

DRAFT MINUTES
Virginia Board for the Blind and Vision Impaired
Quarterly Board Meeting
March 25, 2025
11:00 am – 2:00 pm

Location: Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI)
397 Azalea Avenue
Richmond, VA 23227

Board Members in Attendance

Joseph Ashley-Vice Chair, Robert Bartolotta-Secretary, Paul D’Addario-Chair, Michael Kasey, Mazen Basrawi (virtually from Northern VA due to distance), Kathryn Campbell, Tina Egge

Guests in Attendance

Bryce Lee, The Optimal Service Group, Wells Fargo
Karen Logan, The Optimal Service Group, Wells Fargo

Public in Attendance

Yvonne Mastromano
Sandy Neuzil

DBVI Staff Attendance

Rebecca Askew, Senior Policy Analyst; Wallica Gaines, Deputy Commissioner, Administration; Megan Hall, Director of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and Workforce Services; Tish Harris, Pre-Employment Transition (Pre-ETS) and Career Pathways Coordinator; Reid Herskovitz, Plant Manager, VIB Richmond; Melissa Jackson, **Financial and Risk Management Director**; Becky Keller, Pre-ETS Specialist; Kathy Malone, Deputy Commissioner for Services (virtually); Maggie Mills, Executive Assistant to Commissioner; Rick Mitchell, Commissioner; William Sutton, Pre-ETS Specialist; Ashley West, Executive Assistant to Deputy Commissioners; Felicia Williams, Pre-ETS Specialist

Call to Order & Welcome

Chair D’Addario called the meeting to order and welcomed those in attendance. A roundtable of introductions was conducted. A quorum was met.

Business Items

Consent of Agenda

Dr. Ashley moved to adopt the agenda as presented. Mr. Bartolotta seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Consent of December 17, 2024, Meeting Minutes

Mr. Kasey moved to approve the Minutes as presented. Dr. Ashley seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Public Comment

None

Investment Report - Optimal Services Group

Ms. Logan and Mr. Lee provided an overview of the ups and downs of the stock market and reviewed the January Financial Report. From the equity standpoint strategists are still expecting the equity markets to end on a positive note this year despite a lot of down days. Regarding tariffs, over the long

term, speculation is that markets will be fine, although some volatility now and difficulty individually as consumers. Consumers are feeling the effects of the tariffs, but the portfolio is performing well. The Endowment portfolio at the end of January was \$6.36 million. The portfolio is very close in line with the targets, and Wells Fargo continues to adjust with the trends of the market.

A year ago, the Board approved its Spending Policy for calculating the maximum dollar amount of grants awarded in a given year. A three-year average value of the endowment fund at the end of February of 2023, 2024 and 2025 had a value of \$5,998,182. The Spending Policy calls on the board to award grants totaling a maximum of no more than 4% of that total, which is \$239,927 in 2025. The Board may exceed the 4% maximum with a majority vote of the Board when a quorum is seated.

Agency Reports

Administration Division

Deputy Commissioner Gaines reported several new members of the Administration Division and gave an overview of Administration Division responsibilities which includes the Facilities Team which maintains DBVI facilities/buildings. There are currently several renovation projects in progress. The VIB Charlottesville plant is amid the design phase for a \$12 million renovation for that building. On the Headquarters campus, the Library and Resource Center (LRC) is undergoing a \$20 million renovation on that building. There are several other projects, not as large, in process such as the construction of an outdoor classroom on the Headquarters campus and infrastructure improvements on campus. The Administration Division is made up of the Office of Strategic Initiatives and the AWARE Unit which is DBVI's case management system. It also includes Communications, a Data Analyst, the Facilities Team and the Finance and Risk Management Team.

Enterprise Division

Virginia Industries for the Blind (VIB) Richmond Plant Production Supervisor Reid Herskovitz reported in Deputy Commissioner Koch's absence. Virginia Enterprises for the Blind (VEB) was awarded a \$2.2 million for a highway vending contract. Virginia agreed in principle to join DC, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, California and Arizona in a nationwide Marine Corp feeding contract. Administered by Colorado, it will be consolidating dozens of military feeding contracts into one nationwide contract.

Virginia Industries for the Blind (VIB) launched a 14-week discovery phase of ODO the enterprise resource planning solution that has been in the works for many years. Retail sales of \$15 million year to date, up 23% year over year.

The contract at the VA switchboard at the VA hospital in Salem, which was a contract we have had for years, was regained after having lost it for five years.

