

**State Of Connecticut**

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

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

**Statewide Committee of Blind Vendors Meeting**

**DRAFT MINUTES**

**June 24, 2025**

**Members Present:**

**Rich Braccia- Chairman, Brandy Altergott- Vice Chairwoman, Karan Punjabi, Keith Haley, Shelly McDermott, Kevin Doyle, Angel Torres, Frank Roberts**

**Others Present:**

**Adam Fairbanks, Tyrell Sampson- Program Supervisor, Tracy Morin, Jessie Towle, Joel Garcia, Nicholas Faenza, David Walshe, Ashley Morgan**

**Members Absent:**

**David Pelaggi**

**Welcome:**

**The meeting was called to order at 3:04pm by Tyrell Sampson. Roll call was conducted, a quorum was present to take a vote.**

**Minutes from March 11<sup>th</sup> & March 18<sup>th</sup> Meetings**

**Tyrell Sampson apologized for sending the minutes of the last two (2) meetings from March out late. He asked if everyone had a chance to read them and feel that they are worthy of a committee vote or if more time was needed to review them. Chairman Rich Braccia asked for a motion to be made to accept the minutes from the March meetings. Kevin Doyle made a motion to accept the minutes, seconded by Brandy Altergott. Motion passed unanimously with none opposed and no abstentions.**

## **Old Business:**

### **Budget Update**

**Tyrell Sampson stated the reported budget he received from Director Jenkins for the program is around \$3.4 million but he knows not everything has clear yet for invoices and stated the budget is more like \$3.2 million for the program. The budget remains strong currently.**

## **New Business:**

### **DAS/BEP Statewide Vending Contract Update**

**The process for the contract with Pepsi is at the tail end of getting the paperwork signed and approved to extend the vending contract for an additional five (5) years. This will hopefully be in effect starting July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025, stated Tyrell Sampson. The team has been working on this every day, it is just in need of certain paperwork, documentation and the attorneys' inputs. Tyrell Sampson and Tracy Morin will be meeting with Pepsi and Servo Nation on Thursday at Pepsi to discuss logistical changes to oversight of vending assets and additional vending assets being given to Servomation to restock. He wanted to be included in this meeting to ensure they understand when these changes will occur, and which locations will be impacted by these changes so that there are no surprises. Tracy Morin added that Fairfield County Vending is another subcontractor that will be starting to fill some of Pepsi's machines in the different geographic areas they are in. They are also asking for a note to be left on any machines that will be left on and empty or unlocked to let the consumer know that the machine hasn't been abandoned and that it will be filled very shortly to help aid in a seamless transition. He believes this is a strategic move on Pepsi's part to ensure long term customer/consumer satisfaction. This first five years has been a learning experience to recognize some bumps in the process, for Pepsi to right their wrongs, and for them to take some of our suggestions and implement them.**

### **NAMA Fly In**

**Tyrell Sampson and Tracy Morin went to Washington on June 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> for the National Automatic Merchandising Association (NAMA)**

conference. This was the first time attending this conference for both. It was not what Tyrell Sampson anticipated or expected. It was two (2) days of discussion. The main discussion was that NAMA is proposing to legislators with other businesses in the retail space of vending the option or allowance for a law to be passed to approve the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits being used at these vending machines. They are pushing for this legislation and with that these vending machines would have to be outfitted with SNAP approved items, he does not know the details on what those items would be. He doesn't believe it would require much change since regular SNAP benefits can be used on a large variety of items currently in stores. NAMA believes this would be a huge plus and win for those in the world of vending. There were some legislators, senators, and former senators there to explain the process of how the laws are passed and what goes into this type of requests, a little bit of an education experience with how this works. On the second day it was essentially all about advocacy and how to advocate to your senators and such to help push your concerns to the forefront. Unfortunately, since he is a state employee, he could not advocate on behalf of the program. Tyrell Sampson went on to state that regarding the advocacy it was more on the basis of the SNAP benefits rather than what was going on in the country and advocating for that. This is a law that BEP will be keeping an eye on to see if it passes as that could be a great opportunity to increase revenue for the vending machines.

Tyrell Sampson stated that the conference was good, but he is not sure it is something he would go back to unless there was something stronger in conversations that directly related to the BEP as there wasn't really one then.

### **Blast in Vegas and NAMA Show Update (Brandy)**

Vice Chairwoman Brandy Altergott attended the Blast in Las Vegas this year. She stated it really is a good opportunity for any of the vendors to attend to learn about all the new technology coming out by way of new machines and security aspects for micro-markets. She went into detail regarding some of the new machines, products, and

safety features to some of these machines. She stated that one new technology that would help with the micro-market theft would be this fridge/cabinet setup. Customers would need to scan their credit cards first, then the fridge/cabinet would unlock, they would grab the items they wanted and then their cards would be charged after the items were taken, the machine has cameras and sensors to recognize the items removed. There were also new coffee machines coming out that would be of interest to some of our vendors that offer hot and iced coffee options. There is a pizza machine that customers can get a hot pizza from in fifteen (15) minutes. She went on to describe a new product called GoCharge, it is a rental for phone chargers. There was brief discussion on this with Chairman Rich Braccia. He is very interested in this product. She recommends all the vendors to go at least once to these blasts to network with other vendors and learn about the new technology firsthand to bring back to the BEP for new ideas with vending and markets.

