

Board for the Blind and Vision Impaired
Quarterly Board Meeting
Tuesday, February 1, 2011
DBVI Headquarters Building

Call to Order: Chairperson Liza Bruce called the meeting to order at 1:15 p.m. She asked Board members and staff for introductions.

Members Present: Liza Bruce, Chairperson; Marc Johnson, Ronald Hamm, Marsha Hester, Bob Dendy, Althea Pittman

Staff Present: Ray Hopkins, Commissioner; Bob Burton, Deputy Commissioner for Services; Eva Ampey, Special Assistant to the Commissioner; Jim Meehan, Director of VIB; and Henry Street, Administrative Staff Assistant to the Commissioner, Recorder

Introduction of Board Meeting:

Ms. Bruce re-introduced Mr. Ronald Hamm and introduced new Board member Ms. Marsha Hester attending the quarterly meeting for the first time. She also introduced the new Administrative Staff Assistant to the Commissioner, Mr. Henry Street. His position replaces Ms. Kathy Proffit's.

Opening Comments:

Ms. Bruce called for a motion to adopt the meeting agenda. Mr. Johnson moved on the motion; Mr. Hamm seconded; there was no discussion. The motion was passed unanimously.

Ms. Bruce called for a motion to adopt the minutes from the October 12, 2010 meeting. Corrections were required. Mr. Dendy moved on the motion; Mr. Hamm seconded; there was no discussion. The motion was passed unanimously.

Ms. Bruce called for public comment. There was no one present.

Ms. Bruce thanked everyone for being committed to the Board and reminded everyone of the large responsibility taken on by sitting on the Board; and not just programmatic responsibility, but also includes fiscal. She explained that the Board has stewardship over a large endowment fund. We have been given a unique challenge; we are challenged to meet a unique set of circumstances for Virginian's who are blind or vision impaired. These funds enable the Board to do substantial things for citizens of the Commonwealth who are blind or vision impaired.

Commissioner's Report: Commissioner Hopkins mentioned the construction projects on campus. He discussed the displacement of our program and staff due to the construction. The Board was informed of the safety precaution taken to accommodate the many construction projects on campus. We are extra cautious in light of the excess foot traffic as students move about the campus. So this can also be seen as a positive as the students put to good use the skills attained relative to the orientation and mobility training. These safety precautions are not just for our students and staff but for all pedestrians on campus. There is even more activity in our Headquarters building.

We have to approach things differently, i.e., we have lost use of the kitchen in the student's dorm. Arrangements have been made with a nearby congregation for our students to use the kitchen in the church. Even with the inconveniences from the construction, there is little to no interruption in instructing our students. Our meeting space has been reduced losing access to the meeting space in the AA building. We have also lost the use of some of the offices in Headquarters to offer space for classes. We are adapting and managing well all things considered.

The General Assembly is in session. We did not seek any legislation specific to DBVI for this session. However we were in

the Governor's budget for increased General Funds for our Rehabilitation Program. Due to budget reductions over the past few years it has become increasingly difficult to come up with funds needed to match the Vocational Rehabilitation Grant from the Federal Government. If approved the increase included in the Governor's budget would greatly enhance our ability to continue to provide services.

We have experienced one delegate wanting to take funding away from us. DRS is one of the disability service agencies that is also experiencing short fall. There is a proposal to increase their funds by \$1.5 million in General Funds. We applaud this, but not at the expense of funds from DBVI. We are hoping that the budget amendment won't survive. Other Legislative interest to DBVI is the efforts to reinstitute tax credits for employers who hire persons with disabilities; for businesses owned by persons with disabilities and are registered vendors of the Commonwealth. The Virginia Department of Minority Business Enterprises currently solicits small, women owned and minority businesses as preferred partners for state entities. If this bill passes it will now include businesses owned by people with disabilities. We are in full support of SWAM.

Bob Burton, Deputy Commissioner for Services, is our legislative liaison.

