

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

September 9, 2025

Members Present:

Rich Braccia- Chairman, Brandy Altergott- Vice Chairwoman, Karan Punjabi, Keith Haley, Shelly McDermott, Kevin Doyle, Frank Roberts, David Pelaggi, Adam Fairbanks, Sovie Ramirez, Yolanda Doak, Tony Ford, Amos Fatorma, Present after roll call: Angel Torres

Others Present:

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

Members Absent:

Barbara Miller, Michael Heaney, Keith Deleo

Welcome:

The meeting was called to order at 2:37pm by Tyrell Sampson. Roll call was conducted, a quorum was present to take a vote.

Minutes from June 24th, 2025, Meeting

David Pelaggi made a motion to accept the minutes from the last meeting, seconded by Kevin Doyle. Motion passed unanimously with no opposition and no abstentions.

Annual Training Pepsi Co & Servomation Co

Tyrell Sampson stated every year they look to add someone into our training method into the program that we feel benefits the overarching

value and commitment to this program and allows all of you to gain some benefits with the training or the addition of a guest speaker. He stated that having Mark Bruno Chief Operating Officer of Servomation and Jimmy Demagistris our new account manager from Pepsi be our guest speakers for this year were key individuals to the overall value of this program. BEP couldn't have asked for a better partnership. Mark Bruno stated he appreciates the relationship we have and that it has been really good. He stated they realized the potential that could be gained from this relationship. It has not been without missteps, and he is the first to admit that they don't always do everything perfectly, but they use it as learning tools to improve service. He stated if anyone has any problems or issues with service please report it via their portal. The portal works by creating a ticket that is assigned to an associate that then follows up and works on the problem/issue with the vendor. They are currently working on recruitment of employees. Like everywhere in the industry, it is hard to get employees currently. If anyone knows of anyone interested in working with Servomation please share with them that they are hiring. Mark Bruno continued stating that the company remains committed to excellence and being competitive in the field. They try not to lose by not making the same mistake twice, they want to know where their failures are in order to improve on them. He thanked the program for their continued effort and support. Tracy Morin commended Mark Bruno as a leader of the company, that his commitment to excellence and partnership has been beneficial to us all. The staff has been nothing but courteous, friendly, and very competent and that helps everyone be consistent with our customer service she stated. Tyrell Sampson asked Mark Bruno where he foresees the future of vending and what uncertainties may be out there that the committee might not be aware of. Mark Bruno stated that the snacking and candy industry has evolved. Unfortunately, the duopolies that are created because you can only get Frito, Hershey's, and Mars from one place so that limits the resources, and these companies continue to consolidate the market underneath them. The candy industry is under tremendous pressure right now. The prices have increased radically and that's a challenge. Companies are passing off their cost increases for packaging, employees, etc. onto the consumer. Also, the core

products are starting to change from soft drinks over to more teas and non-carbonated options. Servomation is also looking into the new technologies that are coming out and how that could improve business flow and cut down on theft. He sees the industry changing to healthier options, but vending will always remain, the products just may be different. It's moving to a more sophisticated delivery with larger products and more expensive products, unfortunately. Tyrell Sampson opened to the committee any questions they may have for Mark Bruno. Shelley McDermott asked with the new technology being displayed at training conventions, are there any moves to start bringing in machines that can help cut down on theft. Mark Bruno asked if she was referring to the locked coolers and she stated yes. Mark Bruno mentioned there are some issues with these units that need to be worked out. Some use scales but if the product is not placed in the exact spot it was taken from the scale doesn't register it. Some issues with these machines and cameras is that they are extremely expensive, some cameras alone cost \$1,000.00. He stated they are actively looking for alternatives as technology becomes available.

Keith Haley asked what he recommended to say to customers that are questioning the date on the front of the package. He knows it's not an expiration date, but customers believe it is. He recommended going to the FDA website, they would tell you what the date means and much more. According to the FDA, the only thing that really expires is baby formula. He stated he believes Senator Blumenthal is working on getting packaging to reflect an actual expiration date not a best by or prepared on date. He is comfortable saying 30 days from the date is not a problem. Frank Roberts followed this up by asking if they should even report dates since he has reported dates being two (2) months old and not much of a solution has occurred and he doesn't want to waste anyone's time reporting them. Mark Bruno stated it's never a waste of time but if it's two (2) months old then it probably isn't selling to begin with, and the item needs to be reevaluated. This is a problem they are aware of and are working on to actively resolve. He is not concerned that if the item was ingested it would not cause

harm, it would still be safe to ingest, but the optics of this concerns him and that needs to be addressed.

Shelley McDermott asked if Servomation is getting a best deal type of pricing from companies they deal with. Mark Bruno stated yes, they do but those prices are always going up due to the costs associated with making the product, be it packaging, distribution, licensing, or labor costs rising these will impact the overall price of an item. He's not trying to blame price increases just at their level but it's a trickle-down effect when prices increase, unfortunately that is just the nature of the beast.

