**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
March 20, 2024**
**Members Present:
Director Carol Jenkins, Mr. Phillip Magalnick, Mr. John Carnemolla, Mr. William DeMaio, Ms. Jennifer Jenkins, Ms. Lucretia Jones, Mr. John McNickle, Ms. Enaida Mendoza, Ms. Kendra Valente, Ms. Nicole Rico Serrano; Mr. Scott Baecker Mr. Scott Baecker

Others Present:
Ms. Mary Burgard, Ms. Lisa Drew, Mr. Erik Jones, Ms. Kerri Fradette, Ms. Elena Caraballo, Ms. Rayah Martin

Members Absent: Ms. Brandy Altergott, Mr. Jay Brown, Mr. Frank Buonomo, Mr. Frank Losquadro, Ms. Melissa Thompson, Ms. Deb Reed, Ms. Beth Reel, Mr. Dennis Regan, Ms. Heide Sulewski

Welcome and Introductions:
Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 10:01 a.m. by Chair Magalnick.
The roll call was conducted by Secretary Lucretia Jones.

Public Comment:
None

Special Guest: National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils Vice President Kerri Fradette
Ms. Fradette is the Vice President of NCSRC and also serves as an education consultant at BRS. In her role as the SRC liaison for VR General, she plays a crucial part in the organization. The NCSRC hosts two conferences annually, typically in April and October, covering essential topics such as Rehabilitation Act mandates, best practices, and addressing various challenges and solutions. Ms. Fradette emphasized that the NCSRC is committed to providing technical assistance to state SRCs, including support for tasks like drafting annual reports and conducting needs assessments.

Chair Magalnick confirmed that he will be in attendance at the next conference. He has also offered to provide a comprehensive report to the council following the event. He stated furthermore there's possibility of arranging a joint meeting with the members of BESB and BRS State Rehabilitation Councils (SRC).**

 **Chair Magalnick inquired about the utilization of funding. Ms. Fradette explained that they have a budget of $20,000 but seldom utilize it. Some of the funds may be allocated for the SRC chair's travel to conferences and to sponsor a few events, but the majority of the funds are returned to VR.

Old Business
Review and Approval of Minutes from the December 20, 2023, meeting.**

**Tabled**

 **Workgroup Reports
Membership
Director Jenkins provided an update on the terms and appointments of Council members. Those whose terms are expiring soon should start searching for replacements. Members are allowed to serve two three-year terms. She also announced that two newly appointed members would be joining the Council: Melissa Thompson from the Statewide Independent Living Council and Laura Knapp from the statewide parent organization.**

 **Chair Magalnick stressed the importance of members representing particular groups to bring their relative expertise and backgrounds to the Council.

Finance
Director Jenkins presented the financial report as of January 2024. The initial budget allocated to the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) for the fiscal year 2023 was $10,000. To date, the expenses incurred were related to the reimbursement for transportation for the SRC Chair. As a result, the remaining balance stands at $9878.20.**

 **Consumer Satisfaction
Chair Magalnick highlighted the predominant concern identified in the needs assessment and consumer satisfaction surveys: the necessity for enhanced technology training and access to products.**

**Director Jenkins added that the satisfaction survey workgroup will need to convene to deliberate on potential modifications to the survey questions for the current program year, ending on June 30. Chair Magalnick expressed his interest in networking at the upcoming conferences to explore strategies for enhancing the response rates on the surveys.

New Business
VR Success Story
VR Counselor Erik Jones facilitated the introduction of Maureen Stacy, the PCA and mother of Eugene Stacy, who has multiple disabilities. She shared her son Eugene has secured customized and supported employment at a doctor's office in records retention, where he was able to fulfill the need and earn a competitive wage.**

**Ms. Stacy added that VRC Erik Jones helped her coordinate services to get a van modification for transportation to work for her son. BESB also assisted Eugene with his education. She is grateful for the services provided by BESB but believes that more can be done by agencies and groups to help disabled individuals find work that suit the talent of a disabled person. She noted that her son has written some books, hosts a podcast, and is interested in finding work related to his English degree.**

**Chair Magalnick graciously offered to follow up with her to see how he could offer his assistance and commended her for her outstanding advocacy.**

