

Virginia Board for the Blind and Vision Impaired Quarterly Board Meeting

Held: March 24, 2026 – 11 am – 2 pm

397 Azalea Avenue, Richmond, VA 23227

Approved Minutes

Board Members in Attendance

Joseph Ashley-Vice Chair; Paul D'Addario-Chair, Michael Kasey-Secretary; Tina Egge, Tracy Bowdish, Suleiman Alibhai

Board Members Not in Attendance

Kathryn Campbell

Guests

Bryce Lee, Optimal Services Group

Karen Logan, Optimal Services Group

DBVI Staff in Attendance

Jankail Allen, Director, Office of Strategic Initiatives; Rebecca Askew, Senior Policy Analyst; Rachel Dancy, Executive Assistant; Julianna Drumond, Director of Rehabilitation Teaching and Independent Living Services; Wallica Gaines, Deputy Commissioner, Administration; Melissa Jackson, Financial and Risk Management Director; Matt Koch, Deputy Commissioner of Enterprises; Kathy Malone, Deputy Commissioner of Services; Maggie Mills, Executive Assistant to Commissioner; Rick Mitchell, Commissioner.

Public (Virtual)

Debra Haynes, John McCracken, Robert Johnston, Vinnetea Freeman

Call to Order & Welcome

Chair D'Addario called the meeting to order and welcomed attendees. A quorum was confirmed.

Business Items

Approval of Agenda

Two additions were proposed:

1. An item from Dr. Ashley regarding a potential initiative/opportunity for Board members.
2. Discussion of policy and procedures for granting funds from the \$750,000 restricted fund.

Ms. Bowdish moved to adopt the Agenda. Dr. Alibhai seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Approval of December 16, 2025, Meeting Minutes

Mr. Kasey moved to approve the Minutes as presented. Ms. Bowdish seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Public Comment - None

Acknowledgment

The Chair acknowledged the passing of former Board members Deborah Helms and Dr. Leo Kim, recognizing their years of dedicated service.

Optimal Services Group

Bryce Lee and Karen Logan presented the investment update.

- Calendar year 2025 showed strong performance across equities and fixed income.
- Early 2026 has seen increased volatility due to geopolitical tensions, particularly in the Middle East.

Portfolio Performance:

- 2025 return: +12.5%
- January 2026: +2.5%, outperforming benchmark by ~60 basis points
- February 2026: additional ~+2% gain
- Year-to-date (through February): ~+5%, outperforming benchmark by ~1%

Portfolio Value:

- End of January: \$7,045,000
- End of February: \$7,173,739 (main endowment only-does not include restricted funds)
- January gains: approximately \$165,000
- The \$750,000 restricted fund has been separated from the main endowment for tracking purposes
- Current value (end of February): approximately \$779,000
- Managed similarly to the main portfolio but reported separately

Spending Policy & Distribution:

- Based on a 3-year rolling average (ending February 28)
- 3-year average portfolio value: \$6,535,170
- Approved spending rate: 4%
- **Available for distribution: \$261,407**
- Dr. Ashley motioned to round out total to \$260,000, Mr. Kasey seconded
- Grants are expected to be approved at the June 23 meeting

Agency Reports

Administration Division

Deputy Commissioner Gaines reported

- DBVI operates multiple facilities, including eight buildings on the Azalea campus and additional sites in Richmond and Charlottesville
- Two major projects have received approval to move to the bidding phase:
 - Charlottesville VIB facility renovation: approximately \$12 million
 - Library and Resource Center renovation (Azalea campus): approximately \$18 million
- These long-awaited projects are moving forward, representing significant progress

Enterprises Division

Deputy Commissioner Koch reported

Virginia Enterprises for the Blind (Randolph-Sheppard Program)

- A draft Memorandum of Agreement was submitted to Colorado
- Multi-state effort (including five states and Washington, D.C.) to pursue a Marine Corps contract for cafeteria services
- If successful, a Virginia-licensed blind vendor would manage operations at Quantico Marine Base

Virginia Industries for the Blind (AbilityOne Program)

- Monthly performance scorecard includes 22 metrics

- Strong performance overall
- Workforce composition goal (50% blind employees):
 - Slight dip to 49% last month, attributed to normal staffing transitions
- Annual ISO (International Standards Organization) audit scheduled for the next month
- Federal sales (90%+ of revenue) have been impacted by procurement changes

Charlottesville Facility:

- Aging, multi-story building (~100 years old) presents operational challenges
- Freight elevator outage previously impacted operations; now restored
- Renovation funding expected to significantly improve efficiency

ERP System Implementation

- New enterprise resource planning system (**Odoo**) progressing
- Phase 1 launch scheduled for week of May 11/full rollout expected over ~15 months

Recognition:

- National award for Excellence for Ft. Belvoir Base Supply Center (3rd in 6 years)
- ***Dr. Ashley motioned that the Board send a letter of congratulations to the Ft. Belvoir team for national recognition. Dr. Alibhai seconded the motion. All were in favor.*

Services Division – Deputy Commissioner Malone

Julianna Drummond in new position of Director of Rehabilitation Teaching and Independent Living Services

Many other positions have been filled with staff moving into new positions. Still have multiple vacancies.

