



**Commonwealth of Massachusetts**  
**Massachusetts Commission for the Blind**  
**600 Washington Street, Boston, MA 02111**  
**(617) 727-5550**

**MAURA T. HEALEY**  
GOVERNOR

**KATHLEEN E. WALSH**  
SECRETARY

**KIMBERLEY DRISCOLL**  
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

**JOHN OLIVEIRA**  
COMMISSIONER

**Testimony of John Oliveira**  
**Commissioner for the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind**  
**Joint Committee on Children, Families, and Persons with Disabilities**  
**Informational Hearing**  
**April 15, 2025**

Hello, House Chair Livingstone, Senate Chair Kennedy, and distinguished members of the Joint Committee on Children, Families, and Persons with Disabilities.

- The Massachusetts Commission for the Blind has been serving Massachusetts residents who are blind since 1906.
- Helen Keller was one of the first commissioners.
- Today, MCB serves approximately 30,000 residents who are legally blind.
- We employ 140 people.
- Our annual state budget is approximately \$30 million with another \$8 million in federal funding
- Our mission is to provide individualized training, education, and empowerment to people who are legally blind, and advocate for inclusive policies across the Commonwealth, with the goal of life-long independence and full community participation.
- More than two-thirds of the residents we serve are aged 60 or older, with the average age being 81.
- Age-related vision impairment exceeds any other etiology in Massachusetts.
- Under Massachusetts law, all eye care providers licensed in the Commonwealth are required to report within 30 days all cases of legal blindness to MCB. Our Blindness Registry then registers the patient, and the case is assigned to a counselor.
- We have three principal services that support our mission:
  - Social Rehabilitation
    - Offering skills training to help individuals live independently.
    - We currently have approximately 2,250 active cases.
    - Services include safe cooking, home management, laundry, managing expenses, adjustment to blindness counseling, orientation and mobility and

low vision magnification devices, using assistive technology or other adaptive methods.

- The agency continues to provide flexible funding that allows the parents to cover respite services, equipment not covered by insurance, or other services that are needed to maintain the child at home. The agency also provides camperships and the Carroll Center Kids program. The agency also provides adaptive daily living skills training for our social rehabilitation consumers. We also provide orientation and mobility, and assistive technology training as needed.
- Our assistive technology staff trained the vision rehabilitation therapists on the use of accessibility features for iPhones and iPads.

○ Vocational Rehabilitation

- Assisting individuals in achieving or retaining employment, with a focus on higher-wage opportunities. MCB is currently serving 982 Vocational Rehabilitation consumers.
- These services include education, such as college or certificate training programs, and extensive independent living skills training such as record keeping, orientation and mobility, cooking safely, and a variety of other adaptive skills and low vision trainings.
- We have a shortage of staff, and we are working collaboratively with UMASS Boston to develop videos and course curriculum that would help promote career opportunities through social media and offer undergraduate students a chance to take a course and learn more about career opportunities in working with individuals who are blind.

○ Turning 22

- Providing specialized services for young adults, including those who are DeafBlind or have additional disabilities.
- We are currently serving 1,100 consumers in this program.
- This program offers various residential services, case management, and day programming to support them in living in a setting that is most appropriate for them.
- During this fiscal year MCB is collaborating with New England Homes for the Deaf and is providing funding to pay for individuals to accompany our consumers who live at the New England Homes for the Deaf if they need to go to the hospital for emergency services. This program was developed because of several situations that occurred with DeafBlind consumers not being able to receive the appropriate assistance because of their inability to communicate with hospital personnel.

- Our programs make a significant difference in the lives of the residents we serve.