

**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 Committee on Ways and Means  
February 15, 2022**

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Good morning, Vice Chair Donato, Vice Chair Friedman, and honorable members of the Committee on Ways and Means. My name is David D'Arcangelo, and I am the Commissioner of the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB).

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today about Governor Baker's Fiscal Year 2023 budget and the vital programs and highly specialized services it will continue to support. MCB services approximately 25,000 individuals in Massachusetts who are legally blind and Deaf-Blind by providing access to employment opportunities and social rehabilitation with the goal of increasing independence and self-determination.

Governor Baker's FY23 House 1 budget includes \$27M in funding for MCB, a \$1.3M or 5% decrease from the FY22 budget. This decrease is largely attributed to the removal of earmarks to the base budget, offset by maintenance increases. By appropriation, the Administration account was increased by \$541K (or 47%) attributed to the re-alignment of rent costs. The largest decrease was attributed to the Community Services account which is due to the earmark removal as previously mentioned. The Deaf-Blind Extended Supports line item, formerly known as Turning 22, saw an increase of \$313K (or 2%) due to the Chapter 257 rate increases. This allows full funding for 2-year rate reviews such as

the Adult Long-Term Care (ALTR) Rate. MCB is pleased with the FY23 House 1 budget and appreciate the opportunity to speak of it and the programs each of these appropriations serve.

MCB has three principal programs that support our mission:

- **Social Rehabilitation** to further independent living
- **Vocational Rehabilitation** to achieve employment
- **Turning 22** providing residential care, case management, and specialized services for **deaf/blind and multi-disabled consumers**

