**National Federation of the Blind of Connecticut**

**State Board Meeting Minutes**

**January 9, 2021**

Called to order: 11:03 AM

Roll Call:

President: Maryanne Melley

1st Vice-President: Beth Rival

2nd Vice-President: Mary Silverberg

Treasurer: Nathanael T. Wales

Secretary: Marchele Davis

Board Members:

Shonda R. Rosetta

Deb Reed

Veronica Alston

Jim McCollum

Affiliate member(s) at large

Recite of NFB Pledge:

Opening Remarks: None

Treasurer’s Report: Nathanael T. Wales

Statement: President Maryanne stated that her and Lucia had been in conversation regarding the Blackford Fund. It was mutually agreed by both Maryanne and Lucia, that after 2 weeks, Lucia would politely inquire where the funds might be. No discussion. Beth made a motion to accept the Treasurer’s Report. It was seconded by Shonda and motion passed with acceptance.

Updated Website: Brian Mackey

Brian is the NFB of CT’s Webmaster. Brian reported that he has completed the redesign of the affiliate website, [www.nfbct.org](http://www.nfbct.org), to the Drupal platform. Brian stated that if you are using an iPhone you must double tap on a menu button up at the top. Then scroll down to another button. Also, videos, pictures and other content can be uploaded on the server. “Contact Brian, Maryanne or Lucia for assistance.” Brian stated later this year, the national office will be contacting the affiliates regarding the migrating of the website to a multi-site Drupal platform. He had encouraged the affiliate members to view and explore the website’s content on a frequent basis. If there is anything that needs attention, you are welcome to address it to Brian. His email is: [bmackey@nfbct.org](mailto:bmackey@nfbct.org).

Advisory Board Report: Beth Rival

Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS)

Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB)

Draft Minutes

December 10, 2020

Public Comment

Mr. Thall acknowledged Adult Services for the distribution of the 2021 large print calendars sent to clients.  He also expressed concern about the future of the low vision providers since several of the providers are close to retirement age.

Ms. Brenda Biernat introduced herself as a parent of a client and as a student at the UMass Boston Master’s degree program for teachers of the visually impaired (TVI). She spoke about the importance of having staff who are trained in techniques for working with children that have cortical visual impairment (CVI).

Ms. Rival commented that the National Federation of the Blind offers scholarships for students pursuing degrees to become a TVI and that more information can be found at [NFB.org](http://www.nfb.org).

New Business

Blind Americans Equality Day Workgroup update

Ms. Akers acknowledged the workgroup members for their efforts. Ms. Akers will provide a written report to the members.

Bureau Update

Business Enterprise Program (BEP)

Mr. Sampson reported that BEP continues to be greatly affected by COVID-19.  To date, 28 out of the Program’s 32 vending facilities are closed. Pepsi has been awarded the statewide vending machine contract by the Department of Administrative Services for the term of July 1,2020 - June 30, 2025. The general program expenditure account remains stable, but continued shortfalls in vending commissions or increased expenses could pose future concern if the pandemic continues much longer.  The current vacancy for the position of Fiscal Administrative Officer is on hold and those duties have been temporarily assigned to staff within the Bureau of Organizational Support.

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)

Ms. Burgard reported that the Vocational Rehabilitation Program lost two transition counselors back in March and that both positions have since been filled.  Recruitment is underway to hire a rehabilitation technologist to cover the southern part of the state and VR is seeking to refill Ms. Copenhaver’s regional caseload for the South-Central part of the state.  Staff continue to utilize on-line programs for clients and the focus is to get the clients set up to be able to access online training programs and virtual employment opportunities. The American Job Centers offer a variety of virtual training opportunities and clients have also participated in virtual training provided by the Helen Keller National Center. World Services for the Blind, and a program in Vermont developed a virtual Work Readiness Program for transition age students.  The Vocational Rehabilitation Program was an active participant in the Annual Disability Resources Fair that was held virtually this year.

COVID-19 UPDATES

Mr. Sigman stressed the importance of frequently checking the Governor’s website that is dedicated to the COVID-19 pandemic. The website address is [ct.gov/coronavirus](http://www.ct.gov/coronavirus).

During this past Summer, protocols were distributed to staff and community providers that pertained to the provision of in-person services. The majority of BESB staff are still working virtually, providing services to clients using different technology approaches.  In-person services can be provided where no feasible alternative option is available.

Public Comment Period Summary - Personal Adjustment Programs

Mr. Sigman reported that there were two public commenters both of whom spoke positive on the proposed changes. In a written comment there was a suggestion to add language justifying the need for an out-of-state residential program. Mr. Sigman stated that the State Rehabilitation Council will take up this proposed policy update at their next meeting in December.

A motion was made by Mr. Thall, seconded by Ms. Silverberg, to accept the proposed changes to the policy on personal adjustment training and to forward this on to the State Rehabilitation Council for their consideration.  The motion passed with two abstentions.

