

**VIRGINIA STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL FOR THE BLIND AND VISION IMPAIRED  
Quarterly Meeting**

**DRAFT MINUTES**

**March 10, 2023**

**397 Azalea Avenue, Richmond, VA 23227**

**SRC Members in Attendance**

**Alexa Bowe**, Arlington, Representative of Business, Industry and Labor

**Leelynn Untalan Brady**, Suffolk, Representative of Statewide Independent Living Council

**Edna Johnson**, Alexandria, Former or Current Recipient of Vocational Rehabilitation Services

**Liang Liao**, Richmond, DBVI, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, Ex-Officio Member

**Joliefawn Liddell**, Richmond, Representative of the Client Assistance Program

**Ricardo Lizama**, Arlington, Representative of Disability Advocacy Group

**Marianne Moore**, Richmond, Representative of the Virginia Department of Education

**Chanthen Nene**, Manassas, Representative of Disability Advocacy Group via zoom from Manassas due to person reasons

**Rachael Rounds**, Midlothian, Representative of Community Rehabilitation Services Program

**Milford Stern**, Roanoke, Representative of Business, Industry, and Labor

**SRC Members Not Able to Attend**

**Annette Hyde**, Radiant, Representative of the Workforce Council due to work obligations

**Heidi Lawyer**, Henrico, Representative of Parent Training & Information Center (PEATC) due to medical reasons

**DBVI Staff Present**

**Pam Cato**, Deputy Commissioner of Services

**Deborah Collard**, Senior Program Analyst

**Megan Hall**, Director of Vocational Rehabilitation and Workforce Services

**Maggie Mills**, Executive Assistant to Commissioner Mitchell

**Rick Mitchell**, Richmond, Commissioner, DBVI, Ex-Officio Member

**Ashley West**, Executive Assistant to Deputy Commissioners – Recorder of Minutes

**ASL Interpreters**

**Bernice McCormack**

**Stephanie Oliver**

**Public**

**Justin Sheets**

**Call to Order / Welcome and Introductions**

Chair Bowe called the meeting to order. A roundtable of introductions took place. Quorum was met.

**Adoption of Agenda**

Chair Bowe suggested one change to the Agenda under New Business. Chair Bowe recommended a hearing officers item to review the suggested addition of a hearing officer. Mr. Stern motioned to adopt

the change to the Agenda and Ms. Moore seconded. All were in favor.

### **Adoption of December 9, 2022, Meeting Minutes**

Ms. Johnson moved to accept Minutes as presented. All were in favor.

### **Public Comment**

Justin Sheets was introduced as the new Assistant Director of Vocational Rehabilitation at Department of the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI). Justin looks forward to learning more about the SRC. Justin has been with DBVI for almost two months.

### **Commissioner's Report – Commissioner Rick Mitchell**

Written report provided VR Agency Report. Additional comments are as follows:

Commissioner Mitchell gave an update on our federal partners in Rehabilitation Services Administration, a commissioner has not been appointed for this position and looking for ways to make this partnership more effective by looking for opportunities to grow and expand this program. The Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI) is focusing on services to the Hispanic population in a stronger way and how the agency can better serve this population. DBVI is embarking on a new project of updating agency videos that will expand on agency programs within the services division, overall information about the agency, and the Enterprise Division. This project is expected to be completed by July 2023. A full-time communications director position has been established, to focus on community outreach and a stronger social media presence. Commissioner Mitchell gave an overview of the Enterprise Division and the Randolph Sheppard program within this division. The Enterprise Division does work with AbilityOne at the Virginia Industries for the Blind (VIB) Charlottesville facility. Mr. Stern asked if the new DBVI videos, and advertising will be in different languages. Currently, the DBVI website can translate in other languages, and the Administration Division is looking at how we can better serve those whose English is not the primary language. For the current DBVI videos, the communications director will be asked about this.

### **Deputy Commissioner's Report – Pam Cato**

Written report provided VR Report. Additional comments are as follows:

Ms. Cato reviewed several of the vacancies in the Services Division and gave an update on the recruitment status.

Justin Sheets was introduced as new Assistant VR Director.

Ashley West was introduced as new Executive Assistant in the Commissioner's Office and will be the new DBVI Staff support for the SRC.

Domonique Lawless was named the Director of Low Vision and Orientation and Mobility Services.

Caren Phipps, Director of Services for Children and Youth, officially retires May 1, 2023, and Deputy Commissioner Cato will be the primary contact for these services.

A round table discussion was held in reference to filling key leadership roles within DBVI. Ms. Johnson welcomed the opportunity for leadership training and personal development when taking on leadership roles within DBVI. Chair Bowe suggested apprenticeship opportunities with DBVI when available to work on leadership development.

