

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

March 11, 2025

Members Present:

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

Others Present:

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

Members Absent:

None

Welcome:

The meeting was called to order at 3:03pm by Tyrell Sampson. Roll call was conducted, and all members were present. Tyrell Sampson asked for an additional item to be added to the agenda. Penfield Pavilions Concession was brought to him for first right, and he wanted to discuss it, a motion was made to allow this additional topic by Brandy Altergott, seconded by Kevin Doyle. Motion carried unanimously, none opposed, and no abstentions.

Minutes of the Last Meetings

The minutes from the last two meetings, November 14, 2024, Special meeting and December 10, 2024, quarterly meeting minutes were voted on for approval. Brandy Altergott made a motion to accept the

meeting minutes for both, seconded by David Pelaggi. Motion carried unanimously, none opposed, and no abstentions.

Old Business:

Budget Update

The budget currently stands at \$3.3 million right now. Tyrell Sampson stated he does foresee these funds being used and he will elaborate on how as we continue down the list of topics for discussion.

Business Reports, Schedule C, Retirement Contribution

Tyrell Sampson stated he knows people are asking for business report summations to bring to their tax providers at this time of year. He wants members to please check that these reports are accurate. If they are not submitted timely and accurately it can create issues down the road with the RSA 15 report, so just make sure we continue to send accurate reports on time.

Schedule C's are starting to trickle in from members. He stated that the committee agreed that the submittal of these should be reflective of the date set forth annually from a federal standpoint. He is expectant and hopeful that everyone gets their Schedule C in by such date.

Retirement contributions have continuously had questions surrounding them. He stated BESB does not manage this, it just acts as a pass through for collecting the contributions and Schedule C's and getting this over to the retirement department. He has been in talks with the retirement department to ask several questions. He asked if it was mandatory for members to participate in the retirement plan since this has been a question of contention for some time. It is being reviewed by their legal team before an official memo goes out to him, but they were able to get him information for him to bring to today's meeting. Bottom line is yes, it is mandatory. Members are considered private employees, and the statute that was implemented to create the program states that private employees are required to participate in the retirement plan. This requires members to not only provide the Schedule C but to provide the appropriate retirement contribution for which category you have come into this program.

With that, he does not know what the ramifications are for anyone who may not be caught up with their retirement contributions. He did ask for clarification on the implications of missed contributions to retirement when members are ready to do so what could happen if there are penalties or not. They are having this reviewed by their legal team before they submit an outline that covers these questions and concerns. He is hoping to have this before the next quarterly meeting to distribute to members. He brought several questions to them that he wanted to have answered, like statements and a phone number for people to call other than the general number, to ensure everyone understands the retirement process.

New Business:

DAS/BEP Statewide Vending Contract Update

Tyrell Sampson stated that it has been 4 ½ years since the contract with Pepsi went into effect and that essentially this is the last year with Pepsi. There is conversation regarding extending the contract. They have discussed how long to extend the contract, negotiation back and forth regarding annual sponsorship, beverage case rebates, and commissions. Nothing has been signed yet, but some agreements have been made. For the annual sponsorship, originally Pepsi wanted to cut it out entirely but were able to land on 250,000 from the 325,000 we have currently to ensure the overall contract value maintains a 6.3 million threshold. For beverage case rebates we currently get \$2.00, we landed on \$1.25 for case rebates. There will be a decrease in the commission share from the 28% we have currently to 26% for beverages and 19.5% to 17% for snacks. A price increase will be offered July 1st, \$0.25 for beverages and \$0.10 for snacks. He stated for year 2 of this contract there will be no changes. Year 3 we have agreed to either give Pepsi a \$0.25 mech rate increase on all items or an additional 3% reduction of commission rates. Year 4 no changes to the mech rate or commissions. Year 5 there would also be no changes. One thing that is changing is that we currently get commissions on bottle deposits and tax, we will no longer be getting that. He feels this is fair with all the uncertainty surrounding the country right now. He does not feel we could have received a better

deal with another company because as we have seen with this pilot program, that Pepsi made no profits the first year of this. It is hard to get something like this up and running the first few years. He stated you have to give a little to gain a little and he feels that's what happened with these negotiations with Pepsi. He stated we have to shift to an understanding mindset in these times and understand that situations and things can occur that indirectly affect our program. He does anticipate some reduction in monthly commissions from outside factors such as people not spending as much on snacks and beverages with other expenses being higher. With that, yes, the budget is at \$3.3 million but he anticipates having to start cutting into that with the reduction of sales to cover any necessary overtime expenditures and he is ok with using the funds in the budget for this.

He asked if anyone had any questions regarding the contract. Karan Punjabi asked if the commission rates reflect just Pepsi, Tyrell Sampson stated it is with Pepsi because they are the contract holder. The third-party vendors that they have on board have internal agreements that reflect these changes. Karan Punjabi also asked if this was for state or federal routes, Tyrell Sampson stated it was for all routes. Brandy Altergott wanted to clarify that this contract would be effective July 1, 2025, Tyrell Sampson stated that was correct.

