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## VIRGINIA STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL FOR THE BLIND AND VISION IMPAIRED (SRC)

### Quarterly Meeting

### Final Minutes

November 07, 2025

The Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI) via Zoom

#### SRC Members in Attendance

- **Amaan Karim**, Richmond, Business/Labor/Industry Representative
- **Beth Klein**, Stafford, Representative of the Client Assistance Program (CAP)
- **Chanthen Nene**, Manassas, Rep. of an Applicant or Recipient of Rehabilitation Services
- **Christine Appert**, Charlottesville, Current/Former Recipient of Rehabilitation Services
- **Gary Talley**, Petersburg, Statewide Independent Living Council Representative (SILC)
- **Gerald Meredith**, South Chesterfield, Representative of a Disability Advocacy Group
- **Heidi Lawyer**, Henrico, Representative of Parent Training & Information Center (PEATC)
- **Kendall Morris**, Mechanicsville, Business/Labor/Industry Representative
- **Lasonya Jackson**, Crozet, Representative of a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, Ex-Officio Member
- **Rebecca Ceja**, Richmond, Representative of the Virginia Department of Education
- **Rick Mitchell**, Richmond, Commissioner, DBVI, Ex-Officio Member
- **Susan Bowmaster**, Annadale, Representative of a Disability Advocacy Group

#### DBVI Staff Present

- **Ashley West**, Executive Assistant to Deputy Commissioners
- **Kathy Malone**, Bristol, Deputy Commissioner of Services
- **Madeline Nunnally**, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor
- **Maggie Mills**, Executive Assistant to Commissioner Mitchell
- **Megan Hall**, Director of Vocational Rehabilitation and Workforce Services
- **Rachel Dancy**, Executive Assistant, Commissioner's Office – Recorder of Minutes
- **Tish Harris**, Student Team and Career Pathway Coordinator

#### ASL Interpreters

- **Carrie Humphrey**
- **Katherine Resendez**

#### Public

- **Kendall Morris**
- **Leon Barwick**
- **Lori Epik**
- **Mark Roane**
- **Theresa Kane**

#### Call to Order / Welcome and Introductions

Chair Nene called the meeting to order. Ms. Dancy conducted roll call. Quorum was met.

#### Adoption Agenda

Mr. Talley moved to adopt the proposed agenda; Mr. Leopold seconded the motion, and the motion was passed unanimously.

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## Adoption of November 07, Meeting Minutes

Ms. Lawyer moved to adopt November 07, 2025, SRC Quarterly Meeting minutes, Mr. Talley seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

## Public Comment

None.

## Commissioner's Report – Rick Mitchell

### Effects of Government Shutdown

- **Services Division**
  - **Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services:** Things are running normally because of smart planning; we have enough federal money saved to last 6–7 months. We get a new grant every year and have two years to use it. We didn't spend October 2024 funds until spring 2025, so we still have remaining balances to use.
  - **Older Blind Program (OIB):** No problems expected. We have two years to use the funds, and we planned ahead last year.
- **Enterprise Division – Virginia Industries for the Blind (VIB):**
  - 90% of our money comes from government contracts.
  - 11 workers are temporarily laid off, but we'll bring them back once we get a new budget.
  - 10 others are using their leave time and won't be laid off until that runs out.
  - We're still making mattresses but haven't been paid for yet. The government owes us \$2.5 million. Once we get paid, our money situation will improve.

## Public Meetings

- We've been holding public meetings, now called Community Conversations, to hear from people and answer questions. This fall, we had two of these events, one with the American Council of the Blind and one with the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) Virginia Chapter.
- At the NFB meeting, we had a one-hour virtual session where our senior leaders, including our three deputy commissioners, joined to answer live questions. Staff responded in real time, and we recorded the session. We plan to use AI to turn the recording into a list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for our website in 2025.
- A representative from the National NFB said it's rare to see a state agency send senior staff to these meetings, and they appreciated our openness. We want to keep being transparent and continue strong communication with the community.

## Renovation Update – Charlottesville VIB

- We're in the middle of construction and updates at the Charlottesville Virginia Industries for the Blind (VIB) location. We've been working on upgrading the fire alarm system and are now waiting for final testing and approval. We're also having issues with the freight elevator, but it will be repaired soon.

## Deputy Commissioner's for Services' Report – Kathy Malone

Written report provided. Updates to Regional Office Staffing are as follows:

- Bristol Fully Staffed
- Fairfax Recruiting for Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor
- Norfolk Full Staffed
- Richmond Recruiting for Wage Regional Program Assistant
- Roanoke Fully Staffed
- Staunton Recruiting for Wage ASL Interpreter
- Headquarters Pre-ETS Specialist (offer imminent)
- Business Relations Fully Staffed
- VRCBVI Recruiting for Orientation & Mobility Specialist

### **VR Program Update– Megan Hall**

Written report provided. Additional comments are as follows:

