

Minutes

Virginia Board for the Blind and Vision Impaired
Virginia Rehabilitation Center for the Blind and Vision Impaired
401 Azalea Avenue, Richmond VA 23227
October 2, 2018 at 1:00 PM

Board Attendees

Mr. Ken Jessup, *Chair*; Mr. Mazen Basrawi; Ms. Deborah Helms; Mr. Leo Kim.

Members Absent

None.

Members of the Public

None.

DBVI Staff to the Board

Raymond Hopkins, Commissioner, DBVI; Dr. Rick Mitchell, Deputy Commissioner for Services, DBVI; Mr. Matt Koch, Deputy Commissioner for Enterprises, DBVI; Ms. Wallica Gaines, Deputy Commissioner for Administration, DBVI; Ms. Jessica Collette, Staff Assistant, DBVI.

Call to Order & Introductions (*Action Item*)

Chairman Ken Jessup called the meeting to order and members introduced themselves.

Consent Agenda & Minutes

Adoption of Agenda (*Action Item*)

Mr. Mazen Basrawi asked to amend the agenda to add discussion of meeting times; Chairman Ken Jessup moved to adopt agenda as amended; Mr. Leo Kim seconded and motion passed unanimously.

Adoption of Minutes (*Action Item*)

Mr. Leo Kim asked about the year that was left blank in the minutes; DBVI staff provided the year 1999 and Mr. Kim asked for the information to be added. Ms. Debra Helms moved to adopt minutes; Mr. Mazen Basrawi seconded and motion passed unanimously.

Public Comment

None.

Mr. Mazen Basrawi asked if any additional way of promoting the meeting was completed this time. For this meeting, the Commissioner said there was not, however, for future meetings notice will be sent to current clients.

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Mr. Ken Jessup asked if information was on the website and/ or Facebook. Ms. Wallica Gaines responded that information is on the DBVI website and in the future a notice will be added on the DBVI Facebook page.

Program Spotlight: History of the Agency

Commissioner Ray Hopkins

The Virginia Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired began in 1922 in Charlottesville as the Commission of the Blind and operated out of a bank. Three years later, in 1925, the Commission relocated to Richmond, 3001 Parkwood Avenue, Richmond. Through the years, the building was condemned and the General Assembly appropriated \$80,000 for renovations of the building. The renovation took place in 1939.

All services were provided statewide out of the one location, until the Virginia Workshop for the Blind, now known as Virginia Industries for the Blind, became part of the Agency in the late 1920's. Initially established as a factory making brooms and mattresses, the Workshop was largely operated by the Virginia Workers of the Blind before becoming part of DBVI. The workshop in Charlottesville was followed by a location in Richmond and even one in Lynchburg.

In the 1960s, DBVI established a regional office in Roanoke, Virginia, and this was the first office to provide services outside of the Richmond area. From there multiple other regional offices were created that basically copy the footprint now. These locations include a regional office in Staunton, Roanoke, Bristol, Richmond, Fairfax and Norfolk. In 1968, the Commonwealth of Virginia committed to the Virginia Rehabilitation Center for the Blind and Vision Impaired (VRCBVI). Initially these services were provided in the basement of a church.

In 1972, the land on Azalea Avenue was donated and the VRCBVI building was the original building. When the Center began in this location, the Center Director lived in the old farm house on the grounds. The Center was comprised of numerous buildings including, a dormitory, recreation building and cafeteria. The Recreation Building was donated and built by the Lions Club. The dormitory has been renovated and reopened in 2008. All VRCBVI buildings, two VIB plant facilities, and almost all buildings owned by the Department have been renovated. The Headquarters Administrative Office building is in the process of renovation.

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At this time, DBVI is approaching a century of existence. Since 1922, there have been continuous services to Virginians with vision impairments. As 2022 is approaching, DBVI does not want to only celebrate, but also have conversations with stakeholders and build a plan for the next century of services in the Commonwealth. *What does the future of services look like in a second century of service?* It is important to think more broadly and identify gaps in the system and talk as a collective in terms of education, employment, accessibility, etc. How do we ensure the Commonwealth is poised to include our constituents? The Commissioner believes it is appropriate for the Board and the Agency to have these conversations and if any Board members are interested, the Commissioner would like them to speak with Wallica.