Tyrell Sampson stated that they were still working on categorical changes and that some of the companies are making additional sizes for certain items like candy bars and such due to the price of chocolate. There may be a time when an item is removed from a machine due to numerous price increases. BEP is working on this internally and they hope to have a signed agreement by the end of the month if not by the end of next week.

CTEC Vending Machine Placement Update

Tracy Morin addressed the concern with Connecticut Technical Education and Career System (CTEC). These are trade schools within Connecticut. Unbeknownst to BEP, one of the third-party operators was going in to fill a snack machine at one of the high schools and was told by an employee that she was sorry that they were going to have to be leaving because their machines were going to be replaced

by machines that CTEC system had purchased. Knowing this sounded odd, that merchant reached out to her about this. Tracy Morin was able to reach out to the appropriate people. Thankfully this was in the beginning stages. These machines were purchased through a state grant that's purpose was to alleviate long lines in the cafeteria when students are purchasing reimbursable meals that are made by the cafeteria staff. There was a lot of back and forth with different people involved in this. Thirty-four machines were placed at seventeen technical schools. From these they were only vending snacks and beverages for less than our machines, not reimbursable meals. This brought up some concerns for us. We recently had a memorandum of understanding (MOU) signed by both Amy Porter and their executive director that their machines that they purchased they can no longer use for vending snacks and beverages only for reimbursable meals made in their cafeteria. While she and other field representatives were out doing audits, they went into these schools and saw all the machines were empty and there has been no attempt to repurpose them for these reimbursable meals yet. She stated this was a big win for BEP to make sure our first right of refusal was never overlooked. She asked if anyone had any questions, Shelley McDermott asked if the funds generated from these machines stayed with the schools. Tracy Morin stated yes, they did, and she believes that's how the misstep happened since the commissions from the machines were the schools and not going elsewhere. She also stated that these are technical schools only and not as populated as regular schools, so they really didn't have long lunch lines.

Central Connecticut State University First Right Committee Vote

Tyrell Sampson mentioned that a while back he was approached regarding the upcoming food service contract at Central Connecticut State University, and he brought this up at the meeting in October or November. He had asked at that time if anyone was interested to email him. Keith Haley and Rich Braccia were the only two people that reached out. They had a call with Amos, who operated in a similar manner as a large-scale cafeteria operation. They ended the discussion with the impacts this could have on someone receiving Social Security benefits. Keith Haley reached out to Terry Smith to get

clarification on how these partnerships opportunities essentially operate with the possibility of salary. Terry Smith went into how when these partnerships are established, you are essentially an employee and not just getting a commission and would no longer be able to resume your Social Security benefits because you are considered “gainfully employed”. This also brings up the scope of the responsibilities involved with this type of food service contract. There are unions involved, you are essentially in a managerial/administrative roll. Keith Haley stated that this would be a great opportunity for someone that makes between \$30,000 and \$50,000 and works their tail off. You could be working 5 days a week or 7 days a week. You could do 30 hours or 60 hours a week. It all depends on the unions you are dealing with. He stated Amos is doing an excellent job where he is, and they love him but not everyone would want to be this invested for the payout. He recommended passing on this opportunity. Tyrell Sampson opened it to the members for discussion. Rich Braccia agreed with Keith Haley on the amount of work that could be involved and the unions for the payout was not necessarily for them since they were the only two that showed any interest in this opportunity. Shelley McDermott brought up that once you are working under an entity like this you would no longer be considered a sole proprietor under Randolph Sheperd Act so this would impact that and the Social Security benefits. Kevin Doyle asked if the partnership would be able to have a work from home aspect since it would be mostly managerial/administrative. Tyrell Sampson stated that would be something that would have to be negotiated with the partner for food service that essentially wins the contract, so he doesn’t foresee any work from home situations with this opportunity. Rich Braccia- Chairman asked for a motion to be made regarding this opportunity. Kevin Doyle made a motion to waive the Central Connecticut location, seconded by Shelley McDermott. Motion carried unanimously, none opposed, and no abstentions.

Penfield Pavilions Concession in Fairfield

Tyrell Sampson was approached with this opportunity about a week and a half ago. It’s a nice building, it holds a large wedding/event venue as well. Tracy Morin was able to do a site survey and was able

to access the inside of the facility and took numerous photos. It has a nice kitchen area that wouldn't need any equipment. It's financially supported by the town. There is another concession stand close by so there could be competition. He asked for the profit and loss statements they were provided. They were very detailed with expenses involved from 2019-2020, it has not been opened since 2020 due to Covid and then renovations that needed to be addressed. Kevin Doyle stated that it was only closed last year as he lives near this location. Tyrell Sampson then stated they based on the profit and loss statements that he received he doesn't think it is a viable location due to the rental fee at this location of about \$30,000. The time frame they are looking for this to be open is April 1st to September 30th from 10am to 11pm. Kevin Doyle stated he was sure that those dates and times were not accurate since again he lives near this facility, and they are not typically open until April 15th. There was discussion back and forth regarding getting more information on this location as there is interest from Kevin Doyle on this location. He asked if Tyrell Sampson could get clarification on the rental fee and the dates, they want it running from. Tyrell Sampson stated he will get the information requested and that a vote did not need to happen today so it could be reviewed with the committee. This was tabled until for the time being.

