**State Of Connecticut**

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

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

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

**DRAFT MINUTES**

**December 18, 2024**

**Members Present:**

**Treasurer Ms. Melissa Thompson, Ms. Laura Knapp, Ms. Jennifer Jenkins, Ms. Enaida Mendoza, Ms. Heide Sulewski, Director Carol Jenkins, Ms. Brandy Altergott, Ms. Shelley McDermott, Ms. Deb Reed, Chair Mr. Phillip Magalnick, Vice Chair Mr. William DeMaio, Secretary Ms. Lucretia Jones, Ms. Contessa Big Crow-Jenkins, Ms. Laurianne Florio, Mr. Jay Brown, Ms. Shannon Gale**

**Others Present:**

**Ms. Lori St. Amand, Mr. Christopher Lassen, Mr. Tyrell Sampson, Ms. Catherine Summ, Ms. Nancy Mothersele, Ms. Tae Chung, Ms. Janet LaBrec, Mr. Jimmy Wilson, Ms. Mary Otiato, Mr. Brian Jaeger, Ms. Layla Martinez, Ms. Honorata Kazmierczak, Ms. Ashley Morgan**

**Members Absent:**

 **Mr. Joseph Carbone, Ms. Bernadette Jackel, Mr. John Carnemolla, Ms. Nicole Jezairian, Ms. Marilyn Wenzel**

**Welcome:**

**Call to order: Chair Mr. Phillip Magalnick called the meeting to order at 10:03am. A quorum was present.**

**Public Comment:**

**None**

**Unfinished Business:**

**September Meeting Minutes**

**Chair Magalnick asked for a vote to approve the meeting minutes from the September meeting. Motion was made by Mr. William DeMaio, seconded by Mr. Jay Brown. Motion passed unanimously, no opposed or abstentions.**

**Treasurer’s Report**

**The budget for the SRC has not been spent for this fiscal year and the budget remains at $10,000.00 per Director Carol Jenkins.**

**Work Group Initiatives**

1. **VR Policy Manual Group Needed- The VR Policy Manual is the 200+ page manual that spells out the policies of the VR Program. This needs to be updated and aligned to the changes that happened with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). This policy is used to run and document the program. Volunteers were asked to join a work group to help update this manual. Ms. Jennifer Jenkins, Ms. Laura Knapp, Ms. Enaida Mendoza, Chair Mr. Phillip Magalnick, and Director Carol Jenkins volunteered for this work group. Director Carol Jenkins will send out an email to the other volunteers to set up a meeting day and time in January to work on this.**
2. **Satisfaction Survey Group- The annual Satisfaction Survey needs volunteers for this work group. Ms. Melissa Thompson, Ms. Lucretia Jones, Mr. Phil Magalnick, and Director Carol Jenkins volunteered for this work group. Director Carol Jenkins will send out an email to volunteers to set up a meeting date and time in January for this as well.**

**Spending Policy Approval**

**It was discussed that the SRC Spending Policy could not be used on items or services that VR funds or Client Services funds can be used for such as technology and assistive devices per the RSA. The funds can be used for transportation to meetings for council members, trainings, or a retreat for the council members. The finalized copy of the Spending Policy was emailed out prior to the meeting for members to read. Chair Phillip Magalnick asked if there were any questions regarding this policy, there were none. He asked for a vote to adopt this policy. Mr. William DeMaio made a motion to adopt the Spending Policy, seconded by Ms. Deb Reed. Motion carried unanimously, no opposed or abstentions.**

**Synergy Consultation Briefing**

**Ms. Janet Labrec, Mr. Jimmy Wilson, Ms. Mary Otiato, Mr. Brian Jaeger, and Ms. Layla Martinez from Synergy Consulting Partners joined the meeting to discuss their finding when they came to observe the processes of BESB and BRS. This was a service requested by Director Carol Jenkins of BESB and Director David Doukas of BRS. They worked to understand both bureaus inner workings, what some barriers may be, and where there might be opportunities in areas. This report makes observations of the areas that need to be improved upon with recommendations on how to go about that.**

**What they looked at was how the Designated State Unit (DSU) and the Designated State Agency (DSA) work in collaboration with each other. The three main areas they focused on were fiscal accountability, non-delegable authority, and documentation.**

**There seems to be a disconnect between the DSU and DSA when it comes to the fiscal side of things. Reports are sent over to the director that are not accessible. There is a delay in responses. Fiscal information is key to making certain decisions and the director cannot make them without this information readily available to her.**

**Another area they looked at is the non-delegable authority aspect. This means that the director of the unit is responsible for making decisions about the program. These decisions do not come from the DSA or any external organizations or agencies. There are very specific rules and regulations in place for non-delegable authority. This gives her the ability to hire positions when they are needed. Certain aspects of the non-delegable authority need to be brought back to the DSU level from the DSA level to have processes flow smoother, for instance when positions are needed. This circles back to having fiscal reports available in order to make certain decisions.**

**An additional area they noticed was transaction processing. The manner in which transactions are processed needs improvement. There seems to be a type of “black hole” where the transactions go from BESB to ADS. This needs to be rectified so that information is given in a timely manner.**

