**Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS)**

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

# Advisory Board Meeting Minutes

**DRAFT**

## June 15, 2017

**Members Present**

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

**Members Absent**

**Darcy Jones**

**Others Present**

**Brian Sigman, BESB Director, Chris Lassen, Adult Services Supervisor, Andrew Norton, Legislative and Administrative Advisor, Catherine Summ, Education Supervisor, Lisa Tanguay, Office Supervisor, Lori St. Amand, Volunteer Program Coordinator.**

**Old Business**

**MOTION:  A motion was made by Ms. Akers, seconded by Ms. Giudice, to adopt the minutes from the March 16, 2017 and May 16, 2017 meetings. Motion passed unanimously.**

**New Business**

**Pre-Employment Transition Services**

**Mr. Sigman discussed the language in the federal regulations regarding the age at which Pre-Employment Transition Services may commence. The language has been interpreted to indicate that in states where there are two vocational rehabilitation programs, the age when these services may commence must be the same for both programs. At the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS), the minimum age is 16. Their program has neither the staffing nor the funding to serve individuals who are younger than that age. Therefore, BESB must align the age for the onset of Pre-Employment Transition Services to match the age of onset at BRS. Mr. Sigman did further clarify that BESB may continue to serve eligible clients who are age 14 or 15 using basic Title I and state matching funds under the category of “Transition Services” but the use of the Pre-Employment Transition Services reserve funding cannot be accessed until the client turns age 16.**

**MOTION: Ms. Akers made a motion, seconded by Ms. Giudice, to endorse a modification to the Pre-Employment Transition Services section of the Vocational Rehabilitation policy manual to strike the phrase that reads, “(ii) or for whom the Planning and Placement Team has provided for transition services in the Individualized Education Program for students age 14 or 15,”. Motion passed unanimously.**

**Person-First Language in BESB Mission Statement**

**Mr. Sigman indicated that with the passage of Senate Bill 796, the mission statement for BESB that was previously developed by the board needs to be modified to reflect person-first language.**

**MOTION: Mr. Thal made a motion, seconded by Ms. Rival, to modify the current wording of the Mission Statement from “Connecticut’s blind and visually impaired children” to “Connecticut’s children who are blind or visually impaired” and from “Connecticut’s blind adults” to “Connecticut’s adults who are legally blind.” Motion passed unanimously.**

**Distribution of Legal Benefits Information**

**Mr. Sylvestre asked the members what their preference was for the distribution of information on legal benefits that are available to individuals who are blind.**

**MOTION: Ms. Giudice made a motion, seconded by Ms. Utter, that a document on legal benefits should be provided to all applicants for services in each of the BESB Programs. Motion passed unanimously.**

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

**Remaining Action Items**

**Ms. Akers indicated that the only area of the policy manual changes that she had remaining questions on was in regards to using the words “high school completion” instead of “high school exit” within the Children’s Services policy manual.**

**MOTION: Ms. Silverberg made a motion, seconded by Ms. Giudice, to substitute the word “exit” in place of “completion” from high school. Motion passed unanimously.**

**Budget Update**

**Mr. Sigman reported that BESB will not know until September, 2017 if any federal re-allotment funds are awarded to the Vocational Rehabilitation Program. While the program has sufficient funds to meet expenses in Federal FY 18, additional funding through the re-allotment process is essential for the Vocational Rehabilitation Program to avoid an Order of Section in FY 19.**

**Mr. Norton provided an overview of each of the proposed budgets from the Governor, the House and Senate Democrats and the House and Senate Republicans.  He described the effects of each proposal on the funding for the programs within the Bureau. The legislative session ended on June 7th, and a budget was not passed by that date. The legislature will need to have a special session in order to complete a budget for the fiscal year that begins on July 1st.**

**Bureau Update**

**Mr. Lassen reported that longtime Social Services Assistant Priscilla Williams, who serves as the intake coordinator and who facilitates the monthly low vision support group in the Windsor office, will be retiring on August 31st.  On a trial basis, Vocational Rehabilitation Orientation and Mobility Instructor, Matt Cornelius, is providing instruction for Adult Services clients in the territory formerly covered by Bill Webb, who retired at the end of last September.  Adult Services will reimburse Vocational Rehabilitation Services for time through cost-allocation of funds.  Additionally, an intern from Tufts University’s joint MD/MPH program will be working at BESB for 8-10 weeks and assisting in research projects and outreach efforts in Adult Services.**

**Ms. St. Amand reported that referrals are up and recruitment is down within the Volunteer Services Unit.**

**Ms. Summ reported on Children’s Services events. Michele Zordan was hired in April as an Education Consultant and Cheryl Brown will be retiring effective July 1st after 39 years with BESB as an Education Consultant. The Annual Teen Escape was held on April 26 with 8 high school students attending. Middle School Field Day was held on May 10 with 8 students attending. Thirty-six students, parents and teachers attended a performance of Charlotte’s Web at the Garde Arts Center in New London on June 6. Several of the students utilized assistive technology to view the performance and the performers did a meet and greet with BESB students after the performance. The newly formed CT NAPVI parent organization will hold their kick-off meeting on June 17.**

**Mr. Sigman reported on changes with assignments among staff within the Vocational Rehabilitation Program which will take effect on July 1st. The Pre-Employment Transition Services caseloads will be assigned to Jenifer Eukers and Yesenia Rodriguez. Erik Jones and Jeannette Rodriguez-Perez will be taking over regional caseloads. Recruitment is underway to refill the vacancy created by the retirement of Marion Lynch who served the eastern region.**

**Legislative Update**

**Mr. Norton provided an overview of House Bill 7237 which will restructure the Commission on the Deaf and Hearing Impaired and also change its name to the Advisory Board for Persons who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing.  The new Advisory Board would no longer only advise DORS but would advise all of state government about issues concerning persons who are deaf.  The new Board would have 15-16 members including people who are deaf, parents and representatives from organizations for the deaf.  Another bill, Senate Bill 796, would re-write many Connecticut statutes to adopt person-first language. Under that bill, the Board of Education and Services for the Blind would become the Advisory Board for Persons who are Blind or Visually Impaired.**

**Points to the Good and Welfare**

**Mr. Sigman heard from one individual who expressed an interest in serving on the Advisory Board and who has received an application from the Governor’s office.**

**Mr. Thal announced that several states have passed legislation which would fine someone for unlawfully representing a non-service animal as a service animal.**

**Ms. Giudice reported that for those who utilize the services of Comcast for television, they have an excellent disability services center and that there are options available to waive certain service fees.**

**MOTION: On a motion made by Ms. Giudice, seconded by Ms. Silverberg, the meeting adjourned at 12:00 noon.**

**Next meeting – September 14, 2017 at 10:00 a.m. - BESB**