Micro-Market Theft

It has been discovered that the micro-market at Quinebaug has had substantial amounts of theft over the last year. Tyrell Sampson stated that over \$11,000 worth of product has been stolen, this translates to 43 items per day over the last year. Because of this the micro-market has been removed and vending machines have replaced it. The school was contacted regarding the theft and even when presented with video surveillance they did nothing to address this.

Unfortunately, there are no corrective action policies in place at these governmental facilities to make anyone accountable for the theft like in the private sector. He wanted to bring this to everyone's attention to some of the things that we are finding out when in the field regarding the micro-markets. He stated there are cameras, but they only act as a deterrent that no one is monitoring those cameras and

there is no one to enforce any corrective action. He just wanted everyone to be aware of this with the micro-markets.

BEP Program Instructions for Vending

Back in 2020, BEP and the Department of Education sent out a joint memo regarding the acknowledgement of our first right through all the school systems. There was an incorrect note, he stated, that stated essentially any school who should choose to basically self-fill vending machines that would allow in place of our first right opportunity. It was mistyped and incorrect. He is letting everyone know that a memorandum is now being sent out on BEP program's behalf independently from the school system to clarify our program, background, and our law to clean up that statement. In the last 2-3 years that the incorrect memo has been circulating, we have not been challenged off of it so it didn't really affect us. It could have with the CTEC issue but they never came to us to begin with so they couldn't use that typo against us. He expects this memo to be coming out in the next few weeks.

BESB and Advocacy

Over the last year there have been some situations where individuals thought their ADA compliance rights had been violated. Tyrell Sampson wanted to make clear that everyone understands BESB is an eligibility-based Service Bureau. We are an agency that provides education, training, devices to support day to day needs. If you feel you are being discriminated against, we can provide you with other groups and advocacy agencies contact information that do support these needs. Carol Jenkins our director sent out a memo regarding this with information for advocacy organizations. He wanted to make sure everyone understands that we can provide you with those contacts, but we cannot advocate on your behalf.

Vacation Payment

There was some miscommunication regarding this topic. The person that requested this was looking to discuss increasing the reimbursement amount for trainings. Tyrell Sampson stated that

vacation payments did start to go out though so everyone should have received those and to contact him if there are any discrepancies.

Training Reimbursement

Brandy Altergott wanted to bring the amount reimbursed for training seminars is not sufficient for today's environment. She discussed that the amount should be raised from the \$500.00 currently to \$1000.00 since a lot of these training fees have increased because of the venue it is at. She stated these training blasts offer a lot of useful techniques and have a lot of different machines that they display there for demonstration. These can help members increase their profits. Tyrell Sampson stated he was all for everyone going to as many of these training blasts as possible to expand on opportunities. He was in full support of the increase. Brandy Alergott made a motion to increase the training stipend from \$500 to \$1000. This was seconded by David Pelaggi. Motion carried unanimously, none opposed and no abstentions.

Transfer and Promotion

The subcommittee for the transfer and promotion team reviewed all applications received. They did not have any issues with applications presented and that all the applications should be approved. Shelley McDermott made a motion to accept the subcommittee's recommendations on the transfer and promotion applications for the 2025 year, seconded by Brandy Altergott. Motion carried unanimously, none opposed and no abstentions.

Agency Matters:

Agency Update

Tyrell Sampson stated that the agency is still operating the same as last year, with a mix of in office days and telework. He stated he knows federal employees have been required to go back into the offices but we have not had any change as of yet. The collective BEP office day is typically Thursday for everyone so if you can reach the field representatives on their cell phones you can call the office lines on Thursdays. Shelley McDermott asked if there were any internal updates that have not been reported on the news or social media with

the agency. Tyrell Sampson stated that everything can have an indirect impact on the program. He stated he does not have any undisclosed information, that the information we receive comes from the same general sources as everyone else.

Open Forum

Frank Roberts asked how many people were on the state vending routes right now. Tyrell Sampson stated there are 10 people on the state vending routes. He also wanted to know if there were any pricing changes that were made to the vending machines. He mentioned several items that were priced differently. Tracy Morin stated there was no price increase except for the ones in the public transportation areas. They are going to discuss this individually as it seems to be a problem with his machine.

Brandy Altergott wanted to bring up possibly having September's annual meeting in person to meet the new members and help unite the committee. Questions were asked about transportation, location, and the logistics of that. Several other members mentioned they would be interested in possibly meeting in person as well. Tyrell Sampson stated he was not opposed to this and believes the funds from the budget could be used to have it at a centralized location other than BESB Windsor office. Brandy Altergott was asked to communicate with other members to come up with a centralized location outside of BESB that may work for this meeting.

Adjournment

Dave Pelaggi made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Shelley McDermott. Motion carried unanimously, none opposed and no abstentions. Meeting adjourned at 4:59pm.