**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 MINUTESMarch 22, 2023

 **Members Present: Mr. Phillip Magalnick, Mr. Scott Baecker, Ms. Brandy Altergott, Mr. Jay Brown, Mr. John** **Carnemolla, Ms. Jennifer Jenkins, Ms. Lucretia Jones, Ms. Enaida Mendoza, Ms. Deborah Reed, Ms. Beth Reel, Ms. Nicole Rico-Serrano, Ms. Kendra Valente

Others Present: Director Carol Jenkins, Ms. Mary Burgard, Mr. Tyrell Sampson, Ms. Tracy Morin, Mr. Angelo Vitale, Ms. LaTonya Major**

 **Members Absent: Mr. Gary Allen, Mr. Frank Buonomo, Mr. John McNickle, Mr. Denis Regan, Mr. Frank Losquadro , Mr. William DeMaio** **Welcome and Introductions:

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 10:05 a.m. by Chair Phillip Magalnick.

Chair Magalnick announced that he will reach out to the membership committee to inquire if attendance is being tracked for members who are not regularly attending the meetings. Attendance is part of the bylaws and the members that continuously miss meetings will be contacted to see if they are still interested in participating.**

**Public Comment: None**

**Old Business

Mr. Magalnick announced that due to not having a quorum for December’s meeting, Review and Approval of Minutes did not take place for the September 21, 2022 Meeting.**

**A motion was made by Ms. Brandy Altergott and seconded by Mr. Scott Baecker to accept the minutes of the September 21, 2022 meeting. Motion passed unanimously.**

**Workgroup Reports**

 **Finance**

**Mr. Scott Baecker read the expenditures report. NFB News Line $25,416.68, NCSAB Spring Conference for the Chair to attend $450.00, CSAVR for Vocational Rehab Spring Conference for the Chair to attend $795.00, Mantis Q40 Braille display for the tech lab $2,693.45, Olympus DM720 recorder $176.50, Victor stream $484.03 and a Clover Book Pro $2,905.15.**

**Chair Magalnick shared that he spoke with Director Jenkins and Mr. Andrew Norton and was informed that SRC does not have a budget. The money for expenditures is being spent from VR funds. He announced that he was confused about this process but gained clarity from the conversation.**

**Mr. Magalnick suggested that the expenditures be presented as VR expenditures as opposed to SRC expenditures.**

**Director Jenkins responded that there is not a set amount for a SRC budget to track expenditures, but the SRC is permitted to vote on allowable expenditures under VR. She also stated that prior approval from RSA is required for needs assessment, satisfaction surveys, and transportation reimbursements for SRC members.**

**Mary Burgard revealed that the current expenditures were reported under SRC state plan. These items were previously voted on by RSA and SRC.**

**Consumer Satisfaction**

**Deb Reed is chair of the subcommittee. Ms. Reed reported that they met three times since the last SRC meeting. The group was informed that the information on students in the VR program and their support is not included in the consumer satisfaction survey. Ms. Reed stated that the omission of important information should promote the revision of the survey.**

**Director Jenkins clarified that the VR satisfaction survey is annual and is not mandated to have preemployment transition services surveyed. Also, the Consumer Statewide Needs Assessment is done every three years and is federally mandated.**

**Director Jenkins shared that the amount of the yearly satisfaction survey is $35,202.10. She also shared that she was surprised that although the survey is shorter in length, it’s $12,000.00 higher than the more involved federally mandated surveys.**

**Jennifer Jenkins suggested that previous discussions with CCSU to include more options could be the reason for the increase.**

**Director Jenkins stated that she reviewed the scope of work, and it states that pricing is identical to last year. This is incorrect information because there was a significant increase in the amount.**

**Chair Magalnick suggested that due to the large amount of this expenditure, it should be voted on by the SRC.**

**Director Jenkins agreed and shared the details of the time frames for each. The draft report for the needs assessment survey is due on November 1 and the final report is due by December 1. We only have the rest of the calendar year to complete The Annual Satisfaction Survey which creates a tight deadline.**

**Chair Magalnick inquired about the time frame and process if we were to include other bids for the survey. He also discussed his concerns with pricing and the number of customers that were surveyed.**

**He also suggested tabling the vote on expanding the money for the surveys until more information is provided.**

**Mary Burgard stated that Covid was the cause for the record low year. Ms. Burgard also gave a comparison of the numbers for the past few years and asked that the current increase in clients served be taken into consideration.**

**Ms. Burgard shared that implementation of an online survey has resulted in an increase of responses.**

**Chair Magalnick offered his concern of being obligated to pay for the survey due to the work already being done. He also inquired about the success rate.**

**Ms. Burgard responded that there has been a bigger success rate, possibly because it was done quarterly. She also shared that due to staff shortages, they are currently behind.**

**Chair Magalnick inquired if invoice payment was the cause of the survey process being behind schedule.**

**Director Jenkins responded that the purpose is due to the contracts not being in place. She is currently working with CCSU to complete the contracts process.**

**Brandy Altergott inquired about the usefulness of the service and if its use has promoted positive results.**

**Ms. Burgard responded that policy changes have been made in the past due to the results of the surveys.**

**Chair Magalnick shared statistical information for the surveys. He also stated that the purpose of the workgroup is to examine the VR program, as a whole, to achieve true results of what people are experiencing.**

