**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

## June 23, 2021

**Members Present: Mr. Brian Sigman, Mr. Gary Allen, Mr. Michael Bartley, Mr. Jay Brown, Ms. Jennifer Jenkins, Ms. Lucretia Jones, Mr. Frank Losquadro, Mr. Phillip Magalnick, Ms. Enaida Mendoza, Ms. Deborah Reed, Ms. Beth Reel, Ms. Dawn Russell, Mr. Scott Baecker, Mr. Dennis Reagan, and Ms. Kendra Valente**

**Others Present: Mr. Andrew Norton, Mr. John McNickle, Ms. Mary Burgard, Mr. Zachary Moore, Ms. Brenda Lamarre, Ms. Charlotte Copenhaver, Ms. Melissa Carney, and Mr. John Jurkin**

**Members Absent: Ms. Brandy Altergott, Mr. John Carnemolla, Mr. William DeMaio, Ms. Eileen Rose, and Ms. Nicole Rico Serrano**

**Call to Order: Ms. Dawn Russell, Chair of the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC), called the meeting to order at 10:03 a.m.**

**Public Comment: None**

**Old Business**

**Review and Approval of Minutes from the March 24, 2021 minutes: Ms. Jenkins requested that the March 24, 2021 meeting minutes be amended to include that she was in attendance.**

**MOTION: A motion was made by Ms. Lucretia Jones and seconded by Mr. Michael Bartley to adopt the amended minutes from the March 24, 2021 meeting. Motion carried.**

**Workgroup Reports**

**Membership: Ms. Jones indicated that presently there are 18 voting members on the SRC. There have been 2 new appointments since the March SRC meeting; Mr. DeMaio and Mr. Losquadro both representing Business, Industry, and Labor. Several SRC member terms are expiring. Mr. McNickle’s first term expired June 17, 2021 and his reappointment to the SRC is in process. Ms. Rose will be completing her first term on October 11, 2021 and she is not seeking a second term. This vacancy will need to be filled in the category of Recipient of Services. Mr. Bartley’s second term will be expiring on July 24, 2021, and his replacement’s information has been submitted to the Governor’s office. Ms. Rico Serrano’s first term will expire on July 22, 2021, and her reappointment is pending. One additional candidate is pending appointment in the category of Community Provider. The candidate’s appointment information has been submitted to the Governor’s office. There is one remaining vacancy in the category of Workforce Investment Board, and a candidate is still needed.**

**Mr. Allen, Ms. Mendoza and Ms. Valente also have first terms that will be expiring in 2021 and they each asked for an update on the status of their reappointments. Mr. Sigman responded that he will be following up on the status of these reappointments.**

**Finance: Mr. Sigman provided the update on Mr. Baecker’s behalf. There have been two expenditures since the last SRC meeting in March. One was for State Rehabilitation Council Chair, Ms. Russell, to attend the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB) Spring Conference for a total of $150.00. The second was for renewal of the annual membership with the Council of State Administrators for Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) in the amount of $3,316.15. Total obligations for the current fiscal year are $58,507.28.**

**Consumer Satisfaction: Mr. Sigman reported that per the motion accepted at the March SRC meeting, he has reached out to the Center of Public Policy and Social Research at Central Connecticut State University to reach an agreement regarding the Consumer Satisfaction Survey for next year. The Center of Public Policy and Social Research has agreed to continue completing the survey. There has been a minor price increase since last year for this service moving from $23,807 for the current survey year to $23,904 for this upcoming survey year. Mr. Sigman reported that the current survey will conclude in July of 2021 and the new survey will be in effect in October of 2021. Mr. Sigman has drafted a Memorandum of Agreement which the Center of Public and Social Research has reviewed. Mr. Sigman is now prepared to submit the agreement to the Central Contracting unit for their review.**

**New Business**

**VR Success Story:**

**Ms. Charlotte Copenhaver, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, introduced Ms. Melissa Carney who has been enrolled in BESB services since the age of two. BESB provided services to Ms. Carney from 1999 to very recently when she moved to another state for work. BESB provided her with support throughout her childhood and adult education. As the only blind student in her school district, Ms. Carney, faced many challenges. Unable to participate in many group sports, she found that she enjoyed gymnastics and horseback riding which could be done with more independence. Throughout her life, the people she worked with at BESB encouraged her to learn important skills like laundry, cleaning, and cooking before she needed to use them as an adult. She learned to use a white cane and became independent with her travel skills. She is now employed as the Director of Outreach and Engagement at the Pennsylvania Council for the Blind. Mr. Sigman, Mr. Magalnick, Ms. Reel, Ms. Jenkins, Mr. Jurkin, and Ms. Jones offered their thanks and appreciation to Ms. Carney for sharing her inspiring success story.**