Budget Update

Mr. Sigman reported that in Congress, the House passed a bill to keep the federal government open until December 18th and that the Senate is expected to take up the bill in time to avoid a federal government shutdown that would otherwise occur on December 12th. Due to the deficit in the State budget, there continues to be a hiring freeze for state funded vacancies.  The Bureau has resubmitted requests to refill several vacancies and is awaiting updates on whether any of these positions can be refilled.

Legislative Proposal

Mr. Norton reported that the State is currently projecting a $4.3 billion deficit for the 2021-2023 biennium.  The Special Transportation Fund is also projected to be in deficit within three years.  In February, the Governor will submit his two-year budget and we will know then his specific plans for addressing the situation.

Points to the Good and Welfare

Ms. Akers acknowledged a positive article in Bookshare regarding one of BESB’s rehabilitation technologist, Jolene Nemeth.

Next meeting – 18 March 2021, 10:00 a.m. Beth stated that due to the rise of Covid-19, there are no home visits by social workers or mobility instructors at this time. These actions must be approved by Brian Sigman.

State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) Committee-Deb Reed:

On December 16, the state rehabilitative council met, BESB’s VR Program has funds to avoid “an order of selection” through fiscal year 2023.

On December 2,

I was part of a focus group, initiated by the Center for Public Policy and Social Research at Central Connecticut State University.  Three members of the SRC participated and gave feedback on whether BESB was adequately training vocational rehabilitation clients. There was a consensus that BESB should reach out to community partners to help provide training and support.

We also concluded that BESB should do more to ensure clients are fully aware of the services available to them. One suggestion is for BESB to develop a package for new clients that includes a guide to the services available to them and a list of contacts to learn more about the VR program.

The updated Personal Adjustment Training policy, which passed unanimously in both the advisory board and the SRC, Will become effective February 1, Of this year. (Report Completed)

Planned Authorized Contribution Plan (PAC): Len Schlenk

Leonard had explained the plan and its benefits to the National Federation. He continued to encourage the CT affiliate and non-members to contribute to this worthy cause. In addition, he stated that he will be contacting individuals to request their support. (Report completed)

Vehicle Donation: Marilyn Wenzel

No Report.

Federationist Report: Briana Rigsbee:

Briana stated that she has received a few articles for the Federationist. The topic for the upcoming issue is: “Diversity and Inclusion.” In addition, updates have been gathered from chapter and division presidents to share with the affiliate. All submissions will be made to Lucia on January 15. If anyone desires to place issues or articles, feel free to contact Briana at:

[editor.fedct@gmail.com](mailto:editor.fedct@gmail.com)

Phone: (203)751-0199

New Business:

Convention Business Meeting Minutes

Beth made a motion that the annual Convention business minutes be emailed to board members only before the January meeting. Voting will take place at the subsequent convention. Mary seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

Vote on Auction Item-National Association of Blind Students (NABS/Washington Seminar):

The auction will be online. There will be no tickets for the auction. A third-party service will assist with this event. Furthermore, a link (<https://32auctions.com/2021blindstudents>) will be provided by the listserv, and credit card information is required. Deb made a motion for the board of the CT Affiliate to purchase an Amazon Microwave and Amazon Dot, for the National Association of Blind Students. Shonda seconded and the motion was passed.

Washington Seminar: Mary Silverberg

The Washington Seminar will be virtual this year. Mary reported that there are 7 legislators to make appointments with. A time and date have been set with Senator Murphy’s office and Congressman Courtney’s office. Zoom information will be provided on the listserv. There will be a leader for each meeting the leader will introduce everyone and give who they are meeting with brief information about the NFB there will be 4 other people presenting the four bills. It was mentioned, that at the time, the NFB was continuing in the process of fine-tuning the information. The 4 bills to be discussed at this time are: Access Technology Affordability Act, Non-visual Access Standardization Act, Relative to home medical devices (i.e., blood pressure monitors, home dialysis equipment, etc.) Maryanne reported that this act has been renamed. The new name is: Home Use Medical Device Accessibility Now Act. (HUMAN). The last 2 bills are: Voting and the Website Accessibility Acts. Maryanne stated that the fact sheets should be available on the nfb.org website early next week. Fact sheets give clear detailed information regarding the bills.

BELL Academy, Home Edition: Kristen Dockendorff

Kristen reported that she has been in contact with Honorata. Honorata will be emailing Kristen information. Furthermore, Kristen stated that she has received the name of the person from BESB that works with the youth. Kristen is seeking other organizations that work with visually impaired children to promote the BELL Academy. The BELL Academy will be an in Home Edition again this year. Additional suggestions are welcome.

State Convention Dates-October 29-31, or November 12-14?

There was a consensus that the state convention would be in October 29-31, 2021. Location: Four Points by Sheraton Meriden. A $100.00 deposit had been paid since prior discussions.