**Chair Magalnick requested Director Jenkins to give an overview of the process in Nebraska.**

**Director Jenkins responded that Nebraska’s process included successful and unsuccessful VR cases, clients ready for employment, and clients going to school. They would also target certain areas to obtain information.**

**Chair Magalnick shared that Nebraska used Louisiana Tech for their services, which is considerably less money than CCSU.**

**Director Jenkins is currently awaiting a response from Louisiana Tech.**

**Membership**

**Lucretia shared that there are currently two vacancies. One on the Workforce Investments Board and the other is on the Department of Labor Board. New appointees’ applications were submitted to the Governor’s office, but are still pending approval.**

**New Business**

**VR Success Story**

**Krystal Kelly introduced Daniel who has been a client since 2018. Daniel has received a vast array of services and has successfully navigated services with the American Job Center. Daniel has completed the trial work experience and was hired at CW Resources as a production assistant in December 2022.**

**Daniel stated that he likes his job and it’s been very helpful for him. He described his different tasks and shared that he has had different counselors throughout the years.**

**Chair Magalnick congratulated Daniel on his success with the program. He also asked Daniel about his favorite and hardest part of his new job.**

**Daniel stated that learning new tasks and learning about the Army was his favorite. The hardest part was trying to find the right job.**

**He stated that he has previous experience as a bench worker and that skill was hard to find in Connecticut.**

**Ms. Kelly shared that Daniel has been committed, very kind and patient with BESB.**

**Ms. Kelly stated that it was important to help find Daniel a job that allows him to be happy, maintain his lifestyle and cater to his needs.**

**Ms. Kelly thanked Daniel for his patience and commitment.**

**Ms. Reed from NBC Connecticut congratulated Daniel on his new job.**

**Kendra Valente also congratulated Daniel and expressed that this was a great success story.**

**Chair Magalnick expressed that it’s important to hear the success stories of people who are achieving things and wished Daniel a great year.**

**Chair Magalnick also thanked Ms. Kelly for her hard work on behalf of Daniel.**

**Scott Baecker also congratulated Daniel on his success.**

**AIRA Update**

**Chair Magalnick shared that he has been working on this pilot program for the past four months and reached out for help to promote it.**

**Chair Magalnick shared that the pilot program ends at the end of the month and will not be picked up for permanent usage.**

**Chair Magalnick stated that he had several conversations with AIRA and Lori St. Amand who is the liaison from BESB.**

**Currently, there are only sixty people signed up for the program. This number is very small compared to the number of blind or visually impaired people in Connecticut. According to the health census, there are approximately 100,000 people who have low vision or are blind.**

**Chair Magalnick also shared that he never received the requested information from AIRA regarding fifty services that this program can be used for.**

**He stated that although he did not receive the list, the information was posted to Instagram, Twitter and Facebook. He also stated that the clients of BESB are not being reached properly.**

**Chair Magalnick stated the low number of participants in the program is due to the program not being promoted and marketed appropriately.**

**A blind person being allowed to use AIRA for free would be beneficial due to a high unemployment rate for the visually impaired and blind.**

**Chair Magalnick suggested forming a workgroup to look at ways to get the program funded as private or public accommodation.**

**He also expressed disappointment with the program not moving forward.**

**Chair Magalnick shared that the previous Director was geared toward getting this going in Connecticut but once he retired, it sank to the bottom of the sea.**

**He also requested ideas from the group on ways to get the program funded.**

**John Carnemolla stated that since the program is nearing the end, it may not be possible to breathe life back into it. He also offered different advertising strategies to reach BESB clients for future programs.**

**Chair Magalnick shared that when he reached out to AIRA, he was informed that the announcement for the program was in progress.**

**He had direct contact with AIRA and a lengthy conversation with Lori St. Amand and the task of reaching the clients was not completed.**

**Chair Magalnick shared that he received an email a year and a half ago from his O&M instructor informing him that AIRA was for transportation only.**

**Director Jenkins responded that emails go to consumers that have email addresses. She also shared that RSA was not supportive of the program due to low usage.**

**Chair Magalnick agreed that the amount for the small number of users is way too much money. He also offered suggestions on plan and usage options.**

**Scott inquired about the minimum number of users needed to qualify for the funding.**

**Chair Magalnick stated that Marty Watts was trying to attract one hundred users. He also offered clarity on the monthly pricing for the group.**

**Chair Magalnick is hopeful that BESB will be able to receive a group discount rate for the small group.**

**Ms. Reed expressed her disappointment with the marketing strategy considering BESB was the best point of contact.**

**She also commented that this is a highlight for the decrease in the Adult Services Program budget. Advocating with the state legislature is in progress to increase the budget.**

**Chair Magalnick responded that there are a lot of people in the Adult Services program who are not in the job market and they are usually the ones that need more assistance. Clients in the VR program are more likely to be tech savvy.**

**Ms. Reed also suggested that the O&M training include helping the client with navigating the program.**

**Chair Magalnick suggested that the VR Counselors, Rehab Technologists and Teachers present it to the clients. He also stated that this is an item that should be discussed again.**

**Enaida Mendoza shared that marketing the AIRA program has been her goal and that the Rehab Technologists has developed a list of iPhone applications for the legally blind population.**

**Chair Magalnick announced that he will be attending the CSAVR Conference next month and is hopeful that he will be more informed and able to share what he learned.**