Tracy Morin introduced James Demagistris, aka Jimmy D, the new account manager for BEP at Pepsi Co. She stated he has been with Pepsi for twenty-two (22) years, and he was an integral part of BEP getting these machines when the contract first started. Jimmy D gave a little information about his background, to please use Pepsi's spa box for any issues/problems to report and then moved into the future of product options. Pepsi has seen an increase in healthier options being offered rather than the carbonated ones. They are seeing a rise in teas, Gatorades, Propel waters, and seltzer and zero calorie drinks. He is currently taking part in a pilot program for some new software that will hopefully help grow the business and streamline the process with better card readers on machines and at the back end they are taking a closer look at asset base and expand on these sales. This means they would focus on a particular machine to see what items are selling best and make changes to the availability based on this data. They are also looking into cashless machine options in certain areas where cards seem to be used more. They have some new products that will be offered soon, Starbucks is extending their line of energy drinks, Mug Root Beer Zero, and the line of Gatorade water options with electrolytes has expanded. Pepsi also acquired Poppi Soda Brand and Alani Nu Energy Drinks, so exciting options are coming.

Tracy Morin stated that she is also looking at the planograms for the machines and seeing where changes can be made. She really likes

how Pepsi is looking at the machine to see what is selling and is willing to make those changes based on demand.

Vice Chair Brandy Altergott asked Jimmy D if he could expand on what the cashless machines would look like. He stated that this would only be happening in the high access only accounts where data showed that between 80-85% of the transactions were with credit/debit cards. He stated that the way of the younger generations is going cashless and via phone cash apps. Technology is moving forward to reflect that cashless world. He did mention that this is not happening everywhere, it is solely based on the amount the data shows are cashless transactions. This would be more your colleges and such, he doesn't foresee this happening in like a courthouse or something of that nature where the clientele is more varied based on populus.

Old Business:

Budget Update

Tyrell Sampson stated the reported budget he received from Director Jenkins was \$3.4 million. He stated that expenditures remain low. He is looking into what he can to expend on some of the business responsibilities.

Mini Randolph Sheppard Regulations Update

Tyrell Sampson reported that the memorandum is currently with the legal division of ADS, and they are inundated at this time. They are prioritizing items of importance right now since they are so inundated. He will follow up with them to see where they are in the process to get this update out and he will send an email to update the committee.

New Business:

Operator & Facility Updates: New, Existing, & Future (BESB Micro-Market)

Tyrell Sampson stated that the Department of Corrections is looking into the possibility of a micro market going into their facilities. He is working on finalizing this opportunity as it would be a lucrative one.

Vending Route Update & Expansion Opportunity

Tyrell Sampson asked the field representatives to provide reports on the yearly vending routes value in order to expand on opportunities. He is confident in saying that the committee could increase the revenue cap from \$35,000.00 to \$40,000.00 and add four (4) additional routes to create new opportunities for four (4) new members from the VR program. The budget has been strong and will support this change. Vice Chair Brandy Altergott asked if anyone would like to make a motion on this. Kevin Doyle made a motion to raise the cap to \$40,000.00 and expand 4 new routes, seconded by David Pelaggi. Motion carried unanimously, no opposition or abstentions.

Smart Coolers

Currently, the New Haven Police Department (NHPD) has a competitor in their building offering healthy meal options. We do not have the same offers as this outside company. We approached the owner to see if BESB BEP could possibly purchase his meals and we could sell them in our machines. Unfortunately, he does not have the licensing required to sell his food to a third party.

Tyrell Sampson approached Mark Bruno from Servomation regarding new technology in the form of smart coolers for the NHPD. Many of these smart coolers still have problems with theft but Mark Bruno recommended VE Solutions. VE Solutions has a cooler that utilizes three (3) cameras and a scale to reduce the instant of error in charging and cut down on theft. The consumer would swipe their card first, the door would open for them to select items, and then the machine would charge them based on the camera and scale readings. These units are pricey; Tracy Morin reported the machine costs around \$7,000.00 with ongoing monthly fees. BEP is looking to purchase one with Servomation since they have the licensing behind them for these types of sales and to help with the costs and fees. Tyrell Sampson reports NHPD would be a great place to pilot this machine. If they could pilot this opportunity, it would help establish data to see if this would be valuable to the BEP program due to the price of the machine and the ongoing fees associated with them. Stay tuned for more on this.

Case Rebate Reallocation of Funds

Tyrell Sampson was looking to the committee to vote on the case rebate funds allocation. This is something that is discussed annually for any of the case rebates on the over-the-counter sales that these locations generate. If the committee sees fit to allow that to occur. He asks that the committee vote for the continuance of the reallocation of funds for those individuals who may benefit. Kevin Doyle made a motion to accept the reallocation of the case rebate funds, seconded by Shelley McDermott. Motion carried unanimously with no opposition or abstentions.

2025 Program Highlights

Tyrell Sampson stated that there were many highlights over the year 2025 so far. The overall average income is increasing for vendors, which is good because it shows the work vendors are putting in and shows that the program is of value to the community.

