

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

Quarterly Meeting

Final Minutes

February 20, 2026

The Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI)

397 Azalea Avenue, Richmond, VA 23227 and via Zoom

SRC Members in Attendance

- **Amaan Karim**, Richmond, Business/Labor/Industry Representative (virtual)
- **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)
- **Jeffrey Sluss**, Salem, Workforce Council Representative
- **John Leopold**, Richmond, Business/Labor/Industry Representative
- **Kendall Morris**, Mechanicsville, Business/Labor/Industry Representative (virtual)
- **Lasonya Jackson**, Crozet, Rep. of a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, Ex-Officio Member
- **Mark Roane**, Richmond, Current/Former Recipient of Rehabilitation Services
- **Rebecca Ceja**, Richmond, Representative of the Virginia Department of Education (virtual)
- **Rick Mitchell**, Richmond, Commissioner, DBVI, Ex-Officio Member
- **Susan Bowmaster**, Annadale, Representative of a Disability Advocacy Group (virtual)

DBVI Staff Present

- **Kathy Malone**, Bristol, Deputy Commissioner of Services
- **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

ASL Interpreters

- **Carrie Humphrey**
- **Elaine Hernandez**

Public

- **Ava Winford- ASL Intern**
- **Lisa Robertson- DARS**
- **Scott White**
- **Shiresh Nene**
- **Stacey Butler**
- **Venus Powell**

Call to Order / Welcome and Introductions

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

Adoption Agenda

Mr. Sluss moved to adopt the proposed agenda; Ms. Appert seconded the motion, and the motion was passed unanimously.

Adoption of November 07, 2025, Meeting Minutes

Ms. Appert moved to adopt November 07, 2025, SRC Quarterly Meeting minutes as amended, Mr. Roane seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

Public Comment

None.

Commissioner's Report – Rick Mitchell

Written report provided. Additional comments are as follows:

- **National Changes**
 - There is talk about reducing the size of the U.S. Department of Education.
 - The Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), which oversees vocational rehabilitation, may move to the Department of Labor.
 - The Older Individuals Who Are Blind program may move to Health and Human Services (HHS). Commissioner has a meeting soon with other state directors to learn more. Updates will be shared when available.
- **Budget**
 - All parts of the federal budget passed except Homeland Security.
 - Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is funded through September 30, 2026.
 - DBVI is in a good financial position.
 - Each October 1, DBVI gets a new federal grant and has two years to spend it.
 - Last year, carryover lasted until April; this year it will likely last until March.
 - Goal: keep 4-6 months of carryover to avoid service delays during federal budget funding gaps.
- **General Assembly**
 - DBVI has no new legislation this year.
 - Monitoring bills that may affect the disability community.
 - Weekly updates on bills are available through DBVI's website via GovDelivery.
- **Leadership**
 - Commissioner Rick Mitchell was asked to stay for 120 days (May 17, 2026) under the new administration and final decision is pending.
- **Community Engagement**
 - Last year's Q&A sessions with NFBVA and ACBVA were recorded, but audio quality was poor.
 - Answers have been reviewed and approved; staff will confirm if they are posted online.
 - Future meetings will include more program directors for better responses.

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

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

- Bristol Fully Staffed
- Fairfax Recruiting for 1 Rehabilitation Teacher and 1 part-time wage driver
- Norfolk Fully Staffed
- Richmond Fully Staffed
- Roanoke Recruiting for 1 Rehabilitation Teacher
- Staunton Recruiting for Wage ASL Interpreter
- Headquarters Fully Staffed
- Business Relations Fully Staffed
- VRCBVI Fully Staffed
- LRC Recruiting for Operations Manager

VR Program Update– Megan Hall

Written report provided. Additional comments are as follows:

