vacancies on the Advisory Board, one for the parent of a child who is blind, appointed by the Governor, and another that is appointed by the Senate Majority Leader.**

**Mobility Workgroup Report**

**Ms. Akers provided a report from the workgroup. Areas addressed in the report included the excellent collaboration that the orientation and mobility staff have, the effectiveness of their procedures, the lack of candidates when vacancies do arise, and the importance of training community partners who work with people who are blind. Concerns were raised by the workgroup regarding safety issues that may result from insufficient staffing levels of mobility instructors to thoroughly train clients in safe travel techniques. The workgroup recommends that employing more mobility instructors in the future should be given a priority. The orientation and mobility staff were acknowledged for their on-going efforts in providing remarkable services to the clients considering their large caseloads and responsibilities.**

**Points to the Good and Welfare**

**Ms. Akers announced that CRIS Radio will be holding a reception on March 20th at the Connecticut State Library in Hartford announcing the launch of “Voices of World War 1”, a collaborative project that brings to life the thoughts and experiences of Connecticut residents and service men during WWI through audio recordings of historical documents.**

**MOTION:  On a motion by Mr. Johnson, seconded by Ms. Rival, the meeting adjourned at 12:02 p.m.**

**Next meeting – June 15, 2017 at 10:00 a.m. - BESB**