**BEP Update**

**Tyrell Sampson, Supervisor of the Business Enterprise Program was introduced by Chairman Magalnick.**

**Mr. Sampson shared that the program is a federally authorized program implemented by many states throughout the country. The program trains and license people who are blind or visually impaired to establish and operate a food service business within federal, state, and municipal locations.**

**Mr. Sampson stated that BEP was made possible through the Randolph Shepard Act that was enacted in 1936. This federal law provides priority rights for legally blind people to operate cafeterias, vending machines and food concessions within federal buildings.**

**In 1945, the Randolph Shepard Act was established to include operation of vending stands, vending machines, snack bars, cafeterias, gift shops in state and municipal locations. The program also provides initial inventory and offers ongoing business support. This includes maintenance repair and replacement of all equipment. In addition, BEP works hard to expand opportunities within the program through the first right opportunities and deem the location to be viable at the time of interest.**

**Mr. Sampson stated that the additional benefits of being a part of the program are state health insurance, dental insurance, life insurance and the option to participate in the state retirement plan.**

**Operators that have locations in state and municipal buildings will receive vending commissions from our statewide vending contracts.**

**In Connecticut, BEP is a self-funded program funded through the income derived from a statewide vending contract. This income allows operators to operate their facilities and be responsible for their business expenses.**

**The BEP program pays for 100% of anything that involves maintaining the operation and any earnings derived belongs to the operator.**

**Mr. Sampson shared that the eligibility requirements for the BEP consists of being legally blind, licensed and a United States citizen. You also need to be registered with our Vocational Rehabilitation Department.**

**Organizational skills, the ability to relate to the general public, mathematical skills and marketing skills are essential keys to any entrepreneurship opportunity.**

**Mr. Sampson also stated that there are no financial guarantees, but the goal is to structure opportunities that align with an individual’s interest in profitability. Programs are offered on a major sliding scale and geared toward an individual's interest and skillset.**

**He also shared that he’s been with the agency for seventeen years which includes his whole business enterprise career.**

**Mr. Sampson stated that since COVID, the program continues to explore good opportunities and is hopeful that this will allow for future expansion of the program.**

**Currently, there’s an active referral from VR for one of the existing locations.**

**Mr. Sampson would like to spotlight a current operator of the program, who is also a committee member.**

**Mr. Sampson introduced Ms. Brandy Altergott as a current operator in the program. Ms. Altergott is a SRC Committee member and a member of the Statewide Committee of Blind Vendors. Previously, Ms. Altergott operated Manchester Community College, Rocky Neck Concession State Park and Gillett Castle. She’s vocal, motivated and everything the program is looking for.**

**Ms. Altergott shared that she has been an active participant in the committee since 2015. She also shared that she was the operator for Gillette Castle for seven seasons, Manchester Community College for two years and is currently running Rocky Neck Concession stand. Also, she is constantly expanding and improving her current locations.**

**Ms. Altergott stated that COVID has set some of the businesses back and it has changed a predicted direction.**

**Ms. Altergott gave a brief medical history and stated that the program has allowed her a great opportunity to be successful. She is looking forward to expanding into more state locations.**

**Chair Magalnick thanked Ms. Altergott for her success story.**

**Director Jenkins requested that Mr. Sampson and Ms. Morin share some of the future opportunities for blind operators.**

**Mr. Sampson shared that the great benefit of the statewide contract is that we allow one entity to provide vending machine service to all state and municipal locations.**

**He also stated that the commissions received from the statewide contract remain strong and have increased due to a percentage of vending sales. Due to an increase in product prices, the program will receive more money.**

**Offering the new pilot program will offer vendors ten vending route opportunities in partnership with existing statewide vending contractors. This opportunity will give operators minimal financial risk but allows them the opportunity to expand their existing operations or essentially wave the current operation and utilize this opportunity.**

**The pilot program will be set for a year and contain specific budgets for a long-term allowance. The goal is to look at ways to increase their profitability.**

**Currently, there’s a descriptive proposal out to the Statewide Committee of Blind Vendors outlining this opportunity. Mr. Sampson also shared that he has received positive feedback from the committee.**

**This pilot program could essentially open ten additional opportunities within our existing group of individuals that that are on the transfer/promotion list within our program. After a year, possible expansion opportunities will be offered to existing operators in our program.**

**Chair Magalnick thanked Mr. Sampson for an informative report. He also shared that he met with Mr. Sampson and Director Jenkins regarding expanding the program and creating more opportunities for the blind population in Connecticut.**

**Ms. Altergott stated that the program is making strides and moving in the right direction to provide better opportunities.**

**She also stated that Mr. Sampson and Ms. Morin are constantly looking for opportunities that will increase profits. The recent partnership with Southern University is something that would have been overlooked in the past. She feels that we’re on the right path to expanding the program and giving viable opportunities to those that are interested and capable.**

**Chair Magalnick inquired if the program improved when Mr. Sampson took on the supervisory role.**

**Ms. Altergott responded yes. She believes that this is due to Mr. Sampson’s willingness to take chances without the fear of rejection.**

**Chair Magalnick responded that Mr. Sampson was very gracious when answering his questions and very informative. He also stated that the topic will be included on next month’s agenda.**

**SRC Annual Report**

**Chair Magalnick reviewed the content of the update provided to board members prior to this meeting. The update provided by Chair Magalnick can be found in Appendix B.**

