

Minutes
Virginia Board for the Blind and Vision Impaired
Virtual
December 16, 2020 at 12:30 PM

Board Attendees

Bonnie Atwood; Mazen Basrawi, *Chair*; Paul D’Addario; Deborah Helms; Ken Jessup; Dr. Leo Kim; Barbara McCarthy.

Members Absent

None.

Members of the Public

Chris Piper, Commissioner, Virginia Department of Elections; John Thaniel, Chief Financial Officer, DARS.

DBVI Staff to the Board

Jessica Collette, Staff Assistant, DBVI; Wallica Gaines, Deputy Commissioner for Administration, DBVI; Raymond Hopkins, Commissioner, DBVI; Matt Koch, Deputy Commissioner for Enterprises, DBVI; Dr. Rick Mitchell, Deputy Commissioner for Services, DBVI.

Call to Order & Welcome

Vice-Chairman Jessup called the regular meeting to order and welcomed the members in attendance.

Program Spotlight: Accessible Voting in the Commonwealth

Chris Piper, Commissioner, Virginia Department of Elections

Commissioner Piper spoke regarding accessible voting that occurred throughout the Commonwealth during the 2020 election cycle. This election had the highest voter turnout. In January the Department of Elections will release a report on items to improve on. This year there was an increase in absentee voting as the requirement of a specific reason to vote absentee. Specific to accessibility, a legal process occurred this past year for the ability to email a ballot and submit through a system for tabulation. This year, forty requests were received for this type of accessible ballot with 19 being returned.

The topic around a citizen’s advisory committee was discussed and additional information will be provided to DBVI for the Board. Commissioner Hopkins offered to host a public meeting(s) for the Department of Elections to educate our constituents and stakeholders on the options available for accessible voting. Commissioner Hopkins suggested the Board create a working group to assist with this process and the Department of Elections.

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Business Items

Introductions

Chairman Basrawi commenced the roll call.

Consent of Agenda

Ms. Debbie Helms moved to approve agenda; motion passed unanimously.

Consent of Minutes

Minutes from September 2020 will be approved at the March 2021 meeting.

Public Comment

None.

Agency Reports

Commissioner Hopkins presented an update regarding the Virginia Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired.

Finance Committee Update – Dr. Leo Kim & Barbara McCarthy

At the last Board Meeting, the Board discussed moving the endowment funds into an account to generate a higher yield. The Finance Committee and agency representatives have met since this date to discuss investment opportunities.

Process for Solicitation of Investment Advisor – John Thaniel, Chief Financial Officer

Mr. John Thaniel shared the “project roadmap” on how to move forward in identifying the best investment broker. The timeline provides for the Board to review the top suppliers at the March meeting. This would then allow for monies to be moved in July 2021. The Finance Committee will work with DARS Fiscal to work on this request.

Ms. Wallica Gaines reviewed the current balances since June 30, 2020. Information regarding the total cash and investments, along with earnings were reviewed.

Unfinished Business

Chairman Basrawi asked for an update on the resolution in honor of Jim Wark. Ms. Bonnie Atwood stated this has been sent to Senator McClellan and is awaiting a decision.

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New Business

Dr. Kim began a discussion if trainers at DBVI would be included as a priority of the COVID vaccine. Ms. Gaines reviewed the Phased Allocation of COVID-19 Vaccine from the CDC. VDH is using this document as guidance, but the CDC guidance will be the starting point. The Commissioner shared information from the NCSAB fall conference and a resolution/statement that states employees working in agencies for the blind and vision impaired should be included as essential workers and follow healthcare workers. This position statement will be shared with Secretary Carey and Commissioner Oliver, Virginia Department of Health. Dr. Kim offered to also add numbers, both staff and clientele that would be identified in Phase 1c. The Board supports the Commissioner speaking with the Secretary and Commissioner regarding the statement and the Board endorses this position.

Mr. Paul D'Addario expressed interest in the workgroup from the Board and the Department of Elections. Mr. D'Addario and Chairman Basrawi will be the two representatives.

An update regarding the 100th Centennial Celebration was provided. Currently staff are voting for their favorite theme until this Friday. Once the theme is chosen, it will be unveiled along with a website and events throughout this year of celebration.

Chairman Basrawi has asked for the next meeting to be held on Wednesday, March 24, 2021.

Meeting Dates

March 24, 2021; June 22, 2021.

Adjournment

Ms. Debbie Helms moved to adjourn the meeting at 3:18 pm; motion passed unanimously.

Next Meeting: March 24, 2021

Attachment
Virginia Board for the Blind and Vision Impaired
Virtual
September 22, 2020 at 12:00 PM

Reports

Agency Report – *Commissioner Ray Hopkins*

Written report provided. Additional comments are as follows:

An update regarding the Special Session of the General Assembly was provided specific to DBVI. The largest change was in regards to the removal of funding to several programs, leaving DBVI at level funding similar to previous years.

Earlier this morning, the Governor submitted his budget amendments, which includes a line of credit to DBVI specifically for Virginia Industries of the Blind equaling \$1M. Also, at this time DBVI is operating under a Continuing Resolution with its federally funded programs. This will continue through Friday of this week, December 17th. The hope is a budget will be approved before this deadline to have the ability to operate under a long-term budget.

Discussions took place regarding the funding options around a loan to Virginia Industries for the Blind.

Chairman Basrawi lead a conversation regarding funding for the Agency and how to communicate with the Governor and/or the legislature about the need for the funds that have been removed from the budget. Ms. Bonnie Atwood suggested holding a Zoom meeting with a representative from the Governor's Office to be able to voice the Board's opinion on DBVI's funding. The suggestion is for two board members, Chairman Basrawi and Ms. Atwood, to meet with the Chief of Staff to voice these concerns. These individuals will work to schedule this meeting.

Ms. Wallica Gaines shared regarding the renovations of the HQ building. This is a \$6M renovation, about 75% complete and should be back in office by spring 2021. This will offer staff and visitors a number of different ways to work.

Mr. Matt Koch updated the Board regarding the large order for the Virginia Department of Emergency Management that VIB is currently working on.

Dr. Rick Mitchell spoke regarding service delivery at VRCBVI and throughout the Commonwealth. Back in the summer, face-to-face resumed, but due to high positivity rates, all Regional Offices have pulled back to Phase 2 and offering only virtual training. As far as VRCBVI, the decision was made to not bringing students back between Thanksgiving and Christmas. At the beginning of 2021, discussions will take place about how and when to bring

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students back. At this time, there is currently not a waitlist, but this is contributed to COVID since new cases have decreased, as well.