**There has been changes in staffing at both the DSA and DSU levels and these changes could be what is impacting the relationship between the two. This report makes recommendations and training suggestions to improve the communication between them. Hopefully the DSA and DSU will both come together with these recommendations and work through the barriers now that they have been recognized and suggestions made to improve communication.**

**New Business:**

**Director’s Report**

**Director Carol Jenkins discussed staff vacancies. In the VR program there are two openings for VR Pre-ETS (Pre-Employment Transition Services) counselors, the Bilingual Counselor position and a Rehabilitation Technology Teacher position are vacant. A Processing Technician position is being added to VR to help with invoicing, tracking, and making sure reports are received and making sure we are timely and on top of our documentation.**

**Children Services is looking to fill 2 teacher positions (one was vacant, and the other is an additional position). An Orientation and Mobility position and a second supervisor position will also be added to hire for Children Services.**

**Adult Services will be looking to replace Supervisor Chris Lassen as he will be retiring as of April 1, 2025. Recruitment for this will be happening early next year.**

**The BESB Call Tree main line message was recorded and ready to be implemented. There was a small error with one of the phone numbers, so it was taken down. It is being re-recorded for that section, so all the information is correct. Once this is completed it will be made live on the phones. It will give consumers options when they call to get to specific departments or the person they want to speak to faster.**

**The audio-visual equipment for the two BESB conference rooms has been installed and are in use. Director Carol Jenkins invited members to stop into the office to see it if they would like and are in the area of the office.**

**The Case Management System is still in the process with Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS). Wellsky is giving quotes on this. The current quotes have been around $1 million, she does not want to overpay for this and would like to have funds for client services. They have looked what other state are using and done the research. Three programs are the ones being used and other states are paying extremely high prices. The price includes both one-time fees and then subscription fees that are needed due to the programs being subscription based. The current system is very old, outdated, and cannot perform all the functions that are needed with the ever-changing guidelines that need to be followed. It is also not fully accessible for users who are blind or visually impaired. Once quotes are received one will have to be chosen and implemented. Director Carol Jenkins will provide more on this as she gets more information.**

**Program Outreach Materials are going to be getting more consumer focused and not Bureau focused. BESB VR has been working with Camelo on developing new updated materials to continue the efforts on program outreach to hopefully increase the referral numbers to the VR program. There are brochures, video testimonials and other things that we hope to upload to the website. The State of Connecticut is also working on the website structure to be more consumer focused and not bureau focused as well. This is to hopefully help consumers find the information they need faster when searching.**

**The VR Satisfaction Survey was conducted. Director Carol Jenkins stated she received the draft document and report and had some questions to the items in it. She requested a few corrections be made as well. Once the final draft is approved by her, she will distribute to the SRC members. She cannot distribute the draft per the contract with CCSU who performed the survey.**

**The WIOA 2023 program year performance measures report had very good performance. BRS and BESB met all theRe measures for 2023 she was happy to report. The VR counselors have done an excellent job getting consumers high quality jobs to where they got off of benefits like Social Security. When this happens, we can request to be reimbursed a percentage of the amount of funds that we invested in that. This will enable us to hold a second Silver Summit next year for our older blind consumers.**

**Legislative Updates**

**Chair Phillip Magalnick and Director Carol Jenkins both acknowledged that they did not receive a Legislative Update report. Chair Phillip Magalnick stated he would reach out to Ms. Jennifer Proto, the Legislative representative, for an update on this.**

**Chairman’s Report**

**Chair Phillip Magalnick discussed the need to meet more that 4 times a year. He feels the SRC should meet once every other month for items to get completed. The consultants from Synergy confirmed that some SRC groups meet once every month. Director Carol Jenkins stated if the work groups met more often than the SRC meeting more than 4 times a year would not be necessary. She also stated that increasing this, it would be a lot of her time spent on board and committee meetings. Chair Phillip Magalnick stated that maybe she didn’t need to be on all the meetings of SRC and suggested a representative of the bureau be present instead.**

**It was discussed, regarding new members, that training might be needed to divulge the purpose of the SRC and what it is about and the responsibilities of members. Ms. Jennifer Jenkins mentions this happens at BRS and SRC should try to implement this as well. Chair Phillip Magalnick mentioned that he would like to join the BRS division of the SRC in a retreat. He will reach out to BRS’s SRC to see if this is something they would like to do in the Spring.**

**SRC Annual Report Due December 31st**

**The SRC Annual Report is due by December 31, 2024. The final report was not completed as a few changes needed to be made. Director Carol Jenkins is going to make the changes and email it out to the members to review. Chair Phillip Magalnick asked that once the council reviews the emailed report if he could submit it on behalf of the SRC. Ms. Lucretia Jones made a motion to allow Chair Magalnick to submit the revised SRC Annual Report to the RSA, seconded by Ms. Deb Reed. Motion carried unanimously, no opposed or abstentions.**

**Adjournment**

**Chair Magalnick asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Deb Reed made the motion to adjourn, seconded by Ms. Lucretia Jones. Motion carried unanimously, no opposed or abstentions. Meeting adjourned at 12:32pm.**