 **Report from BESB Representative
Director’s Program Update
Director Jenkins gave an update on staff vacancies. The available positions include Secretary I, Secretary II, two Education Consultant (TVI) positions, and two special assistant roles.**

 **Interviews have been conducted for the VR Secretary I position. She added for the VR Secretary II position she will meet with Ms. Burgard to discuss whether the vacant position should be retained or reclassified to a position that would be more beneficial to VR. Additionally, there are two Special Assistant positions and two Education Consultant (TVI) positions that will be posted soon.**

 **Director Jenkins highlighted that she and Ms. Drew are collaborating with IT and Avaya to implement a phone call tree for BESB. She stated they are awaiting the completion of the database platform before recording the messages to allow consumers to select the department or services needed. Once the database is ready, we will have English and Spanish options, as we have a high population of Spanish-speaking consumers.**

**She informed the council that we will start working on the large print calendars for 2025 in May. The State of Connecticut has introduced new branding guidelines, so we are required to incorporate the new State of Connecticut logo into next year's large print calendars.**

 **She added that the draft of the State Plan has been successfully submitted. Once we receive federal feedback, comments, and RSA changes, She will diligently address them and work towards submitting the finalized state plan for federal approval.**

**She will be in attendance, along with Ms. Burgard and Jonathan Richmond at the CSAVR/NCSRC conferences this spring.**

**For the SRC workgroup, She will be alongside Ms. Burgard and they will initiate the process of developing the contract, formulating pertinent questions, and addressing other requisite tasks for the VR annual satisfaction survey.**

 **Another highlight she announced is that the VR program will introduce the blind astronomy program to Connecticut for pre-employment transition-aged students (16-21) who are blind or visually impaired this summer. Pre-ETS VR Counselors will contact these students to assess their interest in participating in the program. More details will be shared soon.**

 **Director Jenkins provided an update on the VR budget. The final report for the federal grant FY2022 was due by the end of January, and we successfully met our 15% pre-ETS reserve.**

**She reported we returned VR funds of $396,852 and the full supported employment award because it needed to be spent proportionately on youth and adults. Since we didn't have any youths that met the definition for spending the funds on, we couldn't use it on adults either. Regular VR funds were used for the supported employment adults.**

**As for Federal grant FY2023, the new total grant amount is $3,890,039 after accounting for the maintenance of effort penalty and reallotment dollars. The remaining balance as of January is $2,218,819.50.**

**Regarding Pre-ETS services, the reserve allotment is $583,505.85, and we currently have a remaining balance of $334,425.27.**

**Director Jenkins noted the following figures for Federal FY2023 supported employment: The remaining budget for adult services is $2672.00, while the budget for youth services is $22,156.20. If we do not allocate the funds proportionally between youth and adult services, we may have to use VR funds instead of the supported employment funds and return any unspent supported employment funds.**

 **The Business Enterprise Program (BEP) maintains a remaining balance of $2,748,606.32. They were deliberations centered on the BEP balance and the prospective launch of new operations offering opportunities for visually impaired vendors. Anticipation is directed towards the forthcoming receipt of an updated report from BEP during the subsequent meeting.**

 **Legislation Update
Appendix**

 **Report from Chair:
Chair Magalnick addressed the Advisory Board's situation, which involved members resigning and terms ending. He suggested the possibility of merging the Advisory Board with the SRC and proposed the formation of workgroups to focus on Adult Services or Children’s Services. The Council deliberated on the efficiency of this potential merger and its alignment with state law requirements.**

**Director Jenkins emphasized that the Advisory Board would need to vote and provide a recommendation for her to convey to the commissioner.**

 **Ms. Jennifer Jenkins highlighted the specific regulations governing the roles and responsibilities of the SRC.**

 **Director Jenkins confirmed that the RSA would not support the proposed merger.**

 **Chair Magalnick asked the Council to consider how to acknowledge Blindness Equality Day in the fall. Stephen Thal has done much of the work on this in the past but is stepping down from the Board. Mr. DeMaio and Chair Magalnick suggested finding a way to acknowledge Mr. Thal's accomplishments and contributions.**

 **Adjournment
Meeting was adjourned subject to the call of the Chair at 11:33 a.m.**

 **Next meeting June 26, 2024, 10:00 a.m.**