

**DRAFT MINUTES**  
**DBVI STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL**  
March 12, 2021  
Held Via Zoom Videoconference

**SRC Members Present**

**Christine Appert**, Chair, Charlottesville,  
Former Recipient of Vocational Rehabilitation  
Services  
**Alexa Bowe**, Newport News, Representative of  
Business, Industry and Labor  
**Ray Hopkins**, Richmond, Commissioner, DBVI,  
Ex-Officio Member  
**Annette Hyde**, Radiant, Representative of the  
Workforce Council  
**Prem Jadhvani**, Leesburg, Representative of  
Business, Industry, and Labor  
**Edna Johnson**, Alexandria, Former or Current  
Recipient of Vocational Rehabilitation Services

**Larysa Kautz**, Alexandria, Representative of  
Community Rehabilitation Services Program  
Provider  
**Liang Liao**, Richmond, DBVI Vocational  
Rehabilitation Counselor  
**Marianne Moore**, Richmond, Representative of  
the Virginia Department of Education  
**Chanthen Nene**, Manassas, Representative of  
Disability Advocacy Group  
**Mark Roane**, Vice-Chair, Richmond, Former  
Recipient of Vocational Rehabilitation Services  
**Laura Sinclair**, Richmond, Representative of  
the federally mandated Client Assistance  
Program  
**Milford Stern**, Roanoke, Representative of  
Business, Industry, and Labor

**SRC Members Absent**

**Julie Akers**, Radford, Representative of  
Business, Industry and Labor  
**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  
**Ken Jessup**, Virginia Beach, Representative of  
the Statewide Independent Living Council  
**Ricardo Lizama**, Arlington, Representative of  
Disability Advocacy Group

**DBVI Staff Present**

**Pam Cato**, Director of Vocational Rehabilitation  
and Workforce Services  
**Maggie Mills**, Executive Assistant for Services

**Richard Mitchell**, Deputy Commissioner for  
Services

**Public**

Elizabeth Patacca, Department for Aging and

## Rehabilitative Services

### **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. Moore seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

### **Approval of December 2020 Meeting Minutes**

Ms. Kautz moved to accept the December 11, 2020, SRC Quarterly Meeting minutes as presented. Mr. Roane seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

### **Public Comment**

None

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

Written report provided. Additional comments are as follows:

Commissioner Hopkins welcomed the new members and noted the diverse skills and experiences of the SRC members. He shared that monthly updates are emailed to the SRC and to the Virginia Board for the Blind and Vision Impaired to advise of DBVI (Agency) events, announcements and programs. If any member wishes to learn more about any item in the updates, let that be known.

Last year the General Assembly approved almost \$2M in general funds for Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and Independent Living (IL) programs; however, as a result of the pandemic these funds were unallotted. The Agency did receive approximately \$400,000 in funding for IL services, but is struggling to match the grant. The primary reason an increase in funding was requested was because VR has been working under an Order of Selection for a number of years. The Agency closed all service categories which placed potential clients on a wait list, because the Agency did not have the resources to serve all categories. As a result of the pandemic the Agency was not able to directly engage and interact as usual. VR expenditures slowed down so the Agency decided to bring all clients off the waitlist. However, without the additional funding originally allotted, the Agency will likely be back in the situation once again of having to place clients on a waitlist. A request for a line of credit for the Virginia Industries for the Blind (VIB) was also denied by the General Assembly. There is some movement by the General Assembly on DBVI's request of the idea of bringing about a hiring process where people who have certain disabilities may be hired in a different manner and less competitive way. A bill was passed in December for the Randolph Sheppard Vending Facility Program to help cover losses

incurred during the pandemic. Any of these funds left after covering losses may be applied to other aspects of the program.

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

Written report provided. Additional comments are as follows:

Deputy Commissioner Mitchell shared general information about DBVI's six Regional Offices. Ben Bowman was hired to fill the vacant Roanoke Regional Manager position. He started work on March 10. Dr. Mitchell reported that in-person client visits have resumed in some areas of the state as COVID-19 positivity levels are dropping. VRCBVI students have been in virtual training since November and will return to in-person classes March 15. Planning is underway for summer programs some of which the Agency hopes to either have in person or hold as a hybrid of virtual and in person.

### **VR Program Update – Pam Cato**

Written report provided. Additional comments are as follows:

In 2020 the SRC Council provided feedback to improve DBVI's Consumer Satisfaction Survey process. Responses are up 18% from last year and the time to complete the survey dropped by 50%. A Customer Service Representative has been hired in a part-time position to help offer assistance to clients who need help in completing the surveys.

Megan Hall, a former SRC member, has been recently hired as Assistant Director of Vocational Rehabilitation. Tish Harris has moved into a full-time position as Pre-Employment Transition Coordinator and Career Pathway Coordinator.

Formerly called the Robotics Academy, Leap into Linux is another opportunity the Agency is planning for our students to learn about Linux which runs about 90% of the Internet. The hope is that this will be in person the end of June. Additional events and academics are coming up in the next few months. A national trainer has been contracted to work with the VR team for six months focusing on engaging with youth.

DBVI's Business Relations group plans to speak at a future SRC Meeting so the Council can learn more about what they do.