The Commissioner mentioned one thing that that could potentially impact this Board. Members of the General Assembly asked the Attorney General's Office (AG) for an opinion regarding the ability to earmark funds for charitable organizations. There is an effort on the part of the Commonwealth to identify any funds that are included in budgets of agencies or anything involving funds to charitable organizations not based on providing a discreet service or provided under contract. Because within the DBVI budget and specific to this Board, it is mentioned in the appropriations act

applicable; Commissioner Hopkins has asked for an AG's opinion on this matter. Fortunately Board purchases are not through appropriations. He suggests that we not allocate or provide any funds to charitable organizations until the decision has been made. He has put this in the hands of the AG for interpretation. This office also represents the Board. The Board is not limited to the same governing funds as DBVI or DRS (Department of Rehabilitative Services).

We are trying to sort all of this out. We will need to submit information or list by the end of the week for any items purchased from nonprofit organizations.

Introduction of the Program Managers to the Board: Elizabeth Spiers, Deaf-Blind Services; Glen Slonneger, Education Services; Marge Owens, Low Vision Services; Jane Ward-Solomon, Rehabilitation Teaching and Independent Living Program; Peggy Fields, Engineering and Field Services. Bob Burton announced that Susan Payne and Melody Roane were unable to attend.

The program directors introduced themselves as well as gave a brief synopsis of their career or tenure at the Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired.

Virginia Industries for the Blind: Presented by Jim Meehan. Mr. Meehan gave an update on all of the programs and projects associated with the Virginia Industries for the Blind (VIB):

Contract Management Services (CMS) recently hired four individuals that are legally blind and are working in our plant in Richmond. They have started to close out contracts however; there is a software glitch that is being ironed out to allow interfacing with the Army's software program. Successful closure should begin within the next few weeks.

E-Commerce status is that we have successfully completed an on line order and test on our E-Commerce site. A new customer service representative has been hired. VIB hired a part-time sales and service specialist to promote and educate customers about VIB and our capabilities, as well as call on our customers who have purchased our manufactured goods.

Task Force: Currently two are in place. One involves looking at the benefits offered to our managers and senior supervisors and one that will look at our Charlottesville manufacturing effort. We are looking to make things more efficient through this review process.

Recruiting for a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor as well as a Job Coach is underway. This is a national recruitment effort.

Discussions regarding new base line supply stores have begun. It is legislation that dictates that certain locations to include military installations and offices which will impact VIB and some of our store operations. There is an upcoming meeting to discuss other Northern Virginia opportunities.

Revenue: Overall we are up for our state fiscal year by approximately two percent. Charlottesville and Richmond are down. Our revenues are down in our manufacturing areas but they are up in our services and in our stores. We are working on our manufacturing baseline.

Division for Services Report: Presented by Bob Burton. An update on activities was given. There has been no significant change in our Bristol, Norfolk or Staunton offices. Our Roanoke office has undergone a huge personnel change over the past year. There is a new Regional Manager who started on November 25, 2010; also brought on a new rehabilitation engineer who joined us November 1, 2010; we lost a rehabilitation teacher who resigned on January 5, 2011, and are currently recruiting to fill this position.

An Orientation and Mobility Specialist is retiring officially today; and we are recruiting for this position as well. An Education Coordinator from our Richmond office has resigned. This position remains open due to budgetary constraints. Also another member of the Richmond team is out due to medical reasons. This staff slipped on ice during the recent inclement weather and broke a hip. The recuperation period is 10-12 weeks. An Orientation and Mobility Rehabilitation Instructor out of our Fairfax office recently resigned and we are recruiting for a replacement.

At the Rehabilitation Center there were three mobility specialists positions open. One of those positions was recently filled by a recruit from Las Vegas. Recruitment continues for the other two, as well as a vacant Vocational Evaluator position. Headquarters recently hired a manager for its Deaf-Blind program. This position had been vacant for three years.

Capitol Projects: Presented By Eva Ampey. Virginia Industries for the Blind in Richmond is undergoing renovations. Anticipated completion date is March 2011. An extension date on the temporary lease has been requested for another 60 days. Equipment and furnishings are being surplus to occupy the new space; the renovation for the Virginia Rehabilitation Center for the Blind Administrative and Activities building is in full swing. The date to relinquish the building to the contractor is Feb 11, 2011; Campus wide replacement of the fire alarm system, to begin Feb 14, 2011. Replacing the roofs of all buildings on campus except for the Library and Resource Center; Control work for energy performance contract; the purchase of a generator for VRCBVI dormitory; Sidewalk repair came to a halt due to extreme weather conditions. Future project scheduled to include replacing the windows in the Library and Resource Center. Pool repair or replacement is being investigated; Independent living units in the VRCBVI dormitory exhaust system replacement.

