

**VIRGINIA STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL FOR THE BLIND AND VISION IMPAIRED
Quarterly Meeting**

Minutes

September 8, 2023

397 Azalea Avenue, Richmond, VA 23227

SRC Members in Attendance

Alexa Bowe, Arlington, Representative of Business, Industry and Labor

Annette Hyde, Radiant, Representative of the Workforce Council

Heidi Lawyer, Henrico, Representative of Parent Training & Information Center (PEATC)

Joliefawn Liddell, Richmond, Representative of the Client Assistance Program

Rachael Rounds, Midlothian, Representative of Community Rehabilitation Services Program

Milford Stern, Roanoke, Representative of Business, Industry, and Labor, via Zoom

Edna Johnson, Alexandria, Former or Current Recipient of Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Liang Liao, Richmond, DBVI, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, Ex-Officio Member

Ricardo Lizama, Arlington, Representative of Disability Advocacy Group

Chanthen Nene, Manassas, Representative of Disability Advocacy Group

SRC Members Not Able to Attend

Leelynn Untalan Brady, Suffolk, Representative of Statewide Independent Living Council

Marianne Moore, Richmond, Representative of the Virginia Department of Education

DBVI Staff Present

Pam Cato, Deputy Commissioner of Services

Megan Hall, Director of Vocational Rehabilitation and Workforce Services

Ashley West, Executive Assistant to Deputy Commissioners – Recorder of Minutes

DARS Staff Present

Elizabeth Patacca, Administrative Staff Assistant for Policy and Legislative Affairs

ASL Interpreters

Elizabeth Leitch

Bernice McCormack

Call to Order / Welcome and Introductions

Chair Bowe called the meeting to order. A roundtable of introductions took place. Quorum was met.

Adoption of Agenda

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

Adoption of June 9, 2023, Meeting Minutes

An addendum was proposed to the June 9, 2023 SRC meeting minutes. The draft minutes that were presented on Town Hall did not include a synopsis for those who made public comment during the June quarterly meeting. Ms. Hall Recommended Public Comment entry to include that DBVI received public comment from multiple stakeholders who expressed concerns specific to the Norfolk Regional Office. The comments included concerns regarding agency services, staffing levels, including staff experience in working with individuals who are blind, and concerns about the length of time to receive services. DBVI appreciates members of the public taking time to share their experiences and thoughts regarding agency services. Given the fact that the agenda time for public comment is limited during a stated SRC meeting, DBVI explained that the agency provides multiple opportunities in public forums each year and is always willing at any time to accept public comment via email, postal mail, or by phone. All public comment gathered throughout the year is compiled in one report that includes agency responses.

Ms. Lawyer moved to adopt the June 9, 2023, SRC Quarterly Meeting minutes as amended, Mr. Nene seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

Commissioner's Report and Deputy Commissioner's Report – Deputy Commissioner Pam Cato

Written report provided VR Agency Report. Additional comments are as follows:

Deputy Commissioner Cato, addressed reappointments for the council. As of right now, no new appointments have been made by the Governor's office. Several members have terms that are expiring as of September 30, 2023. Those that have applied for reappointment to be on the council have not been notified yet of the status of the appointment. The Secretary of the Commonwealth is working on the council's appointments and will be in touch as soon as they can. A new chair will need to be elected as Chair Bowe's term is over. A reminder was made to the council that to be considered for the Chair position, a member must have served on the council for one year. Elections will need to be held at the December meeting.

The state budget has been passed and is pending the Governor signature.

Currently, recruiting for 2 positions, a pre-employment transition specialist, which has closed and interviews are being set up as well as newly created vocational rehabilitation specialist position. The new vocational rehabilitation specialist position will work out of DBVI HQ and will be able to work with regional managers to cover case loads when the offices are short staffed, as well as assisting the Assistant VR Director to strengthen case reviews and work in the AWARE system and monitor performance measures.

DBVI has received word from RSA that 1 million dollars of VR reallocation funds have been received from RSA.

Deputy Commissioner Cato attended the National Federation of the Blind Conference in Houston, Texas in July, and will attend a portion of the Virginia National Federation of the Blind State Conference in November along with the Commissioner.

CSAVR and the NCSAB will be held this fall in Savannah Georgia.

Mississippi State University visited DBVI HQ for the annual program evaluation site visit. DBVI applied for and has been selected for a technical assistance program with OIB TAC, to help older individuals that have experienced vision loss. Working with this program, DBVI can help individuals who may be at risk of losing a job, or cannot maintain their home and working to improve those through a VR program and work within an individualized plan to receive services and support to function independently and be successful.

VR Program Update – Megan Hall

Written report provided VR Report. Additional comments are as follows:

Currently, recruiting for a business relations specialist that will work out of the Roanoke Regional Office. Interviews have been conducted for this position and working to onboard the selected candidate.

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month. The “Advancing Access and Equity” event will recognize individuals in the VR program who have gone onto great and significant employment, employers of the year, and a new category of advocate of the year will be recognized. This event will take place at the Recreation Center on the Henrico DBVI Campus, on October 4, 2023, with opening remarks beginning at 10:00 am.

DBVI has a GovDelivery system, where online blasts for texts, email and specific events and announcements will be sent out. This is a great way to keep track of all the events, happenings, and announcements at DBVI. This is also a great way for who are currently or who received services in the past to connect and keep up with all the things DBVI is doing.

Dan Aunspach, Director of Rehabilitation Technology Services is working with DARS, to come up with a new contract format for contractors. These contractors go to the homes of the individuals we are serving, and this new contract will have a background element that will ensure the people we serve and the contractors are supported, and verified.

Megan gave a synopsis of all the Pre-ETS events that have taken place over the summer, such as Leap into Linux and JMU Success. Upcoming Pre-ETS events will include Careers in Action which will take place in October at the Double Tree in Williamsburg, Fundamentals course in CompTIA, and an IT Credentials Fair.

Megan attended the VR Summit in Vermont along with DBVI Analysts Deborah Collard and Ann Lynn Banton, which focused on higher level technical assistance and how to expand events with multiple partners across the state.

Old and New Business Annual Report Guidance

Megan Hall is currently gathering information from different divisions and departments for the annual report. Once this information is gathered it will be sent to Milford to report completion and presentation to the council. The report will be reviewed by the SRC at the December meeting.

Election of Officers

Due to no new reappointments made, elections will be held at the next meeting.

Sub-Committee’s Work for a New Hearing Officer

Elizabeth Patacca from DARS, gave an overview of the hearing officer process, and the hearing officer meeting that occurred in August. Ms. Patacca also went over how hearing officer recruitment works and the training that a hearing officer will go through once approved. The SRC was represented by Chair Bowe, Ms. Liddell and Ms. Hall during this hearing. Those SRC members that attended the hearing felt that the hearing officer candidates writing was clear and concise and with training in DBVI and DARS policy and procedure will make for a viable candidate.

Chair Bowe requested a motion to approve the hearing officer candidate. Mr. Nene made the motion and Ms. Lawyer seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Representative Round Table

Heidi Layer – PEATC
Joliefawn Liddell – dCLV
Marianne Moore – VDOE – not present
Milford Stern – Dept. of Labor & Industry
Leelyn Brady – SILC – not present

Adjourn

Mr. Nene moved to end the meeting. Mr. Stern seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Next SRC Quarterly Meeting

December 8, 2023