**Slate of Officers for FFY 2022:**

**Voting for new SRC officer positions will be held at the September SRC meeting. Ms. Russell stated that any member who would like to be considered for the position of Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary or Treasurer should reach out to her via e-mail correspondence.**

**Reopen Plan and COVID-19 Updates:**

**Mr. Sigman stated that as of June 1, 2021 based on the Governor’s Memorandum, full direct client services were resumed. Mr. Sigman shared that many employees are teleworking but have been serving clients in person. Mr. Sigman related that the successes and lessons learned over the past year have created more opportunities for clients to participate in services virtually, reducing the need for clients to travel to events or services. Virtual services will continue to be offered where practical and beneficial. As of July 1, 2021, more staff will be working in office locations. Masks will be required in the building and anyone that cannot wear a mask will meet outside the building or at another location to reduce safety concerns for all involved. There is a new draft update of in person service protocol’s which has been sent to the Deafblind Advisory Committee for review and feedback.**

**Report from BESB State Director**

**Program Update: Mr. Sigman reported that there have been several recent staffing transitions. Mr. Barry Rita has retired. Mr. Zachary Moore has replaced Mr. Daryl Pease as Secretary 1. Ms. Christiana Rufino has taken the late Ms. Julie Mclean’s position as Rehabilitation Technologist. Mr. Sigman announced that he will be retiring on October 1, 2021.**

**Mr. Sigman recently sent out a reminder that BESB is a co-sponsor along with the National Federation for the Blind of Connecticut for the NFB Newsline. Newsline is available at no cost to BESB clients. Individuals who are interested in registering for NFB Newsline can reach out to Ms. Lisa Tanguay at BESB.**

**BESB VR has joined a mulit-state consortium that includes the Vocational Rehabilitation Programs for the Blind in Michigan, Vermont, New Jersey and Maine to apply for a federal Disability Innovation Fund grant. The grant application is for $18 million and if the consortium is awarded a grant, it will be used to coordinate a multi-state approach to employer outreach, technology solutions to job opportunities and increasing the accessibility of vocational training programs and apprenticeships.**

**Mr. Sigman also announced that through a collaboration with the Connecticut Department of Transportation (DOT), they have secured funding to make the AIRA navigation system available on a pilot basis to clients of BESB. The AIRA technology would be provided to clients at no cost and they would use this technology to assess their experiences in utilizing public transportation and community access, sharing their experiences with DOT.**

**Mr. Sigman reported that BESB anticipates reverting a substantial amount of the VR federal allotment for FFY 2020 back to the federal government due to the carry forward period coming to an end. With the pandemic, there were far fewer community providers who were able to provide services, greatly reducing the amount of purchased service costs for BESB. Mr. Sigman reported that BESB will likely be seeking a waiver of maintenance of effort requirements to avoid any penalties due to the extenuating circumstances brought on by the pandemic.**

**Legislation Update: Mr. Norton reported on the State budget. The budget that has passed appropriates about $30.8 million for FY 2022 and $31.5 million FY 2023 to ADS. The Children's Services funding will be $4.4 million in FY 2022 and a little over $4.5 million in FY 2023. The budget for the Vocational Rehabilitation Programs (BRS and BESB) was funded at $7.7 million. Community inclusion funding for individuals who are deafblind was allocated $240,000. CRIS Radio was allocated about $70,000 each year of the two-year budget.**

**Independent Living Centers received a slight increase from last year in order to create more access for individuals who are deaf.**

**In addition to passing a budget the legislature also passed an implementer bill which added an additional $2 million to be used for people who are deaf or blind. Expectations for how this money should be spent still requires clarification. It is unclear if this is a permanent addition to the budget or if it was passed due to the pandemic.**

**Report from Chair: Ms. Russell reported that since the last SRC Meeting she has had the opportunity to attend two national conferences. The Chairperson thanked Vice-Chair Mr. Bartley for his service on the SRC. Mr. Sigman, Ms. Jones, and Ms. Valente extended thanks to the Vice-Chair for his dedication to his position. Ms. Russell acknowledged the retirement of Mr. Sigman. Ms. Reed, Ms. Jones, Mr. Allen, and Mr. Bartley extended thanks to Mr. Sigman for his dedication to his position. Ms. Russell thanked everyone at BESB and everyone on the council for their continued dedication and commitment.**

**Adjournment**

**MOTION: A motion was made by Mr. Michael Bartley, seconded by Mr. Gary Allen to adjourn. Motion passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 11:55 a.m.**

**The next Council meeting is scheduled for Sept. 22, 2021 from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon.**