Another highlight was the five (5) year extension that was reached with Pepsi and Servomation to continue the vending program. The first five (5) years were a learning curve since this was the first time this program was available, and we continue to learn and improve with Pepsi and Servomation and the insight of the vendors.

NFBEI- Renewal Federal Fiscal Year

The National Federation of Blind Entrepreneurs Initiative (NFBEI) dues are up for renewal. Vice Chair Brandy Altergott stated that this is the organization that helps with legalities that may come up. She stated right now there is a big issue going on in Washington D.C. that Terry Smith, one of the heads of the NFBEI, is preparing to fight for our rights. She believes it is very important to remain in this and pay the dues. Kevin Doyle made a motion to pay the dues to the NFBEI, seconded by David Pelaggi. Motion carried with no opposition or abstention.

Schedule C's, Retirement Contributions, and Insurance

Tyrell Sampson stated that he likes to keep this topic in the meeting to make sure everyone is aware of continuing their payments for

retirement contributions, insurance premiums, and Schedule C's so that they do not have to scramble at the last minute to catch up with this. As always if you don't make the payments, it could cause issues when you are ready for retirement. If any members have any questions regarding this, please email Tyrell Sampson.

Proposed 2026 Meeting Dates: March 10, 2026, June 9, 2026, September 8, 2026, December 8, 2026

Tyrell Sampson stated that the committee would need to vote on the date for next year's meetings. These meetings happen quarterly on the 2nd Tuesday of the month. The proposed dates are March 10th, 2026, June 9th, 2026, September 8th, 2026, and December 8th, 2026. Vice Chair Brandy Altergott asked if anyone would like to make a motion on this. Kevin Doyle made a motion to accept the proposed dates for next year's meetings, seconded by David Pelaggi. Motion carried unanimously with none opposed and no abstentions.

Agency Matters:

Currently ADS continues to telework until the end of the 2025-year report Tyrell Sampson. He reported that ADS suffered a loss of colleague Matthew Rodrigues. Matthew started out at BESB as a special assistant and moved up the ranks to end up in the fiscal department. Fiscal will be working on reallocating duties due to this so some things may be delayed.

Transfers & Trainings

BEP is still covering cost towards training opportunities up to \$1,000.00. Tyrell Sampson stated that it is a good opportunity to attend these trainings such as NAMDA to mingle with other vendors and learn/hear about their experiences as this may help you overcome an issue as well.

Committee Elections

Tyrell Sampson reported the statewide committee has received the exact number of interested individuals to fill all vacant positions and maintain a full committee. The following individuals have been placed on the ballot:

- **Keith Haley**
- **Frank Roberts**
- **Karan Punjabi**

Additionally, the following individuals have expressed interest in serving as alternates:

- **Rich Braccia**
- **Brandy Altergott**

Open Forum

Vice Chair Brandy Altergott wanted to share some important information she learned from the National Federation of the Blind (NFB). Pete Hegseth, Secretary of Defense, wrote a letter to Linda McMahon asking for the blind vendors first rights be removed from all federal military bases. He claims that he wants the blind vendors removed due to our inadequate service, providing poor quality food, and this is endangering our military and their readiness due to our poor performance. This information is not known to the public; it was leaked to the NFB. NFB president and legal representative wrote a letter to both asking for a meeting and have been ignored. This is not something they just do; it needs to be made public and voted on. Once this is made public, since the NFB had time to prepare they are ready to file an injunction stopping this. She urges members to reach out to their state representatives and senators to let them know what is happening. Connecticut is lucky that the blind community has a lot of support from our representatives and senators. She has an NFB committee call tonight that once she gets more information she will share via email to the committee.

On another note, she also urges committee members to take advantage of the NAMDA training. The next one is in October in Atlantic City. It's a great opportunity to see the new technology, network with other vendors and companies. She will send an email out to committee members with the information to the NAMDA link.

Shelley McDermott asked if there was a better way to track the BEP commissions. Unfortunately, Tyrell Sampson stated that you have to be diligent in keeping track of this. They are processed in a bulk manner to fiscal, so you must make sure you receive it. There have been instances where people have been missed so you really have to track this yourself. The only thing he can really do is let the field reps know when he processes them and the field reps can let members know. He stresses to not let months pass before notifying him that payment wasn't received. Hopefully by him letting the field reps pass the processing part down that will be a reminder for members to check their accounts in the next few weeks for this payment.

Date of Next Meeting December 2, 2025

Tyrell Sampson stated that the next meeting was scheduled for December 2nd, 2025. He stated that the time should be able to go back to the normal 3pm to 4:30pm as there will not be guest speakers then. The committee accepted this, a vote was not needed.

Adjournment

Vice Chair Brandy Altergott asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Motion was made by David Pelaggi, seconded by Shelley McDermott. Motion carried unanimously, none opposed and no abstentions. Meeting was adjourned at 4:47pm.