



**The Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
Massachusetts Commission for the Blind  
600 Washington Street Boston, MA 02111**

**Charles D. Baker**  
Governor  
**Karyn Polito**  
Lieutenant Governor

**Marylou Sudders**  
Secretary  
**David D'Arcangelo**  
Commissioner

**Written Testimony of David D'Arcangelo, Commissioner  
Massachusetts Commission for the Blind  
Joint Hearing of the House and Senate Committees on Ways  
and Means  
March 30, 2021**

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Good afternoon Representative Vargas and Senator Rush, and distinguished members of the Committees on Ways and Means. My name is David D'Arcangelo and I am the Commissioner of the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB).

MCB services individuals in Massachusetts who are legally blind by providing access to employment opportunities and social rehabilitation with the goal of increasing independence and self-determination. MCB is committed to the values of perseverance, adaptability, respect, resilience, and inclusion and is motivated by a collective vision of a world where individuals who are blind or visually impaired are empowered with opportunities to work and thrive.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today about the vital programs and highly specialized services made available to approximately 26,000 legally blind individuals of all ages in the Commonwealth and our proposed Fiscal Year 2022 (FY22) budget.

## MCB has three principal programs that support our mission:

- **Social Rehabilitation** to further independent living (4110-1000)
- **Vocational Rehabilitation** to achieve employment (4110-3010) matching a federal grant (4110-3021)
- **Turning 22** providing residential care, case management, and specialized services for **deaf/blind and multi-disabled consumers** (4110-2000)

Governor Baker's House 1 budget is funded at \$25.6M, a \$921K or 3% decrease from the FY21 GAA. This decrease is largely attributed to the removal of earmarks to the base budget. The budget ensures full-funding for the Chapter 257 rate reviews including the Adult Long-Term Care (ALTR) rate, Turning 22 class membership, as well the operational needs and services reduced on a one-basis basis in FY21.

Cohort	Massachusetts Population	Massachusetts Individuals Reporting as having Difficulty with Vision*	MCB Registry - Individuals Registered as Legally Blind
Children Under Age 5	361,016	1,083	201
Age 5-17	1,010,244	6,061	1,195
Age 18-64	4,372,204	65,583	8,235
Age 65+	1,107,089	57,569	16,917
<b>Totals</b>	<b>6,850,553</b>	<b>130,161</b>	<b>26,548</b>
<i>Source: 2019 U.S Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS)</i>			

Please note the American Community Survey (ACS) data uses different methods and definitions of "Visual Disability" as compared to MCB's/MGL's "Medical Determination" standard of 20/200.

As a result, the data cannot be directly correlated, and some individuals included in ACS data may not be legally blind by Massachusetts standards. However, MCB endeavors to identify

people with visual disabilities and encourage them to visit an eye care provider.

Since we last met, MCB has remained focused on its mission, demonstrating that people with disabilities can lead during challenging times by continuing to provide Social and Vocational Rehabilitation services remotely. The COVID-19 pandemic forced us to pivot, but our services continued uninterrupted.

In 2020, MCB increased communications and added new formats to enable us to stay engaged with the community safely.

**Examples of these initiatives in 2020 included:**

- Hosting a series of four Stakeholder meetings, four virtual Town Halls, and a virtual Open House on International Day of Persons with Disabilities, engaging several hundred individuals and stakeholders with each session.
- Conducting online learning opportunities for individuals, attending virtual community meetings, presenting at the Statutory Advisory Board and Rehabilitation Council meetings, virtual appearances to increase awareness of MCB, and messaging via the Talking Information Center and MAIN affiliates.
- Revising our website to provide more timely information, growing our social media presence, and disseminating messaging through regional staff by leveraging our internal communication framework that was built in response to the pandemic to establish connectivity and continuity of services.

We also examined MCB's service delivery and business processes during this time. Historically, the vast majority of MCB's services

have been provided in the community, including homes, schools, and group facilities, with virtually no services provided in MCB's regional offices.

As a result and given the overall effectiveness of our virtual service delivery, MCB determined it would consolidate its physical space footprint, which resulted in office closures in New Bedford and Worcester. We did not reduce our staff or our commitment to our community.

### **Accomplishments and Innovative Achievements in FY21:**

The 2020 Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB) Consumer Survey was conducted through a partnership between MCB and the Human Services Research Institute (HSRI) between July 8 and October 5, 2020.

This groundbreaking survey instrument contained questions on demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, health status, visual functioning, other disabilities, assistive technology use, mobility/orientation, activities of daily living, and service utilization.

More importantly, this new tool has provided us with new information, which gives us a fresh and innovative understanding of our consumers and their characteristics.

