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Dear Commissioners:

I just read, with interest, the agenda for the upcoming Commission meeting. I was happy to see the college policy on there. As you may know, the Commissioners passed the college policy last year and promised to review it in a year. Well, a year has passed. The board is being responsible and keeping its promise. I commend you.

I cannot comment on all aspects of whether the policy is working as well as hoped. I can say, without a doubt, the supplemental financial form portion of the policy is not working. I have 2 nearly identical examples of the extreme and mindless enforcement of this superfluous and unnecessary policy in my possession. I am only at liberty to share 1 example, but, this is more than sufficient to demonstrate the point. I wish I could say that both examples were limited to 1 counselor or regional office. Each was from a different regional office. I have also heard a verbal report of yet another similar case in yet another regional office, though, unlike the other 2, I do not have written documentation... If these individuals have had the courage to risk reprisals from –MCB and report these problems, I can only conjecture there are others who are too intimidated to speak up. The intimidation is real, palpable and demonstrated below.

As a member of the Consumer Involvement Council, I brought this up in our meeting this past week. Leamon Jones came into the meeting to discuss the issue. I suggested that the form is not necessary for eligibility or to determine whether Commission support of a student is otherwise legal. Mr. Jones did not disagree with this. I said that if the Commission wanted such a form, it is fine; just take the student out of the loop. The student is not needed to accomplish the goal of collecting information from the college. Also, the student has no control over whether the college completes the form, accurately completes the form or returns the form in a format that the Commission deems acceptable, yet as the example below demonstrates, the student is held responsible for the performance of the college with possible jeopardy to their ability to make progress toward their academic goal.

Mr. Jones said it is good for students to be responsible for their relationship with MCB and asked me whether I thought students have a responsibility in their college endeavors. I told him that, yes, they do. I reiterated that this form is unnecessary and thus is not a reasonable cause to keep a student from attending college. He opined that it is “good for a student” to be responsible and do things for themselves. I replied that this is paternalistic nonsense.”

If the Commission is going to paternalistically require students to do things that are “good for them,” just because they are good for them, then students ought to be required to get to bed early, study for exams, turn in all homework on time, not drink alcohol or at least not in excess, not smoke, eat a healthy diet, get lots of exercise and so on. Except for whether the form is returned on time, this form will not change whether MCB provides service or not. Further, it asks about Social Security benefits. I remind you that MCB may not use Social Security benefits to pay for rehabilitation services, so it is unclear why such information is included. Furthermore, this information is provided in the intake process, since SSI and SSDI clients are automatically eligible for rehabilitation services.

 The FASFA form also provides similar information

Here is a small portion of the interchange between the student and her counselor. The entire chain of emails is very long and includes the allegedly incomplete document from the University of Michigan in Dearborn. I will happily supply the entire document upon request. It has been published on the MCB 2020 list and the NFB of Michigan list. An excerpt is printed below:

*“. . .>> Hello Mr. Jones, It remains confusing to me that your agency is even*

*>> called the Michigan Commission for the Blind. I have met with*

*>> Continual resistance from Mr. Nelson since he has become my counselor*

*>> In the spring of 2010.*

*>> This*

*>> is the third time that he has told me that I may not attend my next*

*>> Semester at the University of Michigan Dearborn. I have continually*

*>> asked him if we could work on the same team to obtain my educational*

*>> success so that I may become gainfully employed. I am not able to*

*>> attend school full-time because of family responsibilities. If he*

*>> were to become interested in my education he would find out that I am*

*>> scheduled to take Environmental Education this fall. This class is*

*>> required for my Environmental studies degree. It will not be offered*

*>> Again for two years. I was on track to graduate in the spring of 2013.*

*>> However, it will now take another year because once a student is a*

*>> Senior as I am required classes are not offered each semester and in*

*>> my school of study some are offered every two years. I will comply*

*>> with his order for me to not attend school this fall. However, I*

*>> believe it is not sound financial planning or a good use of Michigan*

*>> resources. In conclusion I believe that it would be more accurate to*

*>> say that I am a client of the Michigan Commission Against the Blind.*

*>*

*>>> Hi Donna,*

*>>> I nor my secretary cannot open this email to access the information*

*>>> I need which is the financial letter )award or denial letter) for*

*>>> fall 2011. I must have access to print copy today. Email me copy of*

*>>> a printed letter in "word" attached so that I can print it out by*

*>>> today. If I do not have it by 5 p. m. today, I cannot support you*

*>>> for the fall 2011 and you Will have to have your letter to me by*

*>>> november 1, 2011 for the winter. I have informed Mr. Leamon Jones*

*>>> about this and he is aware of this. Thank you.*

*>>. . .”*

As can be observed, above, the client is very frustrated. You can also observe that the Commission was in possession of the financial information from the college. You can also tell that Leamon Jones was aware of the plight of the student. To me it is inexcusable to put a student through this for no gain. Fortunately this student publicized this mistreatment and through intervention she was, to my knowledge, eventually provided service.

I say there is no gain in requiring any student to jump through a hoop of submitting a form to a college and hoping the college will return the form on time and, apparently, in a required format for the Commission to show that the student was being “responsible.” Again, I want to be clear, if MCB feels this form is beneficial in some way, and they wish to use precious staff time collecting and processing the information, instead of returning client’s phone calls, then, have at it. I call upon you, the Commission Board, the entity that adopted the policy, to fix this unjust and abusive portion of the policy and allow students to be responsible for the important work of getting good grades, graduating and getting a job.

In conclusion, aside from eliminating the requirement for the form from the college policy, I, again, strongly suggest that you, as a board, stop using your limited meeting time receiving meaningless and self-promoting verbal reports from the staff. Such reports may be made in writing. Instead, I respectfully suggest you use your time to meet with consumers, staff and MCB administration to constructively determine how to reform the MCB to eliminate such paternalistic, bullying and intimidating policies and practices and to provide staff training that puts customers ahead of bureaucracy, oh and by the way get jobs for blind people.

An example of the impotent nature of the administration was reflected in comments from Bob Robertson. He said in a discussion of the lack of return phone calls from agency staff that this has been an identified complaint from consumers for years. He said no one knows how to get counselors or others to call customers back within 48 hours. There is 1 term that will address this – data-driven, humane expectations of accountability from top management to include all staff. This begins with the Commission Board holding the Director accountable for these issues.

Blind people are citizens, not subjects. Blind people shall not be bullied and kept in a submissive and dependent role. To me, it is clear from the example above; the MCB has no means beyond bullying and intimidation to guide its training or administration of programs for blind people. I truly hope you can use whatever time you can to develop a clear vision and philosophy for MCB and implement a serious training program to accomplish these goals.