**State of Connecticut**

**Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS)**

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

**State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) to BESB**

# DRAFT MINUTES

## March 27, 2019

**Members Present:  Mr. Alan Gunzburg, Mr. Brian Sigman, Mr. Steve Famiglietti, Mr. Patrick Melfi, Mr. Nate Barnes, Mr. Michael Bartley, Ms. Enaida Mendoza, Ms. Linda Mizzi, Mr. Gary Allen, Ms. Kimberly Tindall, Ms. Lori Bartolucci, Mr. Scott Baecker, Ms. Eileen Rose, Ms. Kendra Valente, Ms. Beth Reel, and Ms. Dawn Russell.**

**Others Present: Ms. Mary Burgard, Ms. Jennifer Jenkins, Ms. Marchele Davis, Ms. Holly Kelly, Ms. Kathy Strauss (Interpreter), and Ms. Anita Benjamin (Interpreter).**

**Members Absent: Ms. Colleen Hayles, Ms. Kathleen Marioni, Mr. John McNickle, and Ms. Amanda Billiot.**

**Call to Order: Mr. Alan Gunzburg, Chair of the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC), called the meeting to order at 10:02 a.m.**

**Old Business**

**Review and Approval of Minutes from the December 19, 2018 minutes: MOTION: A motion was made by Mr. Bartley, seconded by Mr. Allen to adopt the minutes from the December 19, 2018 meeting. Motion carried unanimously.**

**Workgroup Reports**

**Membership: Mr. Nate Barnes and Mr. Brian Sigman started by introducing new council member, Kendra Valente. Mr. Sigman reported on the vacancies that still exist: Employer - 1 vacancy; Recipient of Services - 2 vacancies. Candidates have been identified for all of these vacancies and their information has been provided to the Governor’s office. Last, an update on SRC Board members whose terms expire in 2019 was reviewed.**

**Finance: Mr. Famiglietti reported on expenditures since the last meeting that has included renewal of NCSAB membership dues, and equipment/software for the adaptive technology laboratories in New London and Windsor.**

**Consumer Satisfaction: Mr. Sigman summarized the activities of the workgroup that was formed to review the results of the 2018 Consumer Satisfaction Survey. The workgroup came up with several recommendations based on their review and findings. To increase the participation rate of clients in the survey, the workgroup recommends that the survey be done much sooner after an individual has completed services, rather than conducting the survey only once per year. The workgroup also identified that the survey instrument would benefit from updating to align the questions more closely with the priorities identified in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. The workgroup further concluded that some of the responses provided by survey participants suggested a lack of clarity with the Vocational Rehabilitation policies. It was recommended that the Client Services Handbook be updated to address this. It was also noted that some of the decline in satisfaction grew from insufficient coverage of caseloads when Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor positions became vacant. Strategies for ensuring adequate caseload coverage when vacancies occur were identified, such as seeking approval for a retiree to cover a caseload temporarily, and seeking existing staff who are available to work additional hours to help maintain caseload coverage until vacant positions are filled.**

**The workgroup requested that Dr. Diana Cohen from the Center for Public Policy and Social Research at CCSU join in on a discussion with the SRC membership on these recommendations to determine what may be possible in regards to revising the content and timing of the surveying of clients.**

**Technology: Mr. Alan Gunzburg summarized for the Council the CSUN conference he recently attended and explained some of the technology products that are available and how they can be useful.**

**New Business**

**DORS and Legislative Updates: Mr. Andrew Norton provided an update on the HB7163, a legislative proposal to change the name of the agency to the Department of Aging and Disability Services, recognizing the new structure of the agency that includes the State Unit on Aging. The mission of the agency has also expanded accordingly to “maximizing opportunities for the independence and wellbeing of people with disabilities and older adults in Connecticut.”**

