**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 MINUTES

# September 23, 2020

**Members Present: Mr. Gary Allen, Mr. Scott Baecker, Mr. Michael Bartley, Ms. Brandy Altergott, Mr. Jay Brown, Mr. John Carnemolla, Ms. Lucretia Jones, Mr. John McNickle, Ms. Enaida Mendoza, Ms. Deb Reed, Ms. Dawn Russell, Mr. Brian Sigman, and Ms. Kendra Valente.**

**Others Present: Ms. Jennifer Jenkins and Dr. Diana Cohen.**

**Members Absent: Ms. Amanda Billiot, Ms. Beth Reel and Ms. Eileen Rose.**

**Call to Order: Mr. Michael Bartley, Chair of the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC), called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m.**

**Public Comment: There were no public comments.**

**Old Business**

**Review and Approval of Minutes from the June 24, 2020 minutes: MOTION: A motion was made by Mr. McNickle, and seconded by Ms. Russell, to adopt the minutes from the June 24, 2020 meeting. Motion carried unanimously.**

**Workgroup Reports**

**Membership: Mr. Sigman updated the members on the pending applications currently at the Governor’s Office and current vacancies. Appointments are pending in the categories of Recipient of Services, Native American Vocational Rehabilitation Program and Community Provider.**

**Finance: Mr. Baecker reported on the committed funds since the last meeting for the Comprehensive Needs Assessment. He updated the SRC on the total committed funds since October 1, 2019.**

**Consumer Satisfaction: Mr. Sigman re-introduced to the SRC Dr. Diana Cohen from Central Connecticut State University who updated the members on the new quarterly contact format being utilized for the Consumer Satisfaction Survey. Dr. Cohen detailed the challenges of trying to contact clients during the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, the responses received from participants have been positive for BESB-VR. An interim report is due for review by mid-November.**

**Technology: Nothing to report at this time.**

**New Business**

**VR Success Story: Mr. Jonathan Alberto, BESB Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, introduced Mr. Greg Armstrong. Mr. Armstrong spoke briefly on being a stay-at-home parent these past few years before reaching out to BESB-VR when he was ready to transition back into the work force. Mr. Alberto was able to match a local community rehabilitation provider with Mr. Armstrong to assist with securing job placement and support services. Mr. Armstrong was hired by Goodwill, where he works at their donation center in Oxford. He has found this job to be a good fit for him. Mr. Armstrong stated that he is working with a great team of co-workers and learning a wide variety of job duties.**

**Election of Officers: Mr. Bartley read the proposed slate of Officers for FY2021 based on the responses received from the membership: Chair- Dawn Russell, Vice Chair- Michael Bartley, Secretary- Lucretia Jones, Treasurer- Scott Baecker.**

**MOTION: A motion was made by Mr. Allen, seconded by Ms. Reed to vote in the slate of Officers as presented. The motion passed unanimously. The terms of office will commence on October 1, 2020.**

**Comprehensive Needs Assessment Update: Dr. Cohen outlined this project and the data being collected. A sub-group will be formed to get some ideas from the SRC and share their perspective on where the SRC sees some of the needs of the VR Program. Volunteering for this sub-group is Ms. Reed, Ms. Russell, Mr. Allen, Ms. Jones, Mr. Bartley, and Ms. Valente. A teleconference will be conducted in the next few weeks with Dr. Cohen and this sub-group.**

**VR Policy on Personal Adjustment Training: Mr. Sigman reported on the recommended alterations to the draft policy update by the Advisory Board for Persons who are Blind or Visually Impaired at their September meeting. One recommendation was to divide a long sentence in the last paragraph into two separate sentences. The second recommendation was to change the wording to require the submission of accessible reports rather than electronic reports. The Advisory Board passed the draft policy update with these changes and has requested that the SRC review and take action on the draft policy update with these modifications incorporated.**

**MOTION: A motion was made by Ms. Reed, seconded by Ms. Jones, to approve the draft personal adjustment training policy, as amended by the Advisory Board, and send it to a public comment period. Motion passed unanimously.**

**SRC Annual Report: Mr. Bartley and/or Ms. Russell will be reaching out to the SRC very soon to gather information from them and add it to the SRC Annual Report. Also, any member who wishes to submit information for the annual report, that is due on December 31, 2020, should notify them as well.**

**Meeting Dates for 2021 (Proposed 3/24,6/23,9/22,12/22): Discussion took place on the proposed SRC meeting dates for 2021. The dates proposed were March 24, June 23, September 22, and December 22, 2021.**

**MOTION: A motion was made by Ms. Valente, and seconded by Ms. Russell, to accept these meeting dates for 2021. Motion passed unanimously.**

**Report from BESB State Director**

**Program Update: Mr. Sigman reported that COVID-19 continues to require adjustments to how BESB staff deliver services. Staff continue to work remotely and offer services virtually. A small number of staff are coming to the office on a part-time basis to provide support services. Protocols have been issued to staff as well as contractors on in-person services so that safety can be at the forefront of all interactions that require an in-person meeting. Some of the community rehabilitation providers have also returned to offering in-person services as well, including job placement services.**

**Mr. Sigman announced that the VR Program received $1.2 million in re-allotment funds. With these additional funds, projections indicate the bureau will be able to serve all eligible VR clients into FFY 2023. COVID-19 has had a significant impact on the options for expending VR funds due to the high volume of providers that were not offering services until recently. Therefore, BESB-VR is likely to request a waiver of maintenance-of-effort. BESB had to return to the federal government $45,000 in supported employment funds due to the lack of employment opportunities that would qualify for the use of these funds.**

**In the Business Enterprise Program, with so many public buildings having substantially reduced occupancy, the earnings from vending machine sales are down by approximately $100,000 compared to the same time period in the prior year.**

**Two federally funded Pre-Employment Transition Counselor positions have been filled by Stacey-Ann Lewis and Charlotte Copenhaver. Mr. Sigman announced that Ms. Burgard, VR Supervisor, is currently out on leave and that he is overseeing the Vocational Rehabilitation day-to-day functions until her return.**

**Legislation Update: Mr. Sigman reported that due to COVID-19, there has been a significant impact on the revenues received that support the state budget. The State of Connecticut, like many other states, will face a challenge on how to balance a budget that is very lean. Mr. Sigman also updated the SRC on the current status of waiver requests and relief funding for the Randolph-Sheppard program that are included in Congressional legislation that has yet to pass in both chambers.**

**Report from Chair: Mr. Bartley thanked everyone for their contributions today. These current conditions make it difficult for BESB to serve the public and it’s important to recognize the health and safety of the public and BESB staff and how that dictates the delivery of services while maintaining safety protocols. He thanked Mr. Sigman and his staff for maintaining services to our clients despite all the COVID-19 logistical challenges.**

**Adjournment:**

**MOTION: A motion was made by Mr. McNickle, seconded by Mr. Allen to adjourn. Motion passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 11:34 p.m.**

**The next Council meeting is scheduled for December 16, 2020 from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon.**