**Report from BESB Representative

Program Update: Director Jenkins shared that we are currently working to update System 7, the electronic case management system. We are hoping to use VR funding to allow for this upgrade and to be hosted. This will allow accuracy for our federal reporting and include the latest RSA changes, additions, and corrections to the federal report.**

**Director Jenkins stated that we are in the process of obtaining Jotforms. This software will allow our forms to be accessible by everyone. Director Jenkins shared that there are many forms that are not accessible for her and she’s very excited for this software to be put in place.**

**The two items mentioned will be big endeavors and will require staff’s time for the fine detail work. It will be a slow process, but we are working to get these things implemented.**

**Director Jenkins reported that the prior approval for the federal fiscal year 2023 was submitted and has been approved.**

**Director Jenkins gave a report on staff positions. She stated that Vocational Rehabilitation has three vacant counselor positions, one vacant technology position and two vacant clerical positions.**

**The three counselor positions have closed and will be in the interview process.**

**Currently working on getting the technology position posted.**

**Interviews for secretary II will take place on March 30 & March 31 and we are working on reviewing the applications for the secretary I position.**

**Interviews were held for two rehabilitation teacher positions in the Adult Services Program. There was one highly qualified candidate and she’s hopeful that there will be a new staff person starting soon.**

**Director Jenkins stated that she will be working on reposting the other position, and both positions will have a technology teaching focus in Adult Services.**

**Director Jenkins reported that the Children’s Services Department is fully staffed. There are at least sixty new referrals for blind children and she’s working with Catherine to see if additional staff is needed.**

**Director Jenkins also reported that BEP is fully staffed, and she is working on additional clerical positions for BESB. She is also working with the Fiscal Department to see what funding will be available after filling the vacant positions.**

**Director Jenkins reported that Vocational Rehabilitation just completed the final report for the federal fiscal year 2021. We are currently using 2022 federal funds and are working on getting approved to carry these funds over to the current fiscal year 2023. She stated that VR Services gave back $1 million in federal funds for FFY 2021. Staff vacancies are the main cause of and she is hopeful that the numbers will decrease when the vacancies are filled.**

**Director Jenkins shared the details of the budget for Adult Services. After paying two staff salaries, approximately $20,000 will be left for OIB client services. After match funds are used for Federal IL Part B, that leaves approximately $35,000 for client services. These are the funds used to pay for the large print calendars that are sent out every year to open status clients.**

**Director Jenkins also shared that the last Children’s Services budget report includes $380,000.00 in surplus. It’s the end of the school year and the busiest time for the teachers. They are prepping and getting things ready for the next school year and most requests include technology and equipment for children.**

**She shared that she will be attending the CSAVR and NCSAB conferences in April with Mary Burgard. The main focus will be the RSA related items and she’s hopeful to learn more about those particular matters.**

**Director Jenkins added we have a maintenance of effort penalty assessed to us for fiscal year 2023. There will also be a maintenance of effort penalty assessed to us in 2024. The maintenance of effort penalty will allow us to reset our match requirements. Reallotment dollars were granted due to the penalty.**

**Mary Burgard reported that Voc Rehab shared the details of the upcoming conferences. In-person conferences will be held and Voc Rehab staff will be attending. The Association for Persons Support Employment conference will be held in May, Individuals with Disabilities Conference will be held on April 28th, Pre-ETS Transition Conference will be held in May and a Work Summit Conference will be held in April.**

**Ms. Burgard stated that the conferences are great networking opportunities for staff.**

**Ms. Burgard announced that the bilingual counselor position closed, and applications will be reviewed.**

**Chair Magalnick inquired if the large print calendars are offered in Braille.**

**Director Jenkins responded that BESB only offers free large print calendars. Free Braille calendars are also available but she’s unsure of the resource.**

**Chair Magalnick stated that he is aware of the positive changes being made and things are moving forward. He also thanked Director Jenkins for her leadership and all the work she’s done for the blind of Connecticut.**

**He also thanked Mary Burgard for her hard work over the past year.**

**Legislation Update: Appendix A**

 **Report from Chair:**

**Chair Magalnick stated that previously, the SRC report was written by BESB and signed by the council. Moving forward, the report will be submitted by the SRC Council with information included from BESB.**

**Chair Magalnick advised the members to review the SRC report that was previously sent.**

**Adjournment
The meeting was adjourned by Chair Magalnick at 11:35 a.m.

Next Meeting: Wednesday, June 21, 2023**

**Appendix A: Legislative Report**

**The first three bills relate specifically to blindness. None of them progressed beyond being submitted. The fourth bill has passed out of the first committee but still requires several further positive votes.**

[**HB 5039**](https://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/cgabillstatus/cgabillstatus.asp?selBillType=Bill&which_year=2023&bill_num=5039)**, An Act Allowing a Service Animal to Accompany its Handler in an Ambulance. This bill would have allowed a person to take their service animal with them when they are being transported in an ambulance**

[**HB 5814**](https://www.cga.ct.gov/2023/TOB/H/PDF/2023HB-05814-R00-HB.PDF)**, An Act Requiring Health Insurance Coverage for Trained Service Dogs. This bill would have called for health insurance coverage for service dogs in the case of a critical illness.**