State Convention Committee 2021:

Volunteers: Edward Shaham, Jim Cronin, Barbara Blejewski, Becky Ireland. Additional participants are invited.

Maryanne stated that she had received a call from Patty Chang, regarding an expression of thanks from President Riccobono for the $1000.00 donation that was given to the national office. Maryanne revealed that the board had a discussion on the amount of support that was given with the accessible voting process. Freedom Scientific was running a financial campaign. So, our donated contributions were doubled, making the total amount $2000.00. Therefore, it was reported that President Riccobono was grateful!

**Affiliate Dues**

Affiliate dues runs by a calendar year, from January to December. Therefore, Maryanne gave a reminder that affiliate dues are to be turned in by January 31. A PayPal account is on the website.

**Sexual Misconduct and advice from National discussion:**

Code of Conduct Within Our Affiliate

I would like to say a few words regarding sexual misconduct in our affiliate. There have been incidents within our affiliate and the victims have never spoken about their experiences or have only talked to a few close friends. There has been one case where a code of conduct violation was filed. In that case I failed the individual because they felt they could not come to me with what happened to them. I never want any member to feel they cannot come to me with any complaint against another member they are uncomfortable with. It does not matter if the person is my best friend, an acquaintance or someone I barely know. I have also advised other members not to file code of conduct grievances against someone (not of a sexual misconduct kind) in hopes that the problem could be worked out within the affiliate. I was wrong to do this and apologize for interfering in people’s personal decisions. What is important is that any affiliate member feel they can come to me if they have been harassed by anyone. My role is to support affiliate members and not make decisions for them. I am no more important than any one of you, I am elected to serve you and make the best decision with the rest of the board that will benefit all members. Our conversations are confidential. I will help anyone fill out the code of conduct grievance form that needs help doing so.

Maryanne Melley

President

National Federation of the Blind of Connecticut

Maryanne reported on the presidential release regarding sexual misconduct. National has partnered with a company called RAINN. RAINN is the nation’s largest anti-sexual violence organization. In addition, they have a nation-wide sexual assault hotline. For further information, visit the NFB’s website. It was mentioned from the presidential release that training will begin in March for all affiliates and divisions. In addition, President Riccobono realizes that this problem will not be solved in 2021. However, he is committed to ending this intolerable and unacceptable behavior in the federation. Moreover, reviews and augmentations to the code of conduct will be evaluated. Furthermore, the strongest possible policies will be included to aim and adopt best practices in preventing sexual misconduct. It is the hope of the federation president that by the year 2022, that we, the National Federation of the Blind, will possess an environment free of sexual misconduct. A task force involving 6 offended members, has been developed. This too has been on the listserv. You may find the information at NFB.org.

**Technology Grant Fund: Paul Duquette**

Paul stated that he has talked with Stephen Del Tatto, who is the owner of Silver Lining Technologies and has worked with the Federation before to advise with efforts regarding programs and technology. It was decided that recipient(s) would share at the state convention, how the program and/or technology has helped them in their independence. Lastly, there was a motion to change the name of the grant from The Paul Duquette Trantolo & Trantolo Technology Grant Fund to The NFB of CT Technology Grant Fund. A motion was made by Marchele, Mary seconded and the motioned passed.

Chapter News:

Jim Cronin – At Large Chapter: Jim reported that he had a host of speakers coming months. Jim stated that one of the speakers will be a woman from the task force mentioned above. Jim stated that he has included a business component to their chapter meetings. In addition, members of the chapter, will have an election during their upcoming meeting. Lastly, Jim reported that the chapter gained 3 new members!

Garry Allen, Hartford Chapter: No report.

Shonda R. Rosetta, Shore Line Chapter: No report.

Josephina Martinez: Waterbury Chapter: No report.

Marchele Davis: Southern Chapter: Marchele reported that November was Sugar Diabetes Awareness month. Therefore, our very own Joyce Kane was our speaker! Furthermore, other members shared their experiences as well. In December, we had Jeri Lyn Rogge, Director of Editorial and Outreach Ministries for the Christian Records for the Blind. Marchele stated that Pam Allan would be the next guest speaker. She is the director of the NFB’s Louisiana Center for the Blind. Also, she serves as NFB’s first vice-president and has dedicated her life to improving the lives of blind people. Lastly, Dali and Edgar have relocated to Texas. Surprisingly, Edgar was on the call with us. He continues to have ADA Paratransit tickets for sale. Cost: $15.00 per book for the New Haven area.

Deb Reed: Central Chapter: Deb reported that their next meeting will be on January 16. They will be joined with the Hartford chapter. In addition, they are delighted to have Ollie Cantos as their speaker. The topic of discussion will be on how to recruit blind children and ADA issues.

Next NFB Board meeting: April 10, 2021

Meeting adjourned: 1:33PM

Respectfully Submitted,

Marchele Davis

National Federation of the Blind of CT Affiliate:

Secretary