She stated that BESB and BEP have been around for longer than the Department of Education and that we would not be going away even if the Department of Education does. We have a lot of support in congress so she's not afraid of BESB and BEP going anywhere.

### **Micro-Market Theft**

Tyrell Sampson brought up the increased theft at the micro-markets. He stated that we need to prepare ourselves for the need to either increase or change how we utilize the micro-markets because they are at their peak momentum and maybe almost at the tail end of this and we just started these. The problem with the micro-markets is the increased theft with the current set up. He stated, as Brandy Altergott mentioned, these third-party companies may need to investigate these coolers as the next wave of technology to help cut down on theft. He does mention these coolers come with extensive fees associated with them now with the credit card fees and they hold the major credit cards have on this. He anticipates some changes to the setup be it doors that have you scan card before to allow you into that market. He feels that within the next year or so BEP could be transitioning into these coolers. The increased theft is happening not

only at colleges but also at elementary schools and so forth. The most recent college largescale theft was in Middlesex and Servomation came to us and said we are just losing money, and something needs to be done. The problem with the markets, unfortunately, is it's no one's responsibility to police them. The colleges can get the camera footage from us ask for restitution and put a note in that student's transcript but there is no way to enforce a punishment so to speak beyond that. The schools do not have a supplementary income to pay for the theft. The amount of theft that is happening, there is not a single vendor on this call that would be able to sustain and absorb this. In the case of Middlesex, they were always looking for a full-service cafeteria, which they found a company and signed on with them. Our market was never long term for them, they were kind of using us as a band-aid until they could get a cafeteria to resume. He recommends anyone with micro-markets to check in with Servomation to see what the theft situation looks like for their locations just to be aware and ready to pivot if needed or send out information to the building authority head to make them aware of the theft to prevent your location from closing. Stay in communication with Servomation because if anyone thinks they can stay open on their own good luck, because Servomation has a different budget and a different level of absorption for losses than any smaller operation can cover.

Chairman Rich Braccia asked if BEP should be concerned of Servomation pulling out of more than just the colleges or other locations now that they are doing a deep dive into the theft? He asked is this going to be something where there is a push for the machines that Brandy Altergott mentioned where it's not a free for all with people just going in and taking whatever they want. Tyrell Sampson stated he believes it's a collective responsibility between the vendors and Servomation. That Servomation is a business and is in this to make money first and foremost but from his communications with them, they will never just pull everything out because of one bad apple. They have told us that we have micro-markets within their top ten (10) producers, and they oversee hundreds of markets. We are doing rather well with these opportunities, and he doesn't foresee

**Servomation to reduce their footprint with us. It's a learning experience for all of us, and we need to do a better job and maybe pressing them to run reports on micro-markets so we can be aware of the theft in a timely manner before it becomes astronomical to avoid anyone being blindsided by an email stating the location needs to close due to \$20,000.00 of theft. Tracy Morin mentioned that if Servomation notices certain items are being taken at a higher rate than others like the energy drinks like Red Bull, they will remove those types of items from the micro-market. It's unfortunate but we all have to be smart about it.**

### **Service Repair Company Concern**

**As everyone knows we've been down to just Commercial for the most part when it comes to service and repairs for the machines stated Tyrell Sampson. We have basically lost control of anything regarding Commercial and are grateful they are still helping us because they are no longer on state contract, but they are still willing to service our location. This means a few things for BEP:**

- 1) They're not contractually bound by an agreement as they were previously where they couldn't charge for mileage, have slight discounts on materials and parts etc.**
- 2) This is a field that is slowly dying out as technology advances, not many people are into repairing the older machines.**

**The fees for some of these repairs are extremely high. BEP has spent over \$20,000.00 on Commercial probably within the last month/month- and-a-half. He stated we did have big ticket items that needed repair, the walk-in fridge at Brandy Altergott's location, for instance. He has asked David Walshe, BEP Field Representative, if he can scour through the state for companies that perform these repairs. He stated that they have been able to find someone that repairs this but doesn't do this other part of it and so forth. It is a dying field and unfortunately that leaves us paying premium prices for repairs. Brandy Altergott mentioned that there is currently only one employee working at Commercial right now besides the owner. He stated because it is so hard to find these repair companies now, he cannot guarantee that any**

equipment that need repair is going to be done in a timely fashion. In the past, it would be 24 to 48 hours for repair times now it could be days, sometimes weeks. He just wants everyone to be aware of this, BEP is working on trying to find new companies to work with but it's going to take some time unfortunately. As soon as he feels confident that he has found a company he will present it and report back to the committee. Chairman Rich Braccia mentioned he may have a name of a local company for Tyrell to contact, he will look for the information and get it to Tyrell. Tyrell Sampson stated is it a ticking time bomb and he is dreading getting the call one day that Commercial is no longer in business and then we have no one to repair the machines. If anyone else knows of anyone that repairs these machines, please let him know so he can make a call to get some information and try to get another company in the rotation.