[**SB 743**](https://cga.ct.gov/asp/cgabillstatus/cgabillstatus.asp?selBillType=Bill&which_year=2023&bill_num=743)**, An Act Deterring Abuse Of Protections Afforded To Owners Of Service Animals. This bill would have established penalties for anyone who represented that an animal was a service animal when it is not.**

[**SB 420**](https://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/cgabillstatus/cgabillstatus.asp?selBillType=Bill&which_year=2023&bill_num=420)**, An Act Establishing a Tax Credit For Employers Who Hire Persons with Disabilities. This bill would create a tax incentive for employers to hire VR clients of our agency as well as employment clients of the Department of Developmental Services (DDS). Qualifying employers would receive $200 per month for each eligible person with a disability. This bill is still in the early stages.**

**Appendix B: SRC Annual Report**

**2244STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL (SRC)**

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

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

**Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program**

**SRC ANNUAL REPORT FY 2022**

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# A.  COUNCIL PURPOSE:

**The State Rehabilitation Council (the Council or SRC), comprised of individuals appointed by the Governor, works in partnership with, and provides advice to the Department of Aging and Disability Services - Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program in Connecticut.**

**BESB serves Connecticut’s adults who are legally blind and current or former transition-age students who are legally blind or visually impaired through ongoing educational, vocational, and independent living skills programs in order to empower them to achieve employment success and to enhance their self-sufficiency.**

**It is the purpose of the Council to advise the Governor of the State of Connecticut and BESB’s VR Program pertaining to the provision of Vocational Rehabilitation Services as described in the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, to individuals who are blind so that such individuals may prepare for, secure, retain, advance in, or regain employment.**

# B.  COUNCIL DUTIES:

**The federal law under which the Council was formed, Section 105 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, specifies the functions of the Council.  They are:**

**(1) review, analyze, and advise the designated State unit regarding the performance of the responsibilities of the unit under this title, particularly responsibilities relating to‑‑**

**(A) eligibility (including order of selection);**

**(B) the extent, scope, and effectiveness of services provided; and**

**(C) functions performed by State agencies that affect or that potentially affect the ability of individuals with disabilities in achieving employment outcomes under this title**

**(2) in partnership with the designated State unit‑‑**

**(A) develop, agree to, and review State goals and priorities; and**

**(B) evaluate the effectiveness of the vocational rehabilitation program and submit reports of progress to the**

**Commissioner of Rehabilitation Services Administration**

**(3) advise the designated State agency and the designated State unit regarding activities authorized to be carried out under this title, and assist in the preparation of the State plan and amendments to the plan, applications, reports, needs assessments, and evaluations required by this title**

**(4) to the extent feasible, conduct a review and analysis of the effectiveness of, and consumer satisfaction with—**

**(A) the functions performed by the designated State agency;**

**(B) vocational rehabilitation services provided by State agencies and other public and private entities responsible for providing vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities under the Rehabilitation Act; and**

**(C) employment outcomes achieved by eligible individuals receiving services under this title, including the availability of health and other employment benefits in connection with such employment outcomes**

**(5) prepare and submit an annual report to the Governor and the Commissioner of Rehabilitation Services Administration on the status of vocational rehabilitation programs operated within the State, and make the report available to the public**

**(6) to avoid duplication of efforts and enhance the number of individuals served, coordinate activities with the activities of other councils within the State, including the Statewide Independent Living Council, the advisory panel established under section 612(a)(21) of the Individual with Disabilities Education Act, the State Developmental Disabilities Planning Council described in section 124 of the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act (42 U.S.C. 6024), the State mental health planning council established under section 1914(a) of the Public Health Service Act, and the State workforce development board and with the activities of entities carrying out the programs under the Assistive Technology Act of 1998**

**(7) provide for coordination and the establishment of working relationships between the designated State agency and the Statewide Independent Living Council and centers for independent living within the State and**

**(8) perform such other comparable functions, consistent with the purpose of this title, as the State Rehabilitation Council determines to be appropriate, that are comparable to the other functions performed by the Council.**

# C. COUNCIL ACTIVITIES IN FY 2022:

**The State Rehabilitation Council continues to be a valuable and active contributing partner to the Vocational Rehabilitation Program and the Bureau as a whole.  Over the course of the past fiscal year the Council members have participated in many activities on behalf of the Bureau, as well as continued their existing responsibilities as identified in the Rehabilitation Act. These activities included:**

**State Plan Development:**

**The State Rehabilitation Council reviewed the results of the Comprehensive Needs Assessment and the Consumer Satisfaction Survey to gain a clear understanding of the unique needs and areas of focus that should be factored into the submitting updates to the state plan.**

**services. The Council has formed a work group that was joined by members of the Advisory Board for Persons who are Blind or Visually Impaired to assist the Vocational Rehabilitation Program in the update of the BESB VR section of the Unified State Plan.**

**The work group helped revise the state plan goals to meet the current needs of the program. In particular, the members are interested in the implementation of techniques and strategies that will result in stronger engagement by clients of the program utilizing virtual options in combination with in-person.**

**Another area of focus was around updating and improving the BESB’s Vocational Rehabilitation Programs marketing materials and online presence. Also developing a goal to improve the technology available through the program’s technology lab and technology available for assessments.**

**NCSAB / CSAVR 2022 Conferences:**

**This year, the SRC Chairperson was able to attend both the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB) and the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) national virtual conferences in the Spring along with the Vice Chair of the Council. 8 BESB staff members were also able to attend the virtual conference.**

