**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 WITH MOTIONS**

**March 22, 2017**

**Members Present:  Ms. Nyema Pinkney, Mr. Brian Sigman, Ms. Ellen Telker, Mr. Alan Gunzburg, Ms. Marisol DeCordova, Mr. Patrick Melfi, Mr. Nate Barnes, Ms. Diane Weaver-Dunne, Ms. Diann Murray, Mr. Gary Gross, Ms. Jeannette Rodriguez-Perez**

**Others Present: Ms. Mary Burgard, Mr. Andrew Norton, Ms. Britta Mulderrig, and Mr. Sean Conner**

**Members Absent: Mr. Michael Bartley, Ms. Beth Reel, Ms. Kathleen Marioni, Mr. Carl Noll, and Ms. Colleen Hayles**

**Call to Order: Ms. Pinkney, Chair of the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC), called the meeting to order at 10:08 a.m.**

**Old Business**

**December 14, 2016 Minutes: The Council motioned and unanimously adopted the meeting minutes with the following change: Move Kimberly Tindall from the category of “Members Present” to “Others Present.”**

**Workgroup Reports**

**Membership: Mr. Barnes updated the SRC on the vacancies and the re-appointments that are in process. Mr. Barnes and Mr. Gunzburg are seeking reappointment to a second term on the SRC. Their first term will be expiring in June.**

**Finance:  Ms. Murray reported on the committed funds for the NFB Newsline renewal, the Vice-Chair’s participation in the CSUN technology conference, NCSAB dues, and the Youth Leadership Forum. A forthcoming expense will be for the Comprehensive Needs Assessment and Consumer Satisfaction Survey.**

**Consumer Satisfaction: Mr. Sigman reported on the activities of the workgroup that reviewed the results of the 2016 survey in detail. It was noted that transportation services received a satisfaction rating of 6.8 out of 10 this year. Lack of transportation options was also cited as a contributing factor to the satisfaction rating of 7.82 out of 10 in the category of Counselors recognizing the unique needs of clients. Members of the workgroup agreed that learning about transportation options that offer greater flexibility, particularly for clients that do have access to fixed route services would be an important next step. Vice-Chair Gunzburg arranged for two Uber representatives to attend this meeting and he introduced Britta Mulderrig and Sean Conner, who then provided an overview of the various service options that Uber can provide.**

**Mr. Sigman then reported on the survey results in the category of assisting clients in identifying career goals, which had a satisfaction rating of 7.45 out of 10. He indicated that the Program staff has been trained in the use of Career Index Plus, a web-based career exploration and job matching tool that is fully accessible for use with screen readers. Julie McLean, Rehabilitation Teacher in the VR Program, will be available to teach clients how to use it.**

**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.**

**Legislative: Mr. Norton provided an overview of some of the bills that have been introduced during this legislative session.  One bill would waive the normal municipal dog license fee in the case of a guide dog or service animal. Another bill proposed is to have the user’s name or photograph on the accessible parking space placard to prevent other people from using it. One bill would allow a person who is blind to have two accessible parking placards if they owned two vehicles. Another bill introduced would require drivers to yield to a pedestrian who is stepping up to a curb or approaching a crosswalk. Mr. Norton also discussed another bill which would update the DORS statutes to implement “person-first” language.  Part of the bill would change the name of the Advisory Board from the “Board of Education and Services for the Blind” to the “Advisory Board for Persons who are Blind or Visually Impaired.” Another bill creates a new Office of Protection and Advocacy which takes it out of state government and moves it into a private entity called Disability Rights CT.**

**New Business**

**VR Success Story: Ms. Charlotte Copenhaver, BESB VR Counselor, introduced Ms. Patricia Iorio. Ms. Iorio discussed the services that she received through BESB-VR to help her gain employment. Ms. Iorio discussed the importance of adaptive technology and training which gave her confidence to seek employment. She was hired as a Client Advocate with Independence Unlimited. She expressed appreciation for Ms. Copenhaver’s assistance.**

**Vocational Rehabilitation and Children’s Services Policy Manuals- SRC Process: Mr. Sigman reported on the public hearing for the VR policy manual updates which was held March 21, 2017. The public comment period for the proposed changes to the VR policy manual closes on March 31st. The public hearing for the Children’s Services proposed policy manual updates is on Wednesday, April 12, 2017 and the public comment period ends on April 17th for that. Once the public comment period has closed, the Advisory Board and the State Rehabilitation Council will meet to review the comments that were received and make recommendations to the Bureau on the final language to be incorporated into each of the policy manuals.**

**Motion made, seconded, and accepted unanimously to hold a joint special meeting with the Advisory Board and State Rehabilitation Council to review and discuss the public comments that are received.**

**Approval of Impartial Hearing Officers: There are two attorneys on contract with the Department of Rehabilitation Services for the purpose of serving as impartial hearing officers. One is Matthew G. Conway and the other is R. Bradley Morris.**

**Motion made, seconded and passed unanimously to accept these two contracted attorneys as the Impartial Hearing Officers for BESB.**

**SRC Training on Role and Responsibilities: Ms. Pinkney discussed the SRC training scheduled for this coming June. After discussion, it was decided that it would be more beneficial if the training were to be moved to September since new members and re-appointments are still being processed.**

**Motion made, seconded and passed unanimously to move the training to September.**

**Report from BESB State Director**

**Program Update: Mr. Sigman reported on the Career Fairs that BESB is participating in with the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services. These fairs provide opportunities for individuals in sub-minimum wage employment to learn about the Vocational Rehabilitation Program and the opportunity to seek employment for competitive wages. Two retirements were announced in VR recently: One is Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Marion Lynch who covers southeastern Connecticut, and the other is Rehabilitation Technologist David Bergmann. Both retirements are effective this coming June 1.**

**Budget Update: Mr. Sigman discussed the state budget and how it affects BESB. The Children’s Services program is proposed to have $200,000 in reductions and the Employment Opportunity fund, which is an account utilized by the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services and this Bureau has a proposed reduction of $395,000. Mr. Sigman described the strategies that would be utilized to minimize the impact of these reductions on the programs.**

**Legislation Update: Mr. Sigman informed the SRC members of HR 1377, which was reintroduced in Congress this year and would, over a period of time, eliminate the option of subminimum wage employment.**

**Report from Chair: Ms. Pinkney reminded the members that CRIS Radio is hosting their annual “Dancing in the Dark” on April 29, 2017. Anyone interested in attending should contact SRC member Diane Weaver-Dunne or Ms. Pinkney to purchase tickets. Ms. Pinkney discussed a potential change at the federal level that could alter Medicare reimbursements to states. Concerned advocates are drafting a letter to the President of the United States. Ms. Pinkney asked if the SRC members wished sign on to this letter of concern.**

**Motion made, seconded and passed unanimously to have Ms. Pinkney sign this letter on behalf of the SRC.**

**Ms. Pinkney informed the SRC that she has been appointed as a member of the board of Disability Rights CT. She affirmed that if a conflict of interest issue were to arise from her role as Chair of the SRC and member of this new board, she would recuse herself.**

**Lastly, Ms. Pinkney thanked Marisol DeCordova for all her service on the SRC, as this may be the last meeting that Ms. DeCordova attends due to the Client Assistance Program becoming part of a private organization.**

**Adjournment: Motion made, seconded, and accepted unanimously to adjourn at 11:58 a.m.**

**The next Council meeting is scheduled for June 21, 2017 from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon at BESB**