

---

**MINUTES**  
**DBVI STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL**  
**Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired**  
Held Via Zoom Teleconference  
September 11, 2020

**SRC Attendees**

Christine Appert, Chair, Charlottesville, Former Recipient of Vocational Rehabilitation Services; Tammy Burns, Midlothian, Representative of Virginia's Parent Educational Advocacy Training Center; Irene Conlin, Virginia Beach, Representative of an Individual who is blind, has multiple disabilities, and has difficulty representing him or herself or is unable due to disabilities to represent him or herself; Wanda Council, Newport News, VA, Representative of the Virginia Department of Education; Justin Graves, Fairfax, Representative of Business, Industry and Labor; Ray Hopkins, Richmond, Commissioner, DBVI, Ex-Officio Member; Ken Jessup, Virginia Beach, Representative of Disability Advocacy Group; Larysa Kautz, Alexandria, Representative of Community Rehabilitation Services Program Provider; Mark Roane, Vice-Chair, Richmond, Former Recipient of Vocational Rehabilitation Services; Shelesha Taylor, Richmond, Representative of the federally mandated Client Assistance Program

**Members Absent**

Julie Akers, Representative of Business, Industry and Labor; Jenny McKenzie, Roanoke, Representative of Business, Industry and Labor

**DBVI Staff to the SRC**

Pam Cato, Director of Vocational Rehabilitation and Workforce Services; Maggie Mills, Executive Assistant for Services; Richard Mitchell, Deputy Commissioner for Services

**Guest**

Deborah Collard, Program Analyst, DBVI

**Public Attending**

None

**Call to Order / Welcome and Introductions**

Chair Appert called the meeting to order. Ms. Cato welcomed and identified those on the call. Quorum was met.

**Adoption of Agenda**

Mr. Roane moved to adopt the proposed agenda; Ms. Kautz seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

**Approval of June 2020 Meeting Minutes**

Ms. Kautz moved to accept the June 2020 meeting minutes as presented; Ms. Council seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

---

**Commissioner's Report** – *Commissioner Ray Hopkins*

Written report provided. Additional comments are as follows:

DBVI has continued to provide services during the summer with safety protocols in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Offices that were once closed in March due to the virus are now reopening and the Agency is again interacting with the public delivering services across the Commonwealth. The Library Resource Center and most Virginia Industries for the Blind (VIB) locations have continued to operate with individuals on-site throughout the state of emergency. VIB has been a part of the emergency supply chain providing PPE to consumers throughout the pandemic. Agency instructors are once again visiting homes but on a limited as needed basis. The Virginia Rehabilitation Center for the Blind and Vision Impaired (VRCBVI) is reopening its campus doors on September 13 with a small number of students. Sixty-seven percent of the blind vendors have been negatively affected due to facilities closing or because of a substantial reduction of services due to consumer traffic, but we are seeing a gradual reopening of federal and state buildings with limited workers.

Members of Congress are now meeting, and it is our hope that the Secretary of Education's request for flexibilities related to Pre Employment Transition funds will be approved. There is also a waiver pending that would allow DBVI to use VR funds to restock vending facilities. There has been a substantial loss of product as unpurchased stock is now expired and needs to be replenished.

The Agency is also hoping that \$20M to support the Randolph-Sheppard Vending Program will be included in the funding authorization that will carry government agencies through the rest of the calendar year. There has been an agreement made between the Speaker of the House and the White House on a Continuing Resolution.

The Virginia General Assembly is now in a Special Session amending the FY21-22 budget, so funds the Agency was expecting may be unallotted.

DBVI's State Plan was conditionally approved by the federal government. Now the federal government is expecting the Commonwealth to address what it saw as deficiencies in the Commonwealth State Plan. RSA, along with its partners, have identified that Virginia is not in compliance, because there is not a representative of the Title 4 Programs serving as a member of the State Workforce Development Board. Virginia has chosen to address this by allowing the Secretary of Health and Human Resources to appoint a designee.

The federal government goes through a process every year where state agencies are asked if there are monies that they will be unable to match and spend. DBVI did request \$800,000 of reallocated funds which were returned to DBVI.

**Deputy Commissioner's Report** – *Dr. Richard Mitchell*

Written report provided. Additional comments are as follows:

The Services Division continues to monitor the positivity rates throughout the Commonwealth. If an area's positivity rate gets too high, services are scaled back to Phase 2 of the Agency's reopening plan which would prohibit home visits. Most Regional Offices are at Phase 3. Home visits are on an as needed basis; otherwise, services are being conducted virtually. Reopening plans have been

---

created for each of the program areas as well as VRCBVI.

The Services Division is currently recruiting for a Regional Manager in the Roanoke Regional Office. The Roanoke Regional Manager previously there has moved into the Richmond Office VR Counselor position.

The Agency has begun using GovDelivery which is a web-based e-mail subscription management system that allows members of the public to subscribe to news and information about DBVI.

### **VR Program Update** – Pam Cato

Written report provided. Additional comments are as follows:

The DBVI Business Relations Team continues to offer Career Connections in response to the requested training from our active career seekers and has received a great deal of positive feedback.

Since DBVI was not able to offer Leap into Linux this year, it offered a virtual pilot program STEM Warriors to 14 DBVI PreETS students. This was delivered by Intellectual Point. We are looking to replicate this in the future.