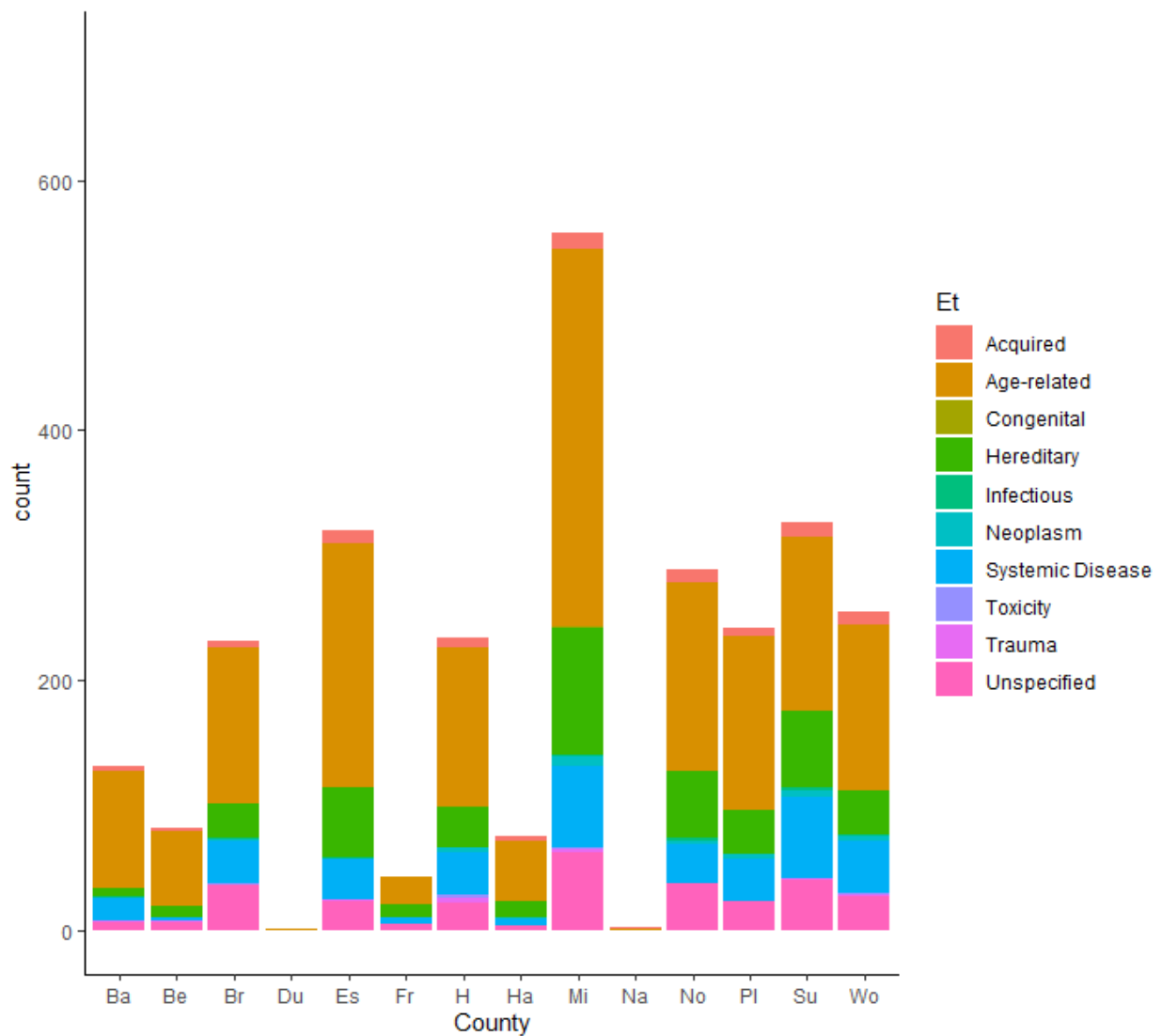


Figure 1

For Legislators who would like to better understand the instances of vision loss by county and the causes of vision loss, we have included Figure 1. This data stems from a project that explored the data between legal blindness (20/200) and visual impairment. As indicated, age related vision impairment exceeds any other etiology in every county in Massachusetts. Here is an excerpt from that report; “Most irreversible low vision conditions in the United States are caused by age-related eye diseases. These include age-related macular degeneration, diabetic retinopathy, and glaucoma as the most common (1). Eighty percent of Americans with low vision are over age 65 (2). Although the annual death rate in the elderly low vision population slows the rate of growth in prevalence, the aging of the U.S. population is accelerating as the generation known as the “baby boomers” move into their older years. Thus, the number of people with low vision is expected to double over the next two decades.”

### **Noteworthy Achievements in FY22:**

- **Central Registry Modernization** – MCB’s Central Registry (CR) Department proactively distributes thousands of Certificates of Blindness (COBs) to individuals in order to address the local Assessor demand/requirement for COBs. This year, MCB is in process of reforming a regulation which will further streamline the process for individuals and local Assessors.
  - The MCB CR Team continues to respond to email inquiries via [BlindnessRegistry@mass.gov](mailto:BlindnessRegistry@mass.gov) as well as via our Virtual Blindness Registry and an online request form.
  - MCB dedicated more personnel resources to address the growing CR service demand by hiring a new staff member for customer service and administrative support and appointing a new director. An additional staff person is currently in the process of being hired.

- **Vocational Rehabilitation** - Since July 1, 2021, to present, MCB has achieved 65 job placements with both large and small employers. In FY21, MCB exceeded the previous year's placement rate by 25 percent. During a period when many communities were experiencing job loss, MCB was able to pivot quickly due to mobile technology, strong employer partnerships, and our nationally recognized internship program.
- **Eye Care Provider Outreach** - In 2021, MCB worked with Mass Eye and Ear and New England College of Optometry to provide a training for 100+ eye care providers and their staff for continuing education credits while also providing information about the registration process at MCB. In 2022, MCB will conduct a similar training for providers.
- **Accessible Instructional Materials (AIM) Library** – MCB entered into an Interagency Service Agreement (ISA) with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), effective July 1st, to continue the success of the Accessible Instructional Materials (AIM) Library, an important statewide resource center that assists school districts and educators in providing specialized instructional materials and equal access to curriculum for more than 3,000 children and students who are blind and visually impaired in Massachusetts.
- **Social Rehabilitation / Assistive Technology Training Earmark Funds** – Due to the provision of earmark funds for Assistive Technology and Independent Living Training within the Community Services Line item, five MCB stakeholder organizations are currently receiving referrals and MCB is working with our advocacy partners at Bay State Council of the Blind and National Federation of the Blind Massachusetts to spread the word about available programs.
- **What's Your Vision? Advertising Campaign** – In 2021, multiple projects were funded via federal allotment from the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) including a paid

media advertising campaign to share MCB's ["What's Your Vision?"](#) PSA on digital and traditional channels. The campaign wrapped up in October to recognize National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) and included a partnership with MassDOT to feature the campaign via 195 digital billboards across the state. The campaign received more than 8,893,743 online impressions and 3,284,740 video views. Offline, the campaign received more than 42,290,616 impressions via TV, radio, and print ads.

- **Ecommerce Entrepreneurial Opportunity and Collaboration with the National Industries for the Blind (NIB)** – MCB is collaborating with the National Industries for the Blind to offer VR consumers an innovative small business enterprise opportunity through a highly accessible system.

### **Community Outreach:**

- MCB meetings prioritize accessibility for our stakeholders and clients with Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART), American Sign Language (ASL) interpreting, accessible documents and presentations, alternative formats, and/or other accommodations.
  - Four MCB Stakeholder meetings were held virtually in 2021 and two virtual Town Hall events with one focused on regional resources led by MCB's Regional Directors and one in partnership with the MBTA to share information on public transportation for individuals with disabilities.
  - In October 2021, MCB presented the first annual Making the Grade event with Boston Public Schools and New England College of Optometry (NECO) to reach parents and caregivers of students who are blind and visually impaired.
  - MCB worked with National Federation of the Blind to update the MCB channel on Newline, providing another method of accessible communication for the community.

- White Cane Awareness Day, typically held in person at the State House, was held virtually via the O&M team on White Cane Safety Day on October 15<sup>th</sup> with approximately 150 people attending to discuss O&M and best techniques for using a white cane.
- MCB worked with the Massachusetts Audio Information Network (M.A.I.N.) and supporting legislators to host a virtual volunteer appreciation event in May for almost 500 radio reading volunteers.
- MCB hosted its first Caregiver Support Week virtually for a five-day series of virtual events with community partners and caregivers along with hosting ongoing Independent Living Hour events virtually for the community, along with virtual Music with Mike afternoon events for children and families.
- One Town Hall for the DeafBlind Community was held in March 2021 led by MCB's DBES Unit in partnership with MCDHH and community partners.

## **Conclusion**

MCB's objective is to continue providing vital social, residential, and vocational programs, while seeking opportunities for continued innovation. The proposed funding in the FY23 House 1 budget will allow us to continue important initiatives and sustain our three core programs for the community we serve in Massachusetts.

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.