# Massachusetts Commission for the Blind

Rehabilitation Council Minutes

For December 7, 2022

The quarterly Meeting of the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind Rehabilitation Council was called to order by Chair DeAnn Elliott at 1:03 p.m. The meeting was held remotely using the Zoom conferencing platform.

There were 27 individuals in attendance.

Members in attendance: DeAnn Elliott (Chair); Jennifer Harnish (Secretary); Jerry Berrier; Martha Daigle; Cheryl Scott; Priscilla Ngome; Jenifer Whitmore.

Inez Canada was attending in place of Naomi Goldberg to represent CAP.

Regrets: David D'Arcangelo; Naomi Goldberg; Rebecca Davis; Brian Switzer; Devon Myer; Filomena Tripp.

Attending Ex officio RC members: Priscilla Ngome.

MCB guests: Deputy Commissioner John Oliveira; Samantha Linden (Zoom host); Nathan Skrocki; Lauren Lang (General Council).

ASL interpreters Janna Evans and Laurie (last name not able to be heard). CART provider is Stephanie (no last name given)

Guests: Inez Canada; Sarah Wiles

There were 7 out of 13 voting members in attendance which does meet quorum.

The chair noted that with Regina DiMarzio’s departure from her role at MCB, Michael Saccone (new MCB Director of Communications is now serving as administrative liaison for the RC. Samantha Linden is taking his place today in his absence.

A reminder to attendees was given by the interpreter that speakers say their names when speaking.

DeAnn announced that her term on the RC and as Chair was ending as of the June 1 RC meeting. There is also an opening for the Vice Chair position . The Chair noted that discussion of new appointments for these roles would occur in March in detail. She shared the aspects of this role. She encouraged members to consider an interest in these roles. She also noted that the Chair has historically been a blind consumer of MCB. She described the roles as working together with MCB on topics such as the Combined State Plan and surveys, as well as sharing ideas for RC meeting topics. These positions solicit speakers , arrange for subcommittee meetings, forwarding accommodation requests and meeting to MCB, and dealing with specific situations that arise such as Covid, past potential for Order of selection, building the RC membership, closing of the two MCB offices, as well. She shared a number of positives she has experienced as Chair and encouraged others to consider the role.

## Voting on minutes

A motion was made and seconded to accept the June 1, 2022, RC meeting minutes; the vote to accept them was unanimous.

Jerry made the motion and the person who seconded it did not state their name.

There was a motion that was seconded to accept the September 7, 2023 minutes. the vote to accept them was unanimous with the stipulation that Regina’s role be listed as a liaison. Jerry made the motion and Sheryl seconded.

## Client Assistance Program Presentation

Sarah Wiles, JD, presented on a document CAP is developing as a guide to vocational rehabilitation for the RC of MCB and also for the SRC of MRC. The document was attached to the email the Chair sent out for this current meeting. Sarah welcomes feedback on the document from RC members.

Some RC attendees had not yet had a chance to read it and plan to email their input. Priscilla noted that some edits are needed to address the vision-focused nature of MCB’s VR work as opposed to the MRC’s focus.

Inez said that CAP is the consumer advocacy arm of BR s They assist consumers with discussions of denial of services with MCB for example. They also do Title 1 trainings and employment workshops. Anyone can contact them for guidance on VR regulations and for service-related support. They Work with MCB and MRC consumers and service providers. DeAnn plans to reach out to CAP to have a more detailed presentation of their services and role in 2023.

## Commissioner’s Report

In the Commissioner’s absence Deputy Commissioner John Oliveira presented on his behalf. He noted that with the administration change occurring in January, MCB has been getting requests for information; the Transition Committee is meeting and reaching out to MCB for information for example, clarification on some systems and processes MCB has.

The budget is stable.

On the program side, MCB has started planning for the annual Visions of Collaboration conference, which is training for TVI’s and mobility instructors who work with pre-ETS youth; the date is still being set and will be sometime in March and likely will be in-person or hybrid. The process of identifying internship sites and reaching out to potential interns for MCB’s summer internship program has begun. Expansion of opportunities thru remote and hybrid work is growing the possible options available for placements; for example, a student can intern with an out-of-state setting on-line, so transportation is not a barrier to that experience. The reverse job fair held in October, with consumers presenting their elevator speech to employers, has seen Several hires coming out of that. Also, this year saw the greatest number of interviews coming out of the job fair as well.

The Disability Employment Project, with the Human Resource Division which invites State hiring managers to attend; The DEP invites MCB and MRC to present vetted consumers with interests in jobs at the State level. The entrepreneurial Self-employment project (started with National Industries for the Blind) continues.

The Employment Now Initiative continues with Polus Center and the Carroll Center, with individuals continuing to be considered for this opportunity. MCB’s mentoring program has mentees waiting for mentors to help mentees understand the future world of work that is coming their way. Anyone with an interest in mentoring can contact John Olivera or Joe Buizon.

Next Gen continues, with referrals being made by MCB regions. High staffing need for the project has been a challenge; for example, a counselor to support blind individuals is still needed, and MCB will be taking the lead in training that person on the specifics of working with blind consumers. . More information on it is available on the MRC website as well as in the recording of the June 2022 RC meeting when Next Gen staff presented on the project; refer to the RC landing page for information on that meeting recording.

The Legislature allowed MCB to carry over 400K in funds that had been designated to conduct a consumer survey that MCB was not able to get too due to personnel issues. The aim is for survey to be done January thru June 2023. Currently this is in the RFR process so details cannot yet be shared. Details will be available after December 12. White Cane Day went well; a combination of live videos and recorded segments were used.

MCB does not have a partnership with Aira.

## MCB Dashboard Spreadsheet

Chair thanked Nathan Skrocki for creating the second draft of the spreadsheet that the RC can use to better understand the specifics of VR cases.

A tab with a glossary of terms will be added. Requests for percentages for ethnicity was made; also if numbers over time can be taken from the database to see trends. such as for number of open VR cases. Also, what the breakdown of ethnicity in the other category is. Clarification of race categories requested, specifically what is meant by White, Hispanic or Latino. Dashboard labels are constrained by RSA. About ten percent of those in the 0-12 age group move to VR. The remainder move to SR/DDS. Request to add accessibility to the Dashboard, for example with using the naming feature of Jaws/Excel for adding row and column titles. INEZ noted that Mass Office on Disability does accessibility consulting for documents and can assist MCB staff and other agencies with making the Dashboard accessible.

## RC Annual Report

The annual report will be due to be turned in on December 30. Patricia Hart has retired and was noted as an expert resource for creating this report. A draft of the report was included in the email for this meeting. This report captures what the RC has been working on and is submitted to the RSA. Nathan is the point person for submission of the report with Patricia’s retirement. Comments and suggested edits for the report can be sent to Nate.

## Public Comments

There were no public commentsr

## New Business

Question on whether it would be helpful to stay abreast of self-employment as a vocational option and how MRC does this.

Request for report on the MCB marketing campaigns in terms of impact on MCB census Lauren Lang clarified that if an item is not on the agenda MCB technically cannot discuss the topic. It will be added to the March RC meeting agenda.

New Statutory Advisory Board members are: Chair Howard Purcell (NECO); Brian Mac Donald (NBP); Kathy Petkauskos

(parent of a blind individual and with WWL), Colleen Moran of Partners, and Blair Wong (blind consumer and former professor of Optometry). .

Next meeting is March 1, 2023, at 1PM.

Meeting was adjourned at 2:49pm.

Minutes submitted by Jennifer Harnish, Secretary