A conversation took place about how to review services for the next 100 years and how it would be beneficial for the Board to meet at other locations. Chairman Ken Jessup mentioned how other boards or groups would meet on a Friday to gather information from stakeholders and then meet Saturday for the business meeting. The Commissioner suggested meeting in a community and meeting 2-3 hours before the business meeting to speak with consumers. He also mentioned the public comment meetings held by the Agency each fall. If additional meetings took place, the Commissioner would hope other stakeholders are made aware of the meeting for more engagement. Mr. Leo Kim mentioned about engaging local General Assembly members and inviting them to the meeting. Chairman Ken Jessup asked about creating a video of success stories. The Commissioner asked for this item to be added as an action item.

Mr. Mazen Basrawi asked about engagement on a personal level of each board member. The Commissioner spoke about how October is Disability Awareness Month and there are a number of different events throughout the Commonwealth. DBVI staff will make sure to pass along information to board members.

Discussion: Board's Approach to Giving *Chairman Ken Jessup*

The Board requested historical information in regards to its annual giving and if there is a way to make exceptions. The conversation turned into a discussion about how the DBVI is using endowment funds as a supplement to the state budget, such as reasonable accommodations for staff. Mr. Mazen Basrawi shared that he feels it is inappropriate for the Board to fund this expense when the legislature is able to appropriate funds. The Commissioner spoke how this is one item the Agency is asking to be considered in the Governor's budget. Mr. Mazen Basrawi asked about adopting a resolution as a Board and then members take to their legislators. It was

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agreed that a resolution would be appropriate and/ or a letter advising the Governor on items affecting those citizens who are blind and vision impaired.

Mr. Leo Kim asked for a more in-depth overall funding history of the endowment fund. Wallica shared that another trust is the only reoccurring income of \$3,500 quarterly, and then any monies donated to the Department. DBVI can pull information on averages of donations each year. In the past 10 years, the Commissioner said the endowment fund has been around \$5M.

Mr. Mazen Basrawi raised a question about the relationship with the Lions Club. The Agency is not able to solicit funds, but the Board can solicit funds for the Endowment Fund. The Commissioner mentioned inviting the Assistant Attorney General, Ms. Pam Beckner, to speak with the Board about use of the endowment funds and contributing to DBVI. Mr. Leo Kim asked if there has been any active fundraising for the endowment fund. The Commissioner said no, but there is nothing prohibiting that from happening. Mr. Leo Kim asked if there was a way to get a written opinion from the Assistant Attorney General for board members to solicit fundraising giving. If the Board agrees, the Commissioner will approach Beckner with her opinion in writing, different than a written AG opinion letter.

Chairman Ken Jessup asked if the Board is interested in sending a letter to the Governor in regards to paying for DBVI drivers. The Chairman said he will meet with DBVI staff and craft a letter to send and then he is able to deliver the letter to the Governor and, also, the Appropriations Committee. Many members voiced support of crafting such a letter and sending to the Governor.

Action Items

Request from Access Virginia for \$5,000 Donation

Access Virginia works with children who are blind/ vision impaired and put on a play in Norfolk. It allows the kids to see there are other kids in the same school system or area that are blind. They get to socialize, relate and put on this play as they learn the ins and outs of play acting. Each productions normally costs between \$7,000 – 8000. Access Virginia is asking for \$5,000 as they can come up with the remaining monies. They are looking at growing into Richmond and other areas and have a number of TVIs working with the children and others donating their time. Ms. Debra Helms made motion, Mr. Mazen Basrawi seconded, passed unanimously.

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Request from Goodwill Industries of the Valley for \$3,000 Donation

Goodwill Industries of the Valley is requesting a donation for large print calendars. Mr. Frank Rogan and other Goodwill employees connected via phone to speak about this request. In the past the Board has funded large print calendars from NewVision. These calendars have been well received and available to individuals with vision impairments. Chairman Ken Jessup asked how long the Agency and the Board has been assisting with sponsorship for these calendars. Ms. Debra Helms mentioned funds have been given for almost 20 years, combined from the Agency and the Board.

Mr. Mazen Basrawi asked who receives the calendars and Goodwill staff shared how these calendars are sent to a number of lists that is maintained by NewVision, which has merged under Goodwill Industries of the Valley as a program. Chairman Ken Jessup asked the cost of 5,000 calendars; Mr. Frank Rogan responded the cost is about \$10,000.

Ms. Debra Helms spoke about how meaningful these calendars are to low vision individuals. The Commissioner spoke about other options if a person needs a Braille calendar and where to get them. Mr. Mazen Basrawi asked, in a growing world of technology if these calendars are still as useful as they once were. Dr. Rick Mitchell spoke from the RT/ IL perspective and how teachers have expressed that these calendars are used by an older population. Mr. Leo Kim made motion, Mr. Mazen Basrawi seconded and Ms. Debra Helms recused herself; motion passed. A tagline will need to be added, "Brought to you by the Virginia Endowment for the Blind...."