The Agency continues to monitor the wait list for VR services.

The SRC has a few upcoming seat vacancies as well as some members' terms ending. Ms. Cato has been communicating with the Governor's Office regarding new and re-appointments. A SRC New Member Orientation will probably be scheduled prior to the December 2020 SRC Quarterly Meeting. Current SRC members are encouraged to present at this orientation. Ms. Council and Mr. Graves both have second terms ending September 30, 2020. Mr. Jessup's term expires September 30, 2020; however, the Governor's Office is working to place Mr. Jessup in the vacant SILC seat.

### **Old and/or New Business**

#### **Consumer Satisfaction Survey** – Deborah Collard

Edits to the FFY2021 draft Consumer Satisfaction Survey include modifications in question wording for simplification or clarity, and previous questions being combined or eliminated. There are currently 11 questions in the draft with 2 of those being optional or not requiring an answer leaving 9 questions to be completed that are not open ended or requiring a written response. The estimated response time is also down to 5 minutes or less from 10 minutes in the current survey.

Ms. Cato and Ms. Collard used the feedback received from the SRC members in revising the Consumer Satisfaction Survey. The goal is to start using the survey in the new federal fiscal year in October, and the hope is to increase response rate and get valuable feedback as a result of this new survey. The survey invitation is sent by email with a link to the survey; however, in the message a phone number is provided so individuals can call for assistance in completing the survey. Feedback is still welcome.

---

**Update on SRC Annual Report** - *Christine Appert/Justin Graves*

The majority of requested contributions from the various Agency departments has been received. The Annual Report is basically the same layout as previous years. End of fiscal year statistics need to be added. By next week, Mr. Graves will share approximately 20 success stories with Ms. Appert. These success stories will then be shared with the SRC members at the December meeting.

**SRC Chair/Vice Chair** - *Christine Appert*

Ms. Appert, current Chair, and Mr. Roane, current Vice Chair, are both eligible to serve an additional year. Both shared that they felt it beneficial that an organization have consistent leadership. There were no alternate nominations or volunteers. Mr. Jessup moved to elect Ms. Appert as Chair and Mr. Roane as Vice Chair for year 2021-22. Mr. Graves seconded the motion. All were in favor.

**Representative Round Table****Tammy Burns - Parent Education Advocacy Training Center (PEATC)**

The PEATC has been extremely busy assisting families during this pandemic. PEATC has developed a back to school planning guide document that assists parents in planning an Individualized Education Program which is available on the PEATC website. The organization has been doing some small in-person trainings and workshops keeping with COVID-19 safety protocols. The PEATC website is currently under construction for easier navigation.

**Wanda Council – Virginia Department of Education (VDOE)**

The VDOE has converted in-person training to virtual formats for professional development events during the summer and will continue to do so for the next few months. As of September 8 all the schools in Virginia have reopened in either in person, virtual or hybrid instruction for all students including those with disabilities. An interactive map is available on the VDOE website that indicates what type of instruction is provided throughout the Commonwealth. Ms. Council has been involved with the Virginia Vision Impairment Training Program which was implemented on August 18 and will continue through November 6, 2020, providing weekly virtual training sessions for the planning team that includes staff from DBVI as well as other organizations. There is no cost to participants. The VDOE website has been updated for easier access to COVID-19 related information, including FAQ's and information regarding students' social and emotional well-being. VDOE is also using GovDelivery to share information with professionals and families.

**Ken Jessup – American Council for the Blind (ACB)**

The Commonwealth committed to making the November 2020 election accessible and safe for voters who cannot mark a paper ballot privately and independently due to disabilities such as blindness. As a result of the lawsuit and preliminary injunction filed by several voters with disabilities, the American Council of the Blind of Virginia, and the National Federation of the Blind of Virginia (NFB), Virginia has agreed to provide an absentee ballot option that is accessible and can be marked electronically in time for the November election.

---

**Larysa Kautz – Melwood**

Melwood has been working through some regulatory obstacles across state lines and jurisdictions in regard to providing services during the pandemic. Maryland has started some small in-person pods, about 70% of clients have been served virtually, providing services outdoors whenever possible. The organization has been working to get technology in the hands of the clients so they don't feel isolated and alone during this pandemic. Virginia DARS is not permitting in-person services at this time.

**Shelesha Taylor – Disability Law Center of Virginia (dLCV)**

The dLCV worked with the ACB and NFB to ensure voters with visual impairments have access to the polls and are able to vote electronically and vote privately in this upcoming November election. Typically, this type of litigation takes months. The dLCV has been working to ensure people in assisted living facilities, and anyone with disabilities, are registered to vote and have been providing resources so they are able vote. There are currently about 50 new laws surrounding voting right now, so several fact sheets are being distributed across the state to people with disabilities.

The organization is virtually monitoring COVID-19 cases in children's psychiatric rehabilitative training facilities ensuring children and adults in these facilities are receiving needed services. Ms. Taylor is moving into a new position with the dLCV and will no longer be involved with the Client Assistance Program. Ms. Taylor will communicate with the SRC members about the dLCV seat prior to the December SRC Quarterly Meeting.

**Adjournment**

Mr. Jessup motioned to end the meeting. Mr. Graves seconded the motion. All were in favor.

The next meeting is scheduled for December 11, 2020.