Statement of Economic Interest must be completed and submitted in a timely fashion. It must be an original; no faxes, scans or email are accepted. The deadline has passed; they were due by January 15, 2011. Also a Conflict of Interest Training is required by all Board members, which was due in January as well. This required training is available on line.

Parameters for using Endowment Funds: Copies of the Virginia code were provided to the finance committee. This tells how the Board is to administer the institutional funds. It also provides definitions and standard of conduct in managing and investing these funds. Reviewed balances: Unrestricted fund balance is \$3.5 million; there are several smaller balances with restrictions for usage. There are about thirteen different restricted fund balances.

With the monies that have been given to be used Mr. Dendy suggested that the Board spend down the funds that are small. This will help with fiscal soundness. Each individual account requires someone to have to manage. Endowments are monies given with restrictions that state the principal can never be spent.

Mr. Johnson gave input as well. The small account balances totals less than 1% of the total fund balance.

Last year's expenditures cover driver wages for blind rehabilitation teachers totaling \$81,000.00 to cover hourly wages and Social Security; funds expended for Super Summer Camp totaling \$50,000. Funds expended for Metropolitan Washington Ear was \$15,000.00. Funds expended for Dream Catchers was \$5,000.00. Funds expended for CapTel Services was \$10,000.00.

Past big ticket items and cost include driver allocations, Camp Easter Seals Super Summer camp, Metropolitan Washington Ear, Dream catchers, dormitory renovations, LRC compact shelving.

Request for Additional Funds. Back to Mr. Burton. Approached by Jane Ward-Solomon the Program Director regarding funds that were set aside to pay our drivers for our blind Rehabilitation Teachers will be overspent this year, and has submitted a request to increase these funds by \$10,000 for drivers. The primary reason for the increase is that we have hired more staff that is blind or vision impaired. This falls under a reasonable accommodation.

Ms. Bruce wants to handle this as a separate item seeing that this is a request for additional funds. She called for a motion to increase funds by \$10,000 for this fiscal year to cover additional drivers due to increased hiring of blind staff. Mr. Johnson moved on the motion; Mr. Dendy called for a second; there was no discussion. The motion was passed unanimously.

5 minute break at 3:00 p.m.

Ms. Bruce called the meeting back to order at 3:07 p.m.; and introduced Mr. Johnson the Finance Chairman and asked that he lead the discussion on the incoming proposals to the Board.

Mr. Johnson gave context on each proposal and how it affects the budget. After that he opened the floor for discussion on the proposals.

At the end of December the Board funds equaled \$5.9 million. This shows tremendous growth from the previous July balance of \$5 million. In viewing our market investment, the Board holdings have a fair amount of international as well as U.S. securities in the portfolio. This balance excludes any expenditure committed for this Fiscal Year; as well as the additional 10 thousand dollars now being allocated to support our rehabilitation teachers who are blind with regards to transportation.

In total, the four proposal requests equal \$190,000.00. Keeping in mind the reoccurring request that we normally commit to which is made at our April meeting; to include drivers, Easter Seals Summer Camp, CapTel which totals approximately \$160,000.00 to be added to that.

The first proposal is an up to \$150,000.00 commitment which will support the following:

- 6 positions (part time) for DBVI regions which will commit to job development and placement activities. Six positions at \$25,000.00 maximum, equals **\$150,000.00 (support)**

2 request from the National Federation for the Blind of Virginia

- Support Braille Enrichment Literacy and Learning (BELL) Program. This will support a two week summer camp teaching students with low vision to read and write Braille. Estimating to serve 15 students. They are requesting a three year commitment to funding. The request is for **\$10,000.00. (support)**
- Support for a one day fair for seniors in Virginia Beach who are experiencing vision loss. To bring in vendors with low vision aid equipment and demonstrate and sell their products. Sessions to discuss adjustments to low vision. The goal is to attract at least 100 seniors. The request is for **\$5,850. (deny)**
- Support for \$25,000 from Virginia Voice for general operating support. Had significant reductions in state funding; as well as their United Way allocation. The funds will be used to help with their general budget of \$373,000. The request is for \$25,000. **(table)**

Mr. Johnson recommended not disbursing any funds pending the General Assembly outcome on contributions to charitable organizations by state entities. Also recommends caution when

considering proposals that are a multiple year commitment as opposed to a one time amount; however, will consider partial support.