- **Federal Government Shutdown:** We are very fortunate to continue working. Some states may have to furlough staff soon, but thanks to good planning by our Commissioner and Deputy Commissioners, we are not facing those problems.
- **VR Support Nationwide:** Technical Assistance Centers for Pre-ETS and other programs are coming back. Grants that ended in September are expected to be renewed. These groups help us follow federal rules and spend money wisely. Example: We helped someone explore self-employment as an Airbnb host and received Federal guidance surrounding the use of VR funding to support that type of venture.
- **National Leadership Changes:** Steve Wooderson, long-time CEO of CSAVR, has stepped down. A new leader will be chosen soon.
- **CVS Skills Lab & Student Programs:**
  - Cindy Roberts, Director of Business and Corporate Initiatives, spoke about the paid work-based learning experience process as a whole and how it connects to the CVS Skills Lab at the CSAVR conference this week.
  - The lab in January 2026 with the pilot group of 4 trainees
    - Students will live in dorms and eat in the cafeteria.
  - Tyler Boone, Career Skills Lab Instructor, will provide guidance and support to the Skills Lab students as they move through the curriculum and move towards eligibility to sit for the test and earn a national customer service credential.
  - The lab is funded by CVS and Aetna, but students don't have to work for them post training. The students are able to generalize their knowledge and earned credential in any customer service employment setting
  - An integral part of the Skills Lab training process is the culmination of an 8-12 week paid work-based learning opportunity in the student's home community.
    - **Technology & Safety Checks:**
  - A Technology checklist was created to ensure students meet pre-requisites to enroll in the program.
  - An Orientation and Mobility Checklist was also created to make sure students can safely move around campus, with help from local staff.
- **State Plan & Policy Review:**
  - We're reviewing our state plan and goals, due by March 2026. DBVI and Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) are working closely together to discuss common performance measure updates.

- Our VR policy manual is being reviewed and updated to ensure alignment with current WIOA interpretations.
  - If we only change wording (not the meaning or intent of the policy), we don't need public comment. However, for any substantive changes that would affect the provision of services, the SRC will assist in the review of the policy and offer any suggestions prior to opening the policy up for public comment.
- **Student Opportunities:**
  - About 30 programs are available for 2026, some virtual, some in person.  
Examples:
    - Spring into Success (March 2026)
    - LIFE Program (Summer 2026)
    - Careers in Action and Cyber Space
    - Universal Application- A new online form makes it easier to apply for all programs. Currently, LIFE Program is not included on universal application due to the nature of the information needed for a longer-term residential program- students should contact VRCBVI directly for extra info.
- **Pre-ETS Funding:**
  - We must use 15% of our funds for pre-ETS. Historically, DBVI has exhausted the 15% pre-ETS reserve funds in about a year and a half. This past program year, DBVI exhausted the funds in about a 12-month period. DBVI is working on a strategy to ensure that quality programming continues while being mindful of the timeline for the use of funds.
- **Commonwealth Peer Mentoring:**  
This new program helps employees grow as leaders and plan their careers for upward mobility or increased employment. DBVI currently has one participant in the program and will offer the opportunity statewide for the next program year.
- **Climate Belonging Survey:**  
As a result of the recent climate and belonging survey, the DBVI Services Division has developed "focus" positions to allow for enhanced duties and responsibilities for those staff who are interested in upward mobility.
- **From Pilot to Copilot:**
  - A new program for parents and students about what changes when a student turns 18 and becomes their own case contact. VRBVI is scheduled to hold this training within the next few weeks.
  - Ms. Lawyer mentioned PEATC has a program called "Turning 18," and happy to connect DBVI with them for additional support.
- **Friends & Family Day 2025:**
  - Successful event with 140+ people attended
- **SRC Vacancies:**
- Several seats are open, currently applications have been submitted for a Business/Labor/Industry Representative and one for a Parent/guardian of a child with a disability.
  - Ms. Hall and Ms. Dancy are available if anyone interested in applying or reapplying needs assistance.

## 2026 SRC Meeting Dates

A draft calendar for 2026 SRC Meeting Dates was proposed. Mr. Talley moved to approve the dates. Mr. Karim seconded the motion. All were in favor, and the following meeting dates were adopted.

2026: February 20, May 8, August 14, November 6 (virtual)

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## **Old and New Business**

### **SRC Annual Report 2025**

- Ms. Hall reported the draft of the report is almost complete. A few sections are still being compiled and edited for dissemination to the council for their review and input by December 1, 2025. Finalized report will be submitted by December 31, 2025.

### **Nominating Committee**

The nominating committee- Mr. Talley and Ms. Bowmaster recommended Mr. Chanthen Nene as Chair and Ms. Christine Appert as Vice Chair.

### **Election of Officers- SRC Chair and Vice Chair**

Ms. Lawyer moved to adopt the appointment of Chair and Vice Chair, Mr. Leopold seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

### **Adjourn**

Ms. Lawyer moved to end the meeting. Mr. Talley seconded the motion. All were in favor, and the meeting was adjourned.

**Next SRC Quarterly Meeting will be held in person on February 20, 2026.**