**In the Fall CSAVR offered an online portion of the conference in which the Chair and six of the BESB staff were able to participate. The Fall Conferences of CSAVR and NCSAB were back to in person in San Antonio and the VR Supervisor and VR Counselor Coordinator were in attendance.**

**Best practices that were shared at these conferences have broadened the perspective and understanding of national trends, concerns, and priorities in the field of vocational rehabilitation, enabling the chair to bring this information before the membership for future planning.**

**VR Client Achievements Presented at SRC meetings:**

**During FY 2022, the State Rehabilitation Council continued its initiative for a client of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program to come before the SRC at each quarterly meeting to explain the type of work they are involved in and how BESB services assisted them in achieving their career goals. The SRC members value this component of each meeting agenda as it provides the members with an opportunity to learn directly from clients about the services that can be provided and the successes that result.**

**Consumer Satisfaction Survey:**

**The SRC once again commissioned the Center for Community Engagement and Social Research at Central (CCESR)Connecticut State University (CCSU) to conduct the FY 2022 consumer satisfaction survey of Vocational Rehabilitation Program recipients. The purpose of the survey was to evaluate the level of satisfaction with services that clients received from the Vocational Rehabilitation Program at BESB.**

**Satisfaction with the services received was measured on a 10-point rating scale, with a rating of “10.00” representing the highest level of satisfaction. As presented below in its entirety, CCESR reported the following results from the FY 2022 Consumer Satisfaction Survey:**

**BESB continues to receive high marks from clients for their Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services and counselors. Nearly all clients (96%) reported that they would recommend BESB VR services to a friend. Overall satisfaction with BESB services, as rated on a scale from 1 to 10 points, remains strong.**

**Following a year in which all eight services showed an increase in mean satisfaction ratings, fiscal year 2022 showed more mixed results. Three services saw an increase in satisfaction ratings, four saw a decline, and one remained unchanged from 2021. Small Business Services (8.20, up 1.7 in mean rating) saw the largest mean satisfaction increase across all services. This service, however, attracted the lowest number of respondents, making the mean subject to volatility. The service seeing the second-best improvement in mean satisfaction rating was Skills Training Services (9.33, up .33), followed by Rehabilitation Technology and Adaptive Equipment (8.93, up .18). Notably, Skills Training Services notched a historic high in mean satisfaction.**

**Satisfaction ratings for counselors increased in all nine categories surveyed in 2022. In contrast to the mixed results in 2021, where some areas improved while others declined, the 2022 satisfaction ratings were strong overall and showed increases across the board. In fact, the 2022 satisfaction ratings represented the highest, or very close to the highest rating, on record for all nine categories surveyed. The largest increase in mean counselor rating was observed in counselors’ ability to help clients understand their VR rights and responsibilities (9.20, up 1.04 in mean rating), followed by counselors’ ability to help clients identify their career goals (8.93, up .97). This dimension of counselors notched its second-best rating in the history of the survey.**

**Clients identified the services that they received from BESB in the past year. As in previous years, the two most frequently used services were Rehabilitation Technology and Adaptive Services (85%, up 5 percentage points from 2021) and Low Vision (81%, up 1 percentage point). Skills Training and Higher Education Training Services were consumed less often, with usage in 2022 at 52% (up 12 percentage points) and 28% (down 2 percentage points), respectively. The least-commonly utilized services included Reader (15%, up 2 percentage points), Transportation (15%, down 15 percentage points), Personal Care Attendant (11%, up 1 percentage point), and Small Business Ventures (11%, up 4 percentage points).**

**Overall, usage of BESB services in 2022 was slightly higher than average. Relative to 2021, usage increased for all but two of the eight services. Skills Training increased most noticeably, while only very modest increases were observed for Low Vision, Personal Care Attendant, Reader, Small Business, and Rehabilitation Technology Services. The two services that saw a decline in usage were Transportation (down 15 percentage points), and more modestly, Higher Education Training (down 2 percentage points). The sizable decline observed in Transportation Services may be due to the increasing societal acceptance of telework and telehealth. Notably, 2022 usage rate for Transportation Services (15%) was only slightly below the historical average for the survey(18%). This suggests that the usage rate for 2022 was closer to “normal,” and that the 2021 rate (30%) was unusually high.**

**This fiscal year, the BESB Vocational Rehabilitation Program had 72 clients who achieved employment outcomes, an increase of 56 from 2021. This returns the number of clients to near pre-pandemic levels; for example, the 2020 report noted that 77 clients achieved employment outcomes.**

**Generally speaking, this report finds notable increases in satisfaction across key areas surveyed. To varying degrees, this speaks to BESB’s efforts to help clients adjust to the re-opening of Connecticut’s economy. While the pandemic is not completely in the rear-view mirror, many sectors of the state’s economy have returned to normal, or near-normal, operation. To some extent, it is hard to untangle the general satisfaction that reopening presents to clients from direct improvements that BESB has made in its VR program.**

**Finally, it should be noted that it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions with a client population of this size. While the increased number of clients achieving employment outcomes since last year helps to ease this concern a bit, some data breakdowns, such as the Eastern territory in the regional analysis, still present small sample sizes.**

**D.   MEMBERSHIP:**

**In FY 2022, appointments to the SRC were made in the categories of Client Assistance Program**

**In addition, BESB leadership is working with the Department of Labor to recruit members from the categories of State Workforce Investment Board.**