For example, we have learned that ~71% of our consumers have had a Driver's License, that ~58% of our consumers use the Internet daily and a better understanding of the consumer's vision loss at Age of Onset. See below:

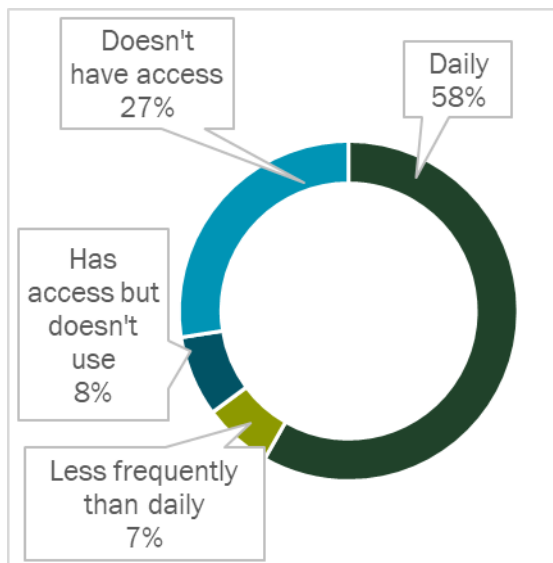


Figure 2Exhibit 19. Frequency of Internet use

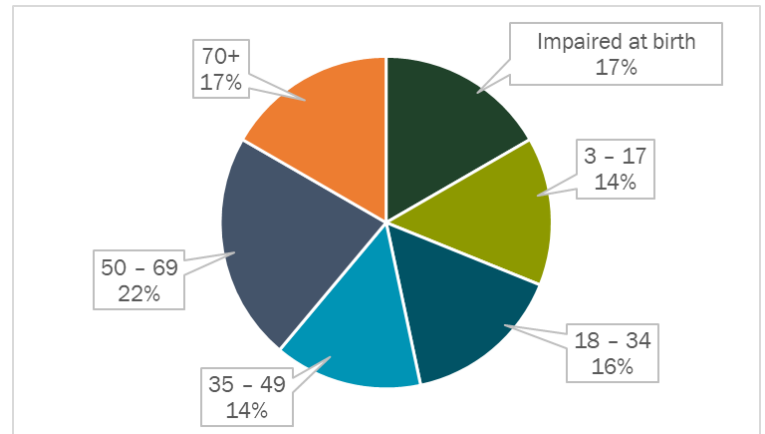


Figure 1Exhibit 11. Age at Onset of Visual Impairment

MCB hopes to continue with this survey longitudinally, which should provide opportunities for more targeted programs and services.

Another series of projects that MCB was pleased to complete in 2020 and will now continue to implement this year are 24 projects utilizing federal RSA re-allotment funds.

First, MCB initiated its comprehensive statewide needs assessment (CSNA). This process allowed us to evaluate the needs of the individuals we serve in order to provide the best programs and services. It allowed us to assess and identify areas for improvement in order to foster future collaboration with statewide partners. It allowed us to develop answers to the question, “What is the future of MCB, and are we prepared?”

We went beyond the traditional framework of the CSNA to recruit national experts in disability policy, vocational rehabilitation, and workforce and economic development to help us find answers that address and explore the issues facing policymakers and our MCB community today including the gig economy and its impact on our community, how inclusive design principles in the workplace are connected to career outcomes, the link between team sports and

future employment, how formalized apprenticeships might benefit individuals who are blind and visually impaired, how MA can create work environments in high-growth sectors for the people we serve, what do autonomous vehicles mean for people with disabilities, and more.

One of our 24 reallotment projects included the development of a PSA filmed during the pandemic outdoors at Perkin's School for the Blind. The PSA (below) is entitled ***What's Your Vision?*** that was shared initially during National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) in October 2020 and supplemented by the generous support of MassDOT, who donated digital billboard space across the state. The PSA will soon hit the airwaves as part of a paid media campaign to further its impact. In it, you'll hear from members of the MCB community as they share their visions for the future, including how MCB's vocational rehabilitation (VR) services help individuals and employers achieve their workforce goals. See [www.mass.gov/whats-your-vision](http://www.mass.gov/whats-your-vision) for the full video.



Other important re-allotment projects included a Pre-ETS needs assessment for individuals age 14 – 21 and the development of a graphic novel titled the Quest for Independence which serves as a Pre-ETS best practice guide for teens and families. In addition, we launched our first podcast called Career Views and developed 25 episodes with guest interviews to cover many vocational rehabilitation topics. Episodes are shared on Friday mornings on Soundcloud, Spotify, and Apple podcasts.

For more information, including key findings, observations, and supporting materials for our 24 projects, please see <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/2020-rsa-re-allotment-project-summary>.

## **Conclusion**

MCB's objective is to continue providing our three core programs of Social Rehabilitation, Vocational Rehabilitation, and Turning 22 while seeking opportunities for continued innovation and efficiencies. The proposed funding of \$25.6 million in House 1 will allow us to continue our important initiatives and sustain our current programs to provide critical services for individuals who are blind, visually impaired, and Deafblind in the Commonwealth.

On behalf of Governor Baker, Lt. Governor Polito and Secretary Sudders, I thank you for the opportunity to testify here today, look forward to your ongoing support, and am pleased to take any questions.