### **VR Program Update – Megan Hall**

Written report provided VR Report. Additional comments are as follows:

Ms. Hall gave an update on various VR programs that included pre-employment transition, Android Answers, peer mentoring program with Virginia Commonwealth University and Blind Design program in partnership with Virginia Tech. Ms. Hall highlighted mentor programs within VR and working with individuals who have been through some of these programs and being able to help those who are starting out and or struggling within the program.

DBVI is partnering with the VA. Department of Aging and Rehabilitation Services (DARS) on Pathways to Careers grant, as well as the University of Virginia (UVA) Pathways project to target specific populations to increase the number of hires. Ms. Hall shared information in reference to the Florida Lighthouse Project in which customer service positions are 100% remote and is looking into implementing a similar program here in Virginia with the Enterprise Division.

Virginia Workforce Development is rolling out a new intake portal in order to better streamline the career work system and to have a referral sent out to our partners in a timely manner.

### **Old and New Business**

#### **Customer Satisfaction – Deborah Collard**

Ms. Collard went over statistics as they relate to the customer service satisfaction surveys and reported on the updated ways that counselors are using these surveys on an ongoing basis versus just at the end of their cases. Number of questions on the survey were changed from 19 to 9 which allows for less time to complete the form and more surveys are completed and returned. As of 2022, DBVI has a 40% response rate for these surveys, which is above the national average.

Chair Bowe asked if the customer satisfaction surveys included any individual demographic information, and as of right now they do not. If demographic information needs to be obtained, it can be manually pulled from their case file. Chair Bowe felt having individual demographic information would be useful for future programs and to help serve as an indicator of types of gaps there may be in services that are provided and if the feedback is positive or negative. Ms. Collard pointed out that DBVI does a comprehensive assessment every three years, and on that report, demographics are broken down for the populations that are served. The next report is set to take place in 2025.

#### **Proposed language to the Council members regarding the new FOIA Amendment**

In the December 2022 meeting Susan Davis proposed new language and opportunity to have an all virtual SRC meeting once a year. Currently, meetings are not recorded due to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), and these meeting are open to the public. For this meeting, the Council is being asked to have one all virtual meeting once a year. The members of the Council will have voting authority, and this virtual meeting can be flexible in dates.

Ms. Brady moved to accept the proposed language to the Council members regarding the new FIOA Amendment and an all-virtual meeting as presented. Mr. Stern seconded the motion.

#### **Volunteers for annual report**

Chair Bowe asked for volunteers to create the SRC annual report. Guidance will state being submitted as early as July and deadline will be given before the end of the year. Ms. Brady volunteered to create the report with Mr. Stern helping to gather the information, as well as Ms. Moore can assist in reviewing

success stories for report. *\*\*Mr. Stern asked for the next meeting, there be some guidance as to how the council would like this report structured and what information should be in the report as a whole and guidance and consistency should be identified.*

### **Amend Hearing Officers**

Megan Hall shared that one hearing officer needs to be voted on to have three hearing officers versus two hearing officers. Sarah Freeman was the hearing officer that was put forth to be voted on as a hearing officer. Council discussed the negative repercussions if only two hearing officers were available. Council addressed training process to become a hearing officer and the recruiting process to get more hearing officers recruited. After consideration, Chair Bowe motioned to keep Ms. Freeman as a hearing officer. Mr. Stern moved to accept Ms. Freeman and Ms. Liddell seconded.

### **CSAVR Spring Conference April 15-19, 2023, Bethesda, Maryland**

Chair Bowe shared that the CSAVR is scheduled for April 15 – 19 and NCSAB is April 20 and 21 in Bethesda, MD. Any member that is interested in attending, please send information to Chair Bowe and Ashley West.

### **Being a more active Council member**

Chair Bowe addressed Council members whose term is expiring in September 2023. If seeking reappointment, please be sure to get application in as early as possible. Business cannot be conducted, and quorum will not be met for voting if there are not enough Council members.

Chair Bowe also asked Council members to consider their role and how active they have been in the Council and look for different opportunities to be more active as a Council member.

### **Quorum and attendance**

Chair Bowe reiterated that in accordance with the Council bylaws, virtual attendance needs to be pre-approved by the Chair in advance of a Council meeting. For the next meeting, a deadline for attendance will be given, which allows for advanced planning and that quorum will be met for voting.

### **New Business**

Ms. Johnson provided information about 2030 and 2040 workforce and special employment programs looking for recruits for the Department of Defense. Focus on encouraging knowledge and more college graduates being exposed to federal service. Currently, not seeing engagement in targeted population, such as the Presidential Fellows program, Management program, summer internship program, and the McCain Fellows program. A great deal of innovation is being done in partnership with Federal service.

### **Representative Roundtable**

Several of the SRC members provided highlights on the organizations they represent.

### **Adjourn**

Ms. Brady moved to end the meeting. Ms. Liddell seconded the motion. All were in favor.

### **Next SRC Quarterly Meeting**

June 9, 2023