# E.  BESB VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION HIGHLIGHTS FOR FY 2022:

**The Vocational Rehabilitation Programs has moved into a hybrid approach to providing services. Over the past year staff have been participating in more in person events, meetings with employers and clients. While some events and meetings remain virtual.**

**For National Employment for Individuals with Disabilities Awareness month in October the VR staff helped organize three events. One event was a Resource Fair for organizations in the Northern part of the state, drawing over 300 participants in person. Another event was a Resource Fair focusing on transition services for families of students with disabilities in the southern part of the state also drawing a large number of families in person. The last event was a virtual event in honor of Blind Americans Equality Day on October 15th, formally White Cane Safety Day. This event focused on Orientation and Mobility with presentations from LEAP VT, BESB staff on the history of White Cane Safety Day and participants experience using AIRA.**

**A high priority that continues for the program is to ensure all eligible participants have access to a laptop and the assistive technology that they need to participate in virtual training programs, certificate programs, college course and work at home opportunities successfully.**

**Through innovation and expansion funds the Rehabilitation Technologists have worked on upgrading our technology lab and technology available for assessment through the state. The program has purchased three Braille Displays (Orbit Reader, Mantis Q 40, BLX 40). A Reveal i16 portable CCTV, Clover Book pro portable CCTV and a Merlin Ultra CCTV. And an OrCAM Eye Pro.**

**FY2022 9/30/21 to 10/1/22 VR had 75 case closures (compared with 60 the previous year)**

**FY2022 Average Hourly Wage: $23.31 (compared to $24.17 the previous year).**

**Annualized Earnings calculated to $2,845,207.56 (compared to $2.5 the previous year).**

**Virtual opportunities for workplace learning experiences were completed by 39 transition-age youth served by the BESB VR Program, which included 13 paid work experiences.**

**Collaboration with the five Regional Workforce Development Boards continues to be a strong focus of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program in FY 2022.**

**During the past year Counselors went back to in person co-location on a part-time basis at all five of the American Job Centers at the same rate before the pandemic. After the onset of the pandemic, most activities were shifted to a virtual model and have slowly opened up providing hybrid services with some appointments and trainings in person and some remote.**

**BESB VR Counselors maintained a strong focus on employer engagement, reaching out to businesses both in person and virtually. Throughout the year, national companies who offer remote work opportunities were invited to speak to the Counselors, Direct Employers, and IFB Solutions.**

**BESB successfully served all eligible clients in FY 2022 and projects that FY 2023 will continue to be a year that every eligible client can be served.**

# F.  FUTURE COUNCIL ACTIVITIES:

**In FY 2023, the Council will continue its role as a partner with the BESB Vocational Rehabilitation Program to ensure the delivery of services that afford clients the tools they need to prepare for, obtain, advance in, and maintain meaningful careers.   The SRC will work together with the Bureau through specific workgroups to continue to work on the goals, objectives and priorities for the current Unified State Plan for Connecticut.**

**The SRC will take an active role in updating the annual Consumer Satisfaction Survey as well as in FFY 23’s Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment in order to analyze and utilize the reports to assist the Vocational Rehabilitation Program in the development of the next plan’s content, priorities, and goals.**

**The Council will further deliberate with the Vocational Rehabilitation Program on the meaningful lessons learned from the provision of virtual services that were developed during the pandemic, with a focus on continuing to utilize a hybrid approach where practical and beneficial as an option for the provision of services, meetings, and participation in web-based learning opportunities with a goal of moving to more in person approaches.**

# G.  MEMBERS OF THE STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL IN FY 2022:

**The Council is committed to seeking appointments of members most qualified to advise the State Director and the Council.  The Council is further committed to diversity in gender, race, disability, geography, and affiliation.  The Council continuously recruits prospective members who can enhance its diversity.  The Council has enjoyed success this year through an active membership, committed to the delivery of quality services to BESB clients.**

**The Council would like to thank Brian Sigman for his year’s of service for BESB, Mary Burgard for her tremendous help and support in the absence of a Director, Cheryl Cepelak for stepping in as interim Director until a new Director was hired, and Commissioner Porter for her work and dedication to move BESB forward on a solid foundation.**

**Per the provisions of the Rehabilitation Act, membership comprises:**

* At least one representative of the Statewide Independent Living Council, who must be the chairperson or other designee of the Statewide Independent Living Council
* At least one representative of a parent training and information center established pursuant to section 682(a) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
* At least one representative of the Client Assistance Program, who must be the director of or other individual recommended by the Client Assistance Program
* At least one representative of community rehabilitation program service providers
* Four representatives of business, industry, and labor
* At least one qualified vocational rehabilitation counselor with knowledge of and experience with vocational rehabilitation programs who serves as an ex officio, nonvoting member of the Council if employed by the designated State agency
* At least one representative of the State educational agency responsible for the public education of students with disabilities who are eligible to receive services under the Rehabilitation Act and part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
* The director of the designated State unit as an ex officio, nonvoting member of the Council
* At least one representative of the State Workforce Development Board
* At least one representative of the directors of projects funded under Section 121 of the Rehabilitation Act for American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services
* Current or former applicants for, or recipients of, vocational rehabilitation services
* At least one representative of a disability advocacy group representing individuals who are blind
* At least one representative of an individual who is blind, has multiple disabilities, and has difficulty representing himself or herself or is unable due to disabilities to represent himself or herself