**Mr. Norton also updated the members on other bills of interest to the SRC. One bill, passed from the Transportation Committee, HB7203, focuses on improving pedestrian safety at crosswalks. Another bill, passed from the Insurance Committee, HB5850, would require health insurance coverage for the purchase of service animals. Another bill that passed from the Human Services Committee, HB7235, would require the state to make their websites and public safety notices auditory accessible for people who are blind. Another bill, supported by the Human Services Committee, HB7093, would establish a Task Force to study and develop recommendations to increase employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. The last bill discussed was passed from the Public Safety and Security Committee, HB695, which would require installation of certain accessibility equipment to assist persons with disabilities in newly constructed or renovated state-owned buildings and buildings leased to the state.**

**Vocational Rehabilitation Success Story: Mr. Barry Rita, BESB-VR Educational Projects Coordinator, introduced Ms. Amanda Jolly. Ms. Jolly began her presentation by explaining how BESB staff provided valuable information that has helped to shape her career direction. Ms. Jolly has participated in the L.I.F.E. Summer Program at UConn, Camp Harkness Transition Summer Camp, and an Internship/OJT at the Naugatuck YMCA. Ms. Jolly is currently attending Mitchell College to continue her pursuit of a degree that will prepare for her a career as a Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments.**

**Consumer Satisfaction Survey Updating: Dr. Diana Cohen joined the meeting to address the recommendations from the workgroup related to the survey. Dr. Cohen noted that this most recent survey had a 55 percent completion rate, which she viewed as a positive return rate for surveying in general. She noted the difficulties in getting clients to answer phone calls. The caller identification displays “State of Connecticut” and there is no known way for this to display differently in her view but she will inquire if there would be an option for displaying something more relevant such as “BESB Survey” on the caller identification. Dr. Cohen indicated that CCSU would be agreeable to conducting the survey on a more frequent basis to assess if this increases the completion rate.**

**The second area of the discussion with Dr. Cohen was in regards to the survey instrument. She affirmed that any changes to the content of the existing survey would have an impact on the reporting of longitudinal data, making some comparisons to prior year results difficult for those areas of the survey that get changed. However, she was amenable to utilizing whatever new or revised survey the SRC membership deemed to be beneficial.**

**MOTION:  A motion was made by Ms. Mizzi, seconded by Mr. Allen to change the timing of the consumer satisfaction survey to quarterly rather than annually, commencing with the quarter that ends on June 30, 2019. Motion carried unanimously.**

**A new workgroup will be formed to review the current questions that are used in the consumer satisfaction survey in order to make recommendations to the SRC on proposed revisions. The new workgroup will consist of Mr. Gary Allen, Mr. Michael Bartley, Ms. Linda Mizzi, Mr. Nate Barnes, and Mr. Alan Gunzburg.**

**VR Services Handbook Updating: Mr. Sigman expressed his appreciation for the feedback he has received so far regarding the content of the updated draft of the VR Services Handbook and reminded the members that he is hoping to receive all feedback by the beginning of April so that the draft can be finalized and put into use. Ms. Mizzi stated that she would be providing some updated language for the Client Assistance Program section of the handbook. Upon completion, the handbook will be made available in accessible formats and provided to all clients at the time of eligibility. It will also be posted on the agency website.**

**Report from BESB State Director**

**Program Update: Mr. Sigman reported on the Governor’s proposed budget that includes favorable funding levels for the programs administered by DORS. Specifically, the proposed budget for fiscal years 2020 and 2021 includes increases for Children’s Services and Vocational Rehabilitation. Based on current funding projections, in federal fiscal year (FFY) 2021 it may be possible to serve all eligible individuals in the BESB Vocational Rehabilitation Program without the need for an Order of Selection. However, the level of projected funding versus the level of anticipated expenses for FFY 2021 is very tight and he will continue to provide updates to the members on whether or not an Order of Selection would be needed in FFY 2021.**

**Report from Chair: Mr. Gunzburg asked members to be diligent regarding website accessibility and to closely follow federal legislation that may have an impact on people with disabilities. He stressed that information that is found to be inaccessible should be brought to the attention of the source of that information so that corrections can be made.**

**Adjournment:**

**Motion made by Ms. Rose, seconded by Ms. Russell to adjourn. Motion passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 12:06 p.m.**

**The next Council meeting is scheduled for June 12, 2019 from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon at BESB.**