

Virginia Board for the Blind and Vision Impaired
March 24 Briefing *Draft* Minutes
March 24, 2020, at 12:00 PM - 2:15 PM
Teleconference

Board Attendees

Bonnie Atwood, Mazen Basrawi, Paul D’Addario, Debra Helms, Dr. Leo Kim, Barbara McCarthy.

Board Members Absent

Ken Jessup, Chair

Members of the Public

None

DBVI Staff to the Board

Wallica Gaines, Deputy Commissioner for Administration; Raymond Hopkins, Commissioner; Matt Koch, Deputy Commissioner for Enterprises; Maggie Mills, Executive Assistant to Services Division; Dr. Rick Mitchell, Deputy Commissioner for Services.

Call to Order and Welcome

Vice Chair Mazen Basrawi called the briefing to order and took roll call.

Program Spotlight

Commissioner Hopkins gave a broad overview of the history of DBVI. He asked the Board for their thoughts on partnering with the Agency in various activities to recognize and celebrate its upcoming 100th year of service. Barbara McCarthy offered to partner in creating an audiovisual recording of the history of the Agency to be published on the DBVI website. The Board is interested in including how the Agency has changed in its approach and emphasis of services over the years and to emphasize that in the beginning there was the tradition of home teaching but not a lot of thought about individuals who were blind going to work. The history will include legislations such as the Smith-Fess Act of 1920 and how DBVI provided services during segregation. The Commissioner envisions the recording to include interviews with significant individuals involved with the Agency through the years.

The Commissioner’s hope is that the Board, with DBVI, will spend this year planning for the 100th anniversary so that commencing in year 2021, DBVI’s 99th year, there will be a series of celebratory activities leading up to the 100th year anniversary. The Board meeting, at the end of 2021, might be cumulated with a summit or large conference, inviting inclusive groups of people, providing various types of services for the blind, vision impaired, deaf and hard of hearing. Here they will consider services needed going into the second century of DBVI. The hope is that as a result of this summit a report would be created summarizing what was learned, what the needs of Virginians are and will be, what DBVI needs to do, as well as the community, to meet these needs. In turn these recommendations would be presented to the Governor’s office for consideration. Funding would be needed for the use of a venue and possibly an event planner or facilitator for this summit. This is

an opportunity to raise the profile of the DBVI Board in the community. Commissioner Hopkins encourages Board members to assist in the planning and discussion of these activities. He asked the Board to consider fundraisers such as cocktail parties and legislative receptions with stakeholders as a way of outreach, education and stakeholder engagement.

Public Comment

None.

Business Items

The Board reviewed the Briefing Agenda.

Consent of the December 2019 minutes has been tabled for the June 2020 meeting.

Pending Business

Barbara McCarthy suggested that the Board make a contribution to Virginia Voice. This is tabled until a time that the Board can vote.

Emerging Issues

None.

Adjournment

Next meeting: June 23, 2020

Attachment
Virginia Board for the Blind and Vision Impaired
Teleconference
March 24, 2020, at Noon

ReportsAgency Report - *Commissioner Ray Hopkins*

Board funding vote for summer camp has been postponed as the Board is “meeting” via teleconference as a result of the current directives from the Governor due to COVID-19. Applications will still be accepted.

The Agency’s focus in the last few weeks has been on COVID-19 and the Agency’s response to it.

Governor Northam’s proposed budget for the next biennial included \$3M per annum in general funds for VR. It appears that what came out of the General Assembly is \$1.5 M for the next two years, and includes funding for independent living services up to \$400,000, includes funds to contribute to the memorandum of understanding with DARS, plus funding for infrastructure for improvements for the Azalea complex in the second year of the biennial which include funds to renovate the LRC. The funding percentage increased approximately 67% in terms of general funds. The pandemic has had an effect on the economy, so changes to the budget may be expected. It is possible a special session may be called to address issues caused by the pandemic.