There is another opportunity that's going to be a consolidated effort with other AbilityOne agencies to handle document conversion for the Department of Commerce, and it's so large that it's going to employ over 120 employees (this includes all the AbilityOne agencies, not just DBVI) and over eight years converting paper documents to digital. DBVI's Business Relations Team has been working with the Roanoke Regional Office holding a job fair, and it seems that nine to ten of those positions will be filled by individuals who are blind or vision impaired.

The Norfolk Navy Ship Store is still in contract with the Department of Real Estate Services (DRES) to get those buildings settled.

VEB renewed DBVI's contract with Canteen (part of Compass Group) which supports our highway rest area vending program. There were no changes in terms to this contract, but did include current pricing

of products in the vending machines which have gone up slightly in the past year due to inflation and the price of goods. The higher prices will lead to higher revenue if sales volumes remain constant.

Services Division

Kathy Malone recently became DBVI's Deputy Commissioner for Services. She will be working remotely out of the Bristol Regional Office and visit HQ each month for various in-person meetings.

The Rehabilitation Teaching/Independent Living (RT/IL) Team has been working with the Older Individuals Who Are Blind (OIB) Tech Center to evaluate DBVI's current services and to identify areas of needed improvement. DBVI received a score of 4.83 out of 5 scale and will be looking into the areas of improvement recommended.

DBVI RT/IL Director attended the 2025 OIB Managers In-Person Conference in Arlington, VA, in February.

Several Services Division staff will be attending the CSAVR and NCSAB Conferences in Bethesda, MD, in April.

Last week the DBVI Deafblind Program Director provided an agencywide training session regarding working with those who are deafblind.

Several audible egg hunts are scheduled throughout the state.

Last week a statewide teacher of the visually impaired training was held led by DBVI Director of Education and Library Services.

A ribbon cutting ceremony is scheduled for June 4 for the CVS/Aetna Training Lab that is being created on DBVI Headquarters at the Virginia Rehabilitation Center for the Blind and Vision Impaired (VRCBVI).

In February the Pre-ETS team hosted sixteen students at a sports and recreation career exploration event at Massanutten Resort.

DBVI is currently working with the Science Museum of Virginia which has a NASA grant funded exhibit sensing space. One group is advising on audio descriptions. Another group is doing a walkthrough and providing some feedback on the braille and audio descriptions.

Prior to that event, DBVI also worked with the Museum on a LEGO project that includes braille blocks.

Deputy Commissioner Gaines gave an update on AWARE which is DBVI's case management system. In the past DBVI and DARS have shared this system which is server based. DBVI is moving to a cloud-based model allowing DBVI and DARS to separate their instances which should happen in May or June of this year. This allows DBVI to tailor the system to better meet its needs.

Working Lunch

Pre-ETS team members, Tish Harris, Becky Keller, William Sutton and Felicia Williams, along with Megan Hall, Director of VR and Workforce Services, reported on the many events and highlights of the Pre-ETS program.

Unfinished Business

Attendance Language/Policy Update

The Board agreed that whether an absence from a Board meeting was excused or unexcused would be left to the discretion of the Chair. If there are two consecutive non-excused absences, the Chair

would present this to the Board, and if it becomes necessary the vote to recommend removal would be made by the entire Board. This would be considered on a case-by-case basis. The Attorney General offered that regarding the definition of excused vs unexcused absences, Boards typically define these items for themselves. Because Board members are appointed by the Governor, the Board cannot remove a member but only recommend that a member be removed.

Update on Grant Application & Process

The Board discussed grant applications submitted by individuals. ***Ms. Egge moved to have the category of individual removed from the grant application. Mr. Kasey seconded the motion. All were in favor.* The Board discussed the timeline of the grant application, funding decisions and grant disbursement process.

Update on Endowment Fund as Voluntary Contribution/Income Tax Form

Chair D'Addario reported that the governor has signed a bill that now allows individuals, when completing their Virginia income tax returns, to donate funds to the endowment fund managed by the DBVI board.

***Deputy Commissioner Gaines will check to see if it is permitted for this donation option to be promoted.*

New Business

A discussion was held regarding restricted funds and the Endowment. There is no policy mentioning how to handle restricted funds. ***Dr. Ashley moved that the Board establish that the current restricted funds be moved into the current Wells Fargo Institutional Investment and that Deputy Commissioner Gaines draft a policy for the Board's consideration that any further restricted donations be moved to the Wells Fargo Investment Fund. Ms. Egge seconded the motion. All were in favor.* This is to identify a flexible approach, a policy similar to the existing institutional account as well as the ability to make larger withdrawals that might include capital. Applications can be made twice a year.

Adjourn

Ms. Egge moved to end the meeting. Mr. Bartolotta seconded the motion. All were in favor.