**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**

**Old 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 revised policy. Mr. William DeMaio made a motion to adopt the revised 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 fully recognized and suggestions made to improve communication.**

**Chair Phillip Magalnick asked several questions throughout this briefing, and they were answered to the satisfaction of the SRC.**

**New Business:**

**Director’s Report**

**Please refer to Appendix A for the full report from Director Carol Jenkins and Appendix B for the full Budget Report.**

**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.**

**Chair Phillip Magalnick also mentioned that he would like the VR Supervisor to be in on the SRC meeting as well to give a deeper understanding of how the VR Program is helping the blind community. There was some discussion on this by the members and it was mentioned that the supervisor may not be needed at every meeting. Director Carol Jenkins mentioned she will have the VR Supervisor at the next meeting in March.**

**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.**

**Appendix A**

**BESB Updates**

**December 2024**

1. **Staff Vacancies**
   1. **In VR, there are two Pre-ETS Counselor positions, one bi-lingual counselor position, one rehabilitation technology teacher, and one secretary 2 position that is being reclassified to a processing technician position being worked on for recruitment.**
   2. **In Children’s Services, two TVI positions, one orientation and mobility position, and an additional supervisor position are currently being worked on for recruitment.**
   3. **The adult services supervisor has announced his retirement effective April 1, 2025.**
2. **BESB Phone Call Tree**
   1. **A couple of the recordings needed to be re-recorded. This has been completed. The new message options will go live in the near future.**
3. **Audio Visual Equipment for BESB Conference Rooms**
   1. **The new equipment has been installed in both BESB conference rooms and is now ready for use for hybrid meetings or trainings.**
4. **New Case Management System** 
   1. **BRS, BESB, and BITS are still currently working to negotiate a price for the new case management system in which both agencies can afford and maintain for the long-term.**
5. **VR Program Outreach Materials**
   1. **BESB VR staff are working on outreach materials with Camelo. This will help BESB with outreach to potential clients, employers and eventually eye doctors.  There will be online materials as well as brochures and a pull up banner. This also will include a general overview of the BESB departments.**
6. **VR Consultant Project** 
   1. **BESB contracted with Synergy for consulting for guidance and assistance on preparing for a potential RSA monitoring. The final report has been completed. ADS, BESB, and BRS staff are meeting internally to discuss the final report. Once the Commissioner gives approval, the report will be released to the chair. BESB will not be monitored in 2025, but potentially in 2026.**
7. **VR Satisfaction Survey** 
   1. **The survey has been completed by Central Connecticut State University. Once the final report has been approved, it will be sent to the chairperson.**
8. **PY 23 WIOA Performance Measures**
   1. **BRS and BESB, as a whole, met all of our performance measures for the common performance measures being assessed for program year 2023, which ended June 30, 2024.**
9. **VR Program Income** 
   1. **The VR counselors have been working very hard and doing a great job getting blind consumers high quality jobs, which gets the consumer off of Social Security benefits. This has allowed BESB to get program income to be able to do a second Silver Summit in 2025.**

**Appendix B**

**BESB Budget Report**

**December 2024**

1. **Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) FFY 2023**
   1. **Original VR Grant: $3,584,073**

**Maintenance of Effort (MOE) Reduction: $444,034**

**VR Grant after MOE Reduction: $3,140,039**

**Reallotment: $750,000**

**Total VR Grant with Reallotment: $3,890,039**

**VR Remaining Balance: $7,032.29**

* 1. **Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS)**
     1. **Pre-ETS Total 15% Reserve including Reallotment: $583,505.85**
     2. **Pre-ETS Remaining Reserve: Met the reserve**
  2. **Supported Employment (SE)** 
     1. **Part A: Adult Remaining balance: $22,500.00**
     2. **Part B: Youth Remaining balance: $22,500.00**

1. **Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) FFY 2024**
   1. **Original VR Grant: $3,584,073.00**

**Maintenance of Effort (MOE) Reduction: $4,206.00**

**Total VR Grant: $3,579,867.00**

**Reallotment: $80,796.00**

**Total VR Grant with Reallotment: $3,660,663.00**

**VR Remaining Balance: $3,163,894.72**

* 1. **Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS)**
     1. **Pre-ETS Total 15% Reserve: $549,099.45**
     2. **Pre-ETS Remaining Reserve: $455,791.06**
  2. **Supported Employment (SE)**
     1. **Part A: Adult Remaining balance: $22,500.00**
     2. **Part B: Youth Remaining balance: $22,500.00**