The Agency has activated its Crisis Management Team as identified in its Continuity of Operations Plan. Wallica Gaines has been organizing meetings and has been overseeing the Agency’s Continuity of Operations planning. Daily status calls are being held with the management team and department representatives. These meetings cover any new directives from the Governor, the Commissioner of Health, and the Emergency Operations Center. Under Virginia code the Agency is required to have representatives assigned to support the Emergency Operations Center. Wallica Gaines is the Agency liaison for Virginia Emergency Support Team (VEST) with Dr. Mitchell as her backup. Additional staff have also been assigned for other support positions. Updates are posted on DBVI website and the Agency’s Facebook page. The Commissioner recommended the Board follow these pages where many resources have been shared regarding the Agency and COVID-19.

Much of the Agency staff are teleworking. A Fairfax office was closed yesterday due to a State employee from another agency testing positive for COVID-19. There have been many closures in the Enterprise Division.

Wallica Gaines reported on the steps the Agency is taking to prevent COVID-19 exposure to its employees which includes sanitizing buildings, provision of hand sanitizer, having staff clean their work areas throughout the day, with extra care taken on high-touch areas. There are no residents on

campus. VRCBVI is no longer providing in-person instruction. VITA is not prepared to accommodate VPN to the high number of State employees teleworking, so there is prioritization related to the

number of staff who can access sites behind firewalls. An emergency order of laptops has been placed for those employees who are currently using desktop computers. Construction projects will continue on campus, but the crews will be exercising social distancing. No workers who are sick are permitted on site.

The Agency is working through processes on voucher processing and other financial documents while staff are teleworking.

Services Division Report - Deputy Commissioner Rick Mitchell

Effective March 13 VRCBVI closed its dorm and ceased instruction in the facility until April 6. The VRCBVI staff has been challenged to provide information and instruction in alternative ways, such as computer training online and Braille instruction over the telephone. Melody Roane, Director of the Rehabilitation Center for the Blind and Vision Impaired, has been tasked with creating a community call-in opportunity to have conversations about blindness which would be open to the displaced students and the community at large. This will be an opportunity to provide information to recipients of services and stakeholders, inviting them to ask questions and for the Agency to be a resource in another way. Teleworking staff have been tasked to engage with their clientele to ensure they are staying in touch with their caseloads, letting their clients know the Agency is open and still offering whatever services it can. The Agency discontinued in-person meetings in response to COVID-19, and staff are no longer making home visits or visiting long-term facilities.

Financial Report - Deputy Commissioner Walica Gaines

The LGIP fund balance on its last statement on February 28 was \$6,205,624.20, earning \$8,444.52 with a return of 1.6 percent. No principal lost.

Enterprise Division Report - Deputy Commissioner Matt Koch

As facilities close or as facilities are restricted employees and food operators are having to take time off or lose revenue. Most positions are not able to be conducted via teleworking. As of today five facilities have closed and four are in restricted status. Out of 179 employees, 17% are on leave due to public health emergency restrictions or closures, 23% are teleworking, 60% are still in stores and manufacturing facilities at hosted contract sites.

VIB is working to find new suppliers of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), exam gloves, and masks. Several locations have had positive COVID-tests so some employees are in self-quarantine. As stores continue to close, revenue is lost.

VEB has had a number of facilities close or have restricted hours, because they are in federal office buildings. The restricted hours have created some new opportunities. The CIA now has a night shift. so the deli has now converted into a micro-market self-service at night and a deli during the day. VEB is reviewing Business Interruption Insurance.

Finance Committee

Dr. Leo Kim shared that the Endowment Fund Grant Request Guideline has been finalized and is available on the DBVI website. The Board was in favor of extending the April 1 deadline as a way to

allow future applications to come in considering that it is not known when the Board can vote again. The DBVI website will be updated to indicate that the deadline will be extended due to COVID-19.

The Board discussed the Endowment Fund and the current market change. Further discussion about market options with higher returns will continue at a later date.

Wallica Gaines shared that the Board can choose its own investment strategy or hire a consultant for that purpose. The Board will decide how it wants to move forward when it is able to vote.

Wallica will contact Beth Prunkl, DARS Procurement Manager Officer, about solicitation of a financial advisor. Dr. Leo Kim recommends hiring an advisor, and at the next meeting that the Board is permitted, vote on how the Board would like to move forward.