#### **Agency Matters:**

##### **Agency Update**

BESB Adult Services Supervisor Chris Lassen retired back in April. We have since replaced him with April Mattoon, she started May 16<sup>th</sup>, 2025. If anyone has a need to reach out to Adult Services for anything she would be the point of contact. She's from Massachusetts, has several years' experience in the field of human service work, she is definitely a good addition to BESB.

We have received a six (6) month extension for telework starting July to January for one (1) day in the office, and four (4) days from home. That is not for every agency throughout the state that is just for BESB. Some agencies are doing a different number of days for this etc.

#### **Open Forum:**

Tyrell Sampson opened it up to the committee to discuss any concerns or issues they may be experiencing. Frank Roberts wanted to bring up his concern with Servomation growing so quickly, he is seeing a drop in satisfaction from vending and micro-market sales. Tyrell Sampson asked if anyone else has been experiencing this, Chairman Rich Braccia stated he hasn't seen this at his locations but

he's not sure if high traffic in his area is accounting for that or not. Tyrell Sampson stated he would bring this up during the meeting they have on Thursday. Frank Roberts stated that he contacted Field Representative Joel Garcia, Joel contacted Steve at Servomation and Steve stated it was taken care of. Frank Roberts stated when he went to check on it after receiving word it was all set, it was not all set. The machine was broken, and it took eight (8) weeks for a part to come in, but he was not made aware that the part was going to take eight (8) weeks nor was he aware that the product would be sitting in the machine for that entire time. Joel Garcia stated that the issue was more about the lack of communication on Servomation's part to let them know it was being fixed but the part was on back-order and would take the eight (8) weeks to get in. Chairman Rich Braccia asked Tyrell Sampson if maybe this is the case that Servomation have a backup machine that they can switch out with the broken one, so the sales are not impacted. Frank Roberts brought up that since we own the machines, he doesn't think logistically Servomation would be able to do this. Kevin Doyle also mentioned that one of his machine's is having issues, he called and had a pleasant experience with the person he spoke to, and they stated they would get to it right away. He is going to keep track of how long it takes to get fixed and report back to see if it's a one-off type of situation that Frank Roberts is experiencing or if it happens to him as well. Tyrell Sampson stated he will bring this all up during Thursday's meeting and see if we could possibly have a backup machine for times like this.

Shelly McDermott asked if the micro-market at BESB was back up and running after the pest issue they experienced. Tyrell Sampson stated that yes, new cabinetry was found and installed but he wasn't sure if the product had been restocked yet. Joel Garcia stated he was at BESB today and he forgot to look in to see if it was stocked. He stated he did receive an email from Steve at Servomation that it was being filled on Friday last week due to the holiday last Thursday. Tyrell Sampson also mentioned that they may not have replaced all the items that are normally stock due to the air conditioning having a problem in the cafeteria and it was extremely hot in there so they may not have replaced items that could possibly melt.



**Shelly McDermott asked for the financial person's information that we are supposed to send insurance and schedule Cs to. It should be going to the attention of the fiscal department, ADS BESB 12<sup>th</sup> floor. He doesn't recommend addressing it to an individual since people leave positions or get promoted to other positions all the time in the state. He will double check and get back to everyone but for now send it to the attention of BESB fiscal department.**

**Vice Chairwoman Brandy Altergott mentioned she did send her check in back in April and it still has not cleared her account. Tyrell stated he would look into this but for everyone in future something similar happens let him know right away. It's harder to get answers for something month ago with the fiscal department than something three (3) weeks ago.**

**Karan Punjabi asked if there was any update to the commissions sales that Pepsi was working on correcting from last years reporting. Tyrell Sampson mentioned they will be discussing that on Thursday as well. They have identified it and are just waiting on Pepsi to cut the check. Tracy Morin stated she spoke to Mike at Pepsi, the check was being cut and once it was deposited, she would confirm it with him. She expects the commissions to show up in August commission report for this.**

**Chairman Rich Braccia wanted to know how far back the commission payments were. Tyrell Sampson stated that the April commissions were just processed and that if you don't see them by next week to let him know. He stated it is the end of the fiscal year for them, they have a deadline before they can balance the budget, and they cannot process anything for three (3) or four (4) days once the deadline occurs.**

**Frank Roberts wanted to get some clarification on the new ice cream vending options coming. Tracy Moring stated that Bart, the franchise owner of Minnie Melts, has been in contact with Mars company to see about getting some novelty ice creams for vending. It's taking a little longer than expected so there is not going to be a lot of these machines so they will be strategically placed. Chairman Rich Braccia**

asked is this was based off customer demand, Tracy Morin stated yes it was as well as traffic.

Karan Punjabi was interested in the process for signing up for health coverage. Tyrell Sampson stated is not really a process, he would email him the link, the options, and price lists and he can sign up and he will be billed monthly for his premium portion. They would discuss this in more detail outside of the meeting.

### **Adjournment**

Chairman Rich Braccia asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Motion was made by Shelly McDermott, seconded by Kevin Doyle. Motion carried unanimously, none opposed and no abstentions. Meeting was adjourned at 4:12pm.