Reports

Commissioner's Report – *Commissioner Ray Hopkins*

The Commissioner reported that RSA is still without a Commissioner as the person nominated, Mark Schultz, has not had a confirmation hearing. This means the RSA is being managed by career staff, but it would be very beneficial to have a Commissioner to provide opinion on matters. One issue that DBVI is experiencing is prior approval for usage of federal funds; RSA has received some input, but an official opinion would be more helpful. This process is very tedious and in the mind of many, needless. This change occurred when WIOA went into effect and DOE said the previous waiver was not accepted for the future.

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The Commissioner mentioned the appropriation bill that funds the VR, RT/IL programs, and how it would be beneficial to have a budget that passes and not just simply a CR. At this time we have not received a grant letter, but expect it soon.

VR reallocation funds, funds at the end of the FY year, grantees must release funds they will not be able to match/ spend; last year these funds were greatly reduced and DBVI received less than half of the requested amount. This year, there was not enough money to fund all requests, but VA received what they requested, \$1M.

DBVI is continually keeping tabs on its financial situation and is currently in the process of submitting budget packets to the Secretary's Office. These must be loaded into an online system by next week, but the Cabinet Secretary must approve before upload. DBVI has a few requests, including funding drivers.

Enterprise Division Report – *Deputy Commissioner Matt Koch*

Written report submitted. Additional information follows.

Mr. Matt Koch made sure all Board members are receiving the Weekly Report from VIB. Mr. Koch asked if there were any questions from his report.

Chairman Ken Jessup questioned about the Randolph-Sheppard Program and the locations operating as independent businesses. Mr. Matt Koch explained that DBVI, the state licensing entity, provides secured locations, training, initial machines and maintenance to vendors. There are not initial costs to the vendor and in the past few years changes have occurred including that vendors are now responsible for several additional centralized services. The control rests with the licensed manager and it is their business to run and manage. This allows for vendors to feel as though they have more ownership and responsibility of the business.

Services Division Report – *Deputy Commissioner Richard Mitchell*

Written report submitted.

Dr. Rick Mitchell mentioned the reduction in staff that took place earlier in the year. He mentioned how staff are still meeting the needs of individuals receiving services. Previously, all services, Vocational Rehabilitation, Rehabilitation Teaching and Independent Living, Education Services, and Orientation and Mobility, were all served out of the same Regional

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Office. However, after this reduction, there has been a shift in regional offices and services provided based on caseload sizes.

Dr. Mitchell asked for any questions. There were none.

Administration Division Report – *Deputy Commissioner Wallica Gaines*

Written report submitted. Additional information follows.

Ms. Wallica Gaines asked for any questions. There were none.

Endowment Fund Report – *Deputy Commissioner Wallica Gaines*

Ms. Wallica Gaines gave a summary of the market value at the end of August is over \$6M. There is not a Word version of the document, but it will be sent out if the PDF is not accessible. These numbers include the amounts spent from the last meeting.

Ms. Gaines mentioned how she has been communicating with the Assistant Attorney General and U.S. Trust about guidance on how to view these funds. U.S. Trust states these funds are public funds; however, DBVI went back to the Code and showed these funds are from private entities and are not required to follow state protocol. However, U.S. Trust responded that they view these funds as public due to the relationship of the Board and the Agency. The Assistant Attorney General views these funds as public as they are managed by a governor appointed board.

In conversation, U.S. Trust cited the Patriot Act as reason to not manage public funds, but this is specific to U.S. Trust. There is a draft RFP to be filled out to move forward in this process to find another entity to manage these funds. Ms. Wallica Gaines has crafted the language, but the Board needs to review to ensure everything reflects their wishes. The Commissioner asked for the last approved investment policy and discussion took place on how to invest and how best to move forward. Mr. Leo Kim stressed the importance on looking at the fee that will be charged to managing this account.

Old Business

None.

Future Action Items & New Business

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Next meeting on December 11th scheduled to be held at VRCBVI with a tour scheduled. Mr. Mazen Basrawi asked if there was a way to reschedule timing of the meeting. Discussion took place about how to better accommodate members schedules. He also suggested having a phone line connected for the public to call and participate or give public comment. Another suggestion was to encourage current VRCBVI students to attend and offer public comment.

Adjournment

Ms. Debra Helms motion to adjourn and Mr. Mazen Basrawi seconded.

Meeting adjourned.

Next Meeting (s): December 11, 2018
March 26, 2019
June 25, 2019