Mr. Johnson gave the meeting back to Ms. Bruce who opened the floor for discussion:

Ms. Bruce suggested that we also consider proposals that impact our entire state. Considering the endowment funds are from people across the entire state. I.e. three of the four proposal requests are specific to a particular region: Virginia Voice – Richmond; Braille Literacy and Senior Fair – Tidewater. If we decide that those three are the direction that we want to go, Ms. Bruce recommended we consider all of the regions around the state by possibly choosing one proposal and implement in all regions. Our decisions can impacts fairness for distribution.

Ms. Pittman enlightened the Board on the two proposals from the Tidewater area. She observed these programs in Northern Virginia (NOVA) which seemed successful. There was public comment on program awareness or service delivery. Constituents feel neglected and out of the loop. Supporting this project bring awareness into a remote area.

Ms. Bruce asked Ms. Pittman if she knew how NOVA received funding for their projects.

Ms. Pittman reported that the projects were funded through a grant. Also the National Federation for the Blind (NFB) contributed funds.

Ms. Bruce asked if it was possible for Tidewater to obtain the same funding.

Ms. Pittman wasn't sure but thought not.

Ms. Bruce expressed a concern with the Senior Fair proposals. It is noted the budget for food for the event was between \$2,000 and 2,200, plus \$750 for conference bags. We may want to consider not spending endowment funds in this manner. While seniors are a large part of the blindness population, the challenge is with bringing vendors in with technology that most seniors are reluctant to learn. Funding vendors to participate is not in line with most fairs where vendors pay a fee to participate. This provides funding to have the event.

The discussion migrated to the Virginia Voice proposal, which is a large request, but they have not come to us before. They serve this geographic area as well as the Hampton Roads area. It serves this area as well. If we decide to fund how would we disburse and cover the entire area.

The discussion moved to the DBVI six part-time positions. The plus is that they cover areas across the state. Also, realizing that each geographic location would not require the same amount of hours for the position; the proposal states that the maximum hours would be twenty-five hours per week depending on location.

Mr. Johnson suggested that each proposal be considered at this time and vote to support or table.

Senior's Fair – After discussion Mr. Johnson made a motion to *deny* the funding request; Mr. Hamm seconded; there was no further discussion. The motion was passed unanimously.

Braille Enrichment Program – After discussion, The Board agreed to *support* but not commit to more than one year at this time. Request for outcomes and revisit next year. Mr. Dendy made a motion to support the funding request; Mr. Hamm seconded;

there was no further discussion. The motion was passed unanimously.

Virginia Voice - After discussion and before a decision will be made the Board agreed to have a representative from the Virginia Voice to attend the next quarterly meeting for further clarification on their proposal concerns. The Board agreed to *table the proposal* until after the April meeting.

DBVI Part time Positions – After discussion Mr. Dendy made a motion to *support* the funding request; Ms. Pittman called for a second; there was no further discussion. The motion was passed unanimously.

Ms. Bruce mentioned the need to elect a new Board Chair. Current chair's term has expired. Need to elect someone to chair for the remainder of the term (end of June). Elections were held to replace current chair Ms. Bruce who has served four consecutive terms (By-laws).

Ms. Bruce made a motion to elect Mr. Dendy as the Chair for the remainder on the term, Mr. Johnson seconded; there was no discussion. The motion was passed unanimously.

This action leaves the Secretary position vacant.

Ms. Bruce made a motion to elect Mr. Johnson as the Secretary for the remainder on the term, Mr. Hamm seconded; there was no discussion. The motion was passed unanimously.

Mr. Dendy recommended that the Board take a look at the By-laws and see if anything needs to change. We need to be familiar with our by-laws

Ms. Ampey will provide copies of the by-laws to every Board member.

Ms. Bruce adjourned the meeting at 4:10 p.m.

Next Quarterly meeting is April 12, 2011.