- **Virginia Rehabilitation Center for the Blind and Vision Impaired**
 - Focus: Teaching skills for independence and preparing for careers or community living.
 - Currently serving 29 students, the highest number in several years.
 - Upcoming LIFE Program (Learning Independence, Feeling Empowered) scheduled for late July to early August 2026.
 - Skills taught- safe cooking, travel without vision, typing, etc.
 - Includes fun evening and weekend activities to help the students gain confidence, practice self-advocacy and develop a sense of community.
 - Recruitment is ongoing for students ages 14–17 (maybe 18 in certain circumstances) who are blind, visually impaired or Deafblind.
- **Student Services**
 - Hosting Spring into Success event.
 - SUCCESS stands for: Strength & Superpowers, Understanding Rights, Communication, Career Exploration, Empowerment, Support Systems.
 - Focus on Pre-Employment Transition Services: career exploration, workplace readiness, work-based learning, post-secondary options, and self-advocacy.
 - New presenter: Marisol Carmona, blind professional from Perkins School, will co-lead parent sessions on preparing for adulthood.
 - Partnership continues with I'm Determined for goal setting and planning.
- **CVS Skills Lab**
 - First lab in the country that is dedicated to training blind, visually impaired or Deafblind individuals in customer service.
 - Pilot program is going well; first student will graduate March 6, 2026.
 - Graduates participate in a 12-week paid work experience after testing and receiving nationally recognized certifications in the industry
 - Next cohort: 4- 5 students ready to start.
- **Student Legislative Success**
 - An 18-year-old student who served out of the DBVI Fairfax office proposed a bill to allow tax credits up to \$50,000 for companies adding Braille labels to packages.
 - Bill passed the Senate Finance Committee and is moving forward.
 - Great example of student advocacy and innovation.

Old and New Business

Member Orientation – Megan Hall

- Discussion on whether orientation should be for all members or just new ones.
- Decision: Offer orientation to new members and anyone interested.
- Will cover acronyms, laws, and how DBVI applies them, the purpose of the SRC and regulations under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).
- A virtual meeting will be scheduled soon and will be open to the public.

Spring 2026 CSAVR NCSRC Conference – Megan Hall

- CSAVR and NCSAB Conference: April 1–3, 2026 in Washington, D.C.
- SRC has funds to send 1–2 members.
- Early registration open; deadline for accommodations/dietary requests: February 27, 2026.
- Interested members should [email Rachel Dancy](#).

Review Proposed Updates: Combined State Plan – Megan Hall

- Virginia uses a combined state plan to guide workforce efforts.
- It includes four main partners:
 - Title I: Adults, dislocated workers, youth programs.
 - Title II: Adult education and family literacy.
 - Title III: Workforce services.
 - Title IV: Vocational Rehabilitation (VR).
- DBVI works with DARS (Department for Aging and Rehabilitation Services) to submit the plan as the Title IV partners in the Commonwealth.
- **Plan Review**
 - The plan is updated every two years.
 - SRC helps set goals and reviews progress.
 - Public comments will be requested before final submission.
 - This year's update includes new requirements from RSA about AI in workforce programs.
- **Council Recommendations**
 - DBVI will report quarterly to SRC on progress toward goals.
 - Feedback from individuals served will be considered using surveys.
- **Consumer Feedback**
 - DBVI partnered with Schmiege Consulting to create a new Pulse Survey.
 - Short, 3-question surveys at key points in a person's VR case.
 - Goal: address issues in real time instead of waiting until the case closes.
 - People can choose to respond by text, email, phone, or mail
 - About 45 people have opted in so far.
- **Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA)**
 - Updated with 2025 data.
 - Outreach efforts have increased diversity:
 - White: 54.5%
 - Black/African American: 40%
 - Asian: 6.7%
 - Hispanic: 5.7% (up from 2022; goal is closer to state average of 8%).

Review Updates: DBVI Technology Tutor contracting process – Megan Hall

- **Technology Tutor Network**
 - DBVI has a network of 16 technology tutors trained to help people who are blind, low vision or Deafblind.
 - Tutors teach skills like using screen readers, ZoomText, and other accessibility tools designed to make employment more accessible.
- **Contracting Process**
 - DBVI will continue its current contracting process with DARS (Department for Aging and Rehabilitation Services).
 - Contracts have been extended until August 2026.
 - There was discussion about using a staffing agency because of a new Virginia requirement for tutors to have liability insurance, but DBVI decided to keep the current process.

Adjourn

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

Next SRC Quarterly Meeting will be held in person on May 8, 2026.