Service Demand: 20–45 new applications weekly

Programs & Initiatives highlighted:

Career & Workforce Development:

- Internship workshop: 20 participants
- Career programs:
 - 14 (Steer Your Career)
 - 38 (Career Connections)

CVS Career Skills Lab:

- Launched January 2026 with first graduate recognized March 12

Student Engagement & Outreach

- Director of Deafblind Services presented at Maggie L. Walker Governor's School
- Pre-ETS Team held a student Town Hall: 57 participants providing information on all the student programs offered
- Blind Design Workshop (Virginia Tech) March 25 - 16 students (ages 14–22)
 - Focus on accessibility, design, and independent living skills
- Outreach to ASL students (45 participants)
- Ongoing job fairs and school engagement

Community & Recreational Programs

- Audible (beeping) egg hunts
- Pre-ETS event at Massanutten in February where students and staff experienced skiing and therapeutic recreation.
- VSDB Day at the Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind in February

Major Events & Programs

- AbilityFest – April 25
- Super Summer Camp – July 5–11
- LIFE Program – 4-week summer program
- Cyber Space Camp – June
- Thrive 55+ – August sessions

Older Individuals Who Are Blind (OIB) Program

Julianna Drummond presented on the OIB Program (presentation attached)

Overview:

- Federally funded (Rehabilitation Act of 1973)
- Serves individuals age 55+ with vision loss

Services:

- Independent living skills
- Orientation & mobility
- Assistive technology
- Counseling and support

Outcomes:

- Increased independence and safety
- Reduced isolation
- Ability to remain at home longer Increased independence and safety

Key Trends Identified

- Increasing demand due to aging population
- More complex client needs and comorbidities
- Growth in technology training needs
- Rising demand in assisted living settings

Old Business

Restricted Funds Update

- Melissa Jackson provided update:
 - No documentation found supporting existing restricted fund designations
 - No response from DARS Finance despite multiple requests
 - Request to close out restricted accounts in QuickBooks
 - Transfer balances to non-restricted general fund category
 - Eliminate: 3 restricted accounts with balances and 6 total restricted accounts
- Board agreed unanimously.

Revision of Grant Application and Report Format

Deputy Commissioner Gaines made the recommended changes to the grant application as advised at December Board Meeting. *****Applicant information will be provided in Excel and Word version to the Board adding notation column.***

Multi-Year Funding Discussion

- Board consensus:
 - Organizations may continue applying year-to-year
 - Continued funding based on program effectiveness and critical need
 - DBVI will request funding for Super Summer Camp to be included in budget from new Administration.

- ***Melissa will provide historical grant funding summary (organization, amount, year) to the Board.*

New Business

Possible Collaboration w/VA Optometric Association

DBVI's Low Vision Director position is currently vacant and the position is being reviewed. ***Commissioner Mitchell will discuss with Dr. Alibhai in the next few weeks.*

Review of Grant Process for New Board Members

Chair D'Addario reviewed the grant distribution process.

- Applications available on DBVI Board website: April 1 – June 1, 2026
 - June 12 (1:00 PM) – Board Special Virtual meeting to shortlist applicants
 - June 23 – Quarterly Board Meeting - final presentations from chosen applicants (3 minutes + Q&A)
- Presentations:
 - Required (virtual or in-person)
 - Will be noted in application instructions

Discussion of Board Members' Terms

- Chair D'Addario and Michael Kasey's terms expire June 30, 2026
- Chair D'Addario is not eligible for reappointment. Mr. Kasey is eligible for reappointment.

Research Participation

- Dr. Ashley participating in research study
 - Focus: "lived experience" representation in boards
 - Organized through Department of Social Services
- Opportunity offered to additional Board members

Restricted Fund Policy (VRCBVI)

- Draft policy introduced (attached)
 - Funds to support innovative, non-operational projects
 - Requires: Commissioner review, Board approval, ongoing reporting

Ms. Egge motioned to adopt the policy. Dr. Ashley seconded the motion.

- Deputy Commissioner Gaines recommended incorporating the restricted fund policy into a broader spending policy rather than a separate stand-alone policy.
- The motion was withdrawn.
- ***Final vote deferred to future meeting after Deputy Commissioner Gaines revises.*

Additional Notes

- Commissioner's appointment extended for 120 days by Administration (decision expected mid-May)

16. Adjournment

- Mr. Kasey motioned to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Bowdish seconded the motion. Motion to adjourn passed all in favor.