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

#### **Annual Report – Christine Appert**

Chair Appert reported on the Annual Report requirement and what is involved in compiling it. She requested two volunteers to assist in this year's Annual Report. Laura Sinclair and Prem Jadhvani volunteered to assist with the Success Stories section of the Annual Report. Laura Sinclair and Milford Stern volunteered to assist with the "authorship" of the Annual Report, collecting and editing information to include in the Report. Other volunteers are welcome to assist as well.

#### **CSAVR and NCSAB Conferences – Pam Cato**

The Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) is a national organization comprised of Directors of State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies. These agencies are the state

partners in the State-Federal program of rehabilitation services provided under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

This year the CSAVR spring conference is virtual over April 13 – April 22.

The National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB) works to promote through advocacy, coordination, and education the delivery of specialized services that enable individuals who are blind and visually impaired to achieve personal and vocational independence.

This year the NCSAB spring conference is virtual May 4 – May 11.

DBVI offers the opportunity for some SRC members to attend these conferences, one in the spring and one in the fall. SRC members should email Maggie Mills if they are interested in attending. Maggie will email the SRC information about these conferences.

#### **DBVI Centennial Kickoff – March 24, 2021 2:00 – 3:00 PM**

On March 22, 2021, the Agency concludes its 99<sup>th</sup> year as an entity of the Commonwealth. It is the Agency's intention to begin its celebration commencing March 24 from 2:00-3:00 PM with a virtual Centennial Celebration Kickoff with several dignitaries attending and some participating as panelists. The celebration will continue with many events throughout the coming year. A special website for this 100-year anniversary is being launched and will be announced publicly in the next few days and will provide stories and videos acknowledging the Agency's service and a calendar of events. The 100-year celebration theme is Celebrating Our Past and Empowering Our Future. Contributions of those in the past will be acknowledged, the Agency will look at where it is as a service in the Commonwealth and suggest how the Agency might improve these services into the future. The Commissioner encouraged members to sign up at [GovDelivery.com](http://GovDelivery.com) to ensure they receive future announcements regarding DBVI. Maggie will send SRC members information on how to join the March 24 virtual celebration.

#### **Representative Roundtable**

**Larysa Kautz, President and CEO of Melwood**, shared that Melwood supports children, youth, and adults with disabilities to work and play where and how they choose. Melwood provides employment, job training, life skill improvement, supportive and recreational services to more than 2,000 people with disabilities each year. The pandemic has made Melwood have to move to providing their services virtually. The organization has received many donations and in-kind donations to help provide their services virtually. The organization is also assisting the individuals it serves receive COVID-19 vaccinations.

**Marianne Moore, Secondary Transition, Department of Special Education and Student Services with Virginia Department of Education, VDOE** reported on the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT). Maggie will email the SRC members with additional information on this organization. Additional information can be found at [transitionta.org](http://transitionta.org). NTACT hosts "toolkits" of resources on a variety of topics, related to secondary education and services for students with disabilities and the capacity building associated with improving such education and services. She

reported on the I'm Determined project, a state directed project funded by the Virginia Department of Education, which focuses on providing direct instruction, models, and opportunities to practice skills associated with self-determined behavior. This project facilitates youth, especially those with disabilities to undertake a measure of control in their lives, helping to set and steer the course rather than remaining the silent passenger.

**Mark Roane, Treasurer for the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) of Virginia**, and a former client of DBVI, reported on the purpose of the organization which is to complete integration of the blind into society on a basis of equality, which involves the removal of legal, economic, and social barriers; the education of the public to new concepts concerning blindness; and the achievement by all blind people of the right to exercise to the fullest their individual talents and capabilities. The organization works with state and national legislature on issues such as accessible absentee voting and statewide employment for those with disabilities. One of the organization's goals is to raise employment opportunities in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The NFB partners with DBVI to provide services to individuals 14-22 years old in a pre-employment transition stage.

**Laura Sinclair, Disability Rights Advocate, disAbility Law Center of Virginia, (DLCV)** reported that the mission of the organization is to advance independence, choice and self-determination; protect legal, human and civil rights; and eliminate abuse, neglect and discrimination of people with disabilities through zealous and uncompromising legal advocacy and representation.

The organization is currently streaming a podcast called Rights Here, Rights Now! where in each episode the organization shares different information about what the DLCV does, what is done in each unit, what services they provide and what the General Assembly is doing and more. DLCV has a FaceBook page that provides many resources such as information about neglect and abuse by caregivers in addition to many opportunities for trainings. The organization does legislative work such as working to get bills passed that offer extended curbside voting. They work to share information about social security benefits, offering free consultations to individuals who are interested in getting benefits. The DLCV has developed a brochure for the Client Assistance Program (CAP) program. Email Laura if you would like to receive brochures to distribute.

### **Other Announcements**

Commissioner Hopkins shared the announcement of the passing of Jim Rothrock, former Commissioner of the Virginia Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services.

### **Adjournment**

Mr. Roane motioned to end the meeting.

The next meeting is scheduled for June 11, 2021. If it is in-person, the meeting will include a tour and a working lunch. It is recommended to block out the entire day on the calendar to allow for travel time if it is in person.