**The FY 2022 Council members and their affiliations were:**

**Dawn Russell, Chair (Employer)**

1. Gary Allen, Chair (State Independent Living Council)
2. Phil Magalnick, Vice Chair Recipient of Services)
3. Scott Baecker, Treasurer (Community Rehabilitation Provider)
4. Lucretia Jones, Secretary (Recipient of Services)
5. Enaida Mendoza (Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor) ex-officio
6. Brandy Altergott (Employer)
7. Jay Brown (Department of Education)
8. Frank Buonomo (Community Rehabilitation Provider)
9. John Carnemolla (Recipient of Services)
10. William DeMaio (Employer)
11. Jennifer Jenkins (Client Assistance Program)
12. Frank Losquadro (Employer)
13. John McNickle (Recipient of Services)
14. Deborah Reed (Disability Advocacy Group)
15. Beth Reel (Statewide Parent Organization)
16. Dennis Regan (Recipient of Services)
17. Nicole Rico Serrano (American Indian Vocational

Rehabilitation)

1. Kendra Valente (Representative of an Individual

who is Blind, has Multiple Disabilities, and has Difficulty Representing Himself or Herself or is Unable due to Disabilities to Represent Himself or Herself)

# H. VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SUCCESS STORY

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**My name is Marchele Davis and I have been a client of the Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) since childhood. I was born with detached retinas. I was a client of Oak Hill School for the blind (in Hartford, CT), before becoming mainstreamed into the New Haven public school system. It was around then that I started receiving services from BESB. I grew accustomed to their education funding, employment assistance, assistive technology, and general support. My experiences with BESB have been rewarding to say the least.**

**Besides working with BESB, I have worked with Marrakech, the New England Assistive Technology (NEAT) Center, American Job Center in New Haven, a short time with the Kennedy Center, BHCare and several other vendors. What I found most helpful was the sense of self-sufficiency they provided. Technology such as JAWS was an invaluable tool on my journey to finding employment and overcoming discrimination/adversity.**

**Early in life, I developed a passion for people. I graduated from Southern Connecticut State University in 2005 with a bachelor’s degree in Social Work. Admittedly, being visually impaired was challenging! However, being a single mother of 4 was all the encouragement I needed to persevere. My love for my family empowered me to overcome the doubt that I always felt my peers, educators, and potential employers had regarding my ability. Time was not infinite, and I often felt discouraged, fearful, and driven to tears. I wasn’t getting any younger and I still couldn’t find any reliable, competitive employment. So much time had passed that I eventually returned to school and received a second associate degree (this time in Drug and Alcohol Counseling). I participated in several situational assessments. Some of them offered some much-needed experience. That said, despite my education, effort, and passion, I still failed to find anything I could call a career. I remember going for an interview at a particular agency where I know I could have been an asset. There was no mention of needing a driver’s license, however, the interviewer adamantly enthused its necessity. In addition, the interviewer informed me that I could look forward to a second interview. Unfortunately, that second interview never came to fruition. The position was later revamped, a driver’s license became nonnegotiable, and I never heard from this company again. It saddens me to say that this is only one example of countless disappointing interviews I have faced in my past. Eventually, my children had grown up and found reliable means to support themselves. While I was forced to “ask for assistance” reading rejection letter after rejection letter. The ideology that I was some form of misfit became a part of my personality. I had truly believed myself to be a failure.**

**Despite the rejection and discontent, I continued to relentlessly apply for any opportunity that I truly believed I could succeed in. It wasn’t until 2019 that a position opened at the American Job Center in Bridgeport. The pandemic had struck and the position was frozen. Then in 2021, I was referred to a staff member at the American Job Center again. The staff remembered my name from the previous interview. While the agency was the same, the position was different. That was when I interviewed for the position of Career Navigator/Case Manager with the Jobs First Employment Services (or JFES, a subset of the American Job Center). I finally found myself gainfully employed on May 24th of 2021.**

**This position is designed to provide training and employment to struggling families. The goal is to help individuals remain employed, independent, and free of government assistance. Some of my responsibilities are to reserve appointments with clients, coordinate various trainings, research different resources, facilitate virtual meetings, and run Care4Kids subsidy groups. The bulk of this opportunity is reliant upon the CT Hires website. The site was initially very difficult to navigate, however, with diligence and attention to detail, I can successfully find, monitor, and store vital information from over 85 clients a week.**

**In conclusion, I would like to give thanks to Charlotte Copenhaver, Enaida Mendoza, Christiana Tyma and the BESB staff at large. I would also like to thank Barbara Green from the AJC in New Haven who also had faith in my abilities and supported my job search in so many ways. In my life, not only have I achieved competitive employment, but I have gotten married to a wonderful supportive husband. I also have been serving as president and chairman for the Center for Disability Rights of West Haven for the last five years; I have served as chapter president for the Southern Chapter of Milford; I have served as the secretary for the National Federation of the Blind State Affiliate of Connecticut. It goes without saying that I am quite busy these days. However, I’m still active with the NFB of Connecticut and nationwide. Life can be rather ironic. I was once a person who was on government assistance, in desperate need of training, and desperately needed employment.**

**Respectfully submitted,**

**Phillip A. Magalnick,JP**

**Chairman, FY22–23**

**Connecticut State Rehabilitation Council, ADS-BESB**