# Minutes of the Rehabilitation Council

## Massachusetts Commission for the Blind

## June 2020 to June 2022

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# Rehabilitation Council Minutes

# For June 3, 2020

The quarterly Meeting of the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind Rehabilitation Council was called to order by Chair Bruce Howell at 10:00 a.m. Bruce discovered his term on the RC expired in March. A motion to approve his chairing this meeting passed unanimously.

## Attendees (by Zoom)

Present: Bruce Howell (Chair); DeAnn Elliott (Vice Chair); Nancy Mader; Nora Nagle ; Mary Otiato; Deputy Commissioner John Oliveira; Richard Curtis; Naomi Goldberg; Charles Curti; Joe Buizon; Patricia Hart; Inez Canada; Nancy Trzcinski; David D’Arcangelo (10:15).

## Minutes Approval

There was a correction of the date of last meeting from March 3rd to March 4th, 2020. Revised minutes were accepted by consent.

## RC Membership Status & Discussion (Bruce, Mary):

Confirmations have been slowed by Covid-19. Our contact at DHS says we have priority. Two new member applications have been received for Jennifer Harnish (Community Rehabilitation Provider) and Brian Switzer (individual who has received VR services.) Patricia Hart confirmed term is two consecutive terms of three years each. Two seats for Business Industry and Labor are currently vacant. Lydia Greene from Tufts Health Plan retired so her seat is vacant. Council members were reminded that they could recommend someone for a role. Priscilla Ngome will be nominated to replace Darren Black as MCB rep.

## Update on Annual Consumer Satisfaction Survey (Mary, Trish):

Bruce shared pleasure with the survey and its accessibility. Mary asked Bruce to forward survey link to RC members. Mary thanked RC members for feedback particularly information provided by Richard Curtis and Chuck Curti related to HR. The RC is important in shaping the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment. Staff, providers, and consumers are being included in focus groups to augment survey. MCB will host a town hall meeting this Friday as well. Commissioner D’Arcangelo suggested having a warm welcome for consumer survey. MCB emailed and called clients and received more than 120 responses from consumers who said they’d be willing to participate. Goal is to increase participation to reduce selection bias. On target to have the needs assessments and reports done by August. The draft report will be sent out for RC Committee to review, so report can be finalized by September30th. This is the first time survey has been done as an online survey to a larger group of consumers. Response rate for smaller online survey in 2017 had low return due to accessibility issues. Chair Bruce Howell praised MCB for moving to online format.

## Update on Reallotment Fund Projects:

* PCG doing Consumer Service Needs Assessment
* PCG also drafted report summarizing VR closures (successful and unsuccessful closures)
* PCG surveying how businesses are using tax incentives.
* American Institutes for Research is developing ad campaign to raise awareness among employers about hiring people with disabilities; waiting for clearance to come to Boston.
* Sent survey to 90 eye professionals but got only three responses. Important but elusive group. Want to create a focus group to give us feedback about what we can do to help them support our consumers as they return to work.

## Deputy Commissioner’s Report:

Since mid-March our staff has been working remotely. All staff equipped with necessary technology. Using various platforms to connect with consumers. Rehab teachers follow up with training over Zoom or phone. Increased partnering with families at this time to support training of consumers remotely. Families have gained increased awareness of their family members visual impairment as a result. All programs have been moved online: town hall, soft skills trainings for interns, each region presented a portion of soft skills training. The opening internship ceremony will happen on Zoom.

Coordinated check-ins with consumers have been facilitated by Carol Cullens (MCB) and Joe Buizon (MCB). Counselors will be invited to join these check-ins.

Additional projects include a residency with New England College of Optometry. Targeted to support a resident in providing low vision services in Western Ma. Hope to have live residency experiences when phase two starts in July.

For next year, MCB is putting soft skills training program into webinar format for remote learning.

Pre-ETS conference Visions of Collaboration postponed to next year due to attendee feedback about availability.

## Commissioner’s Report:

The Commissioner thanked Bruce for the great job he did as chair and wished we could do something in person to acknowledge his service to the RC. He’d like to hold a celebration when we’re able to meet again.

Work Without Limits is currently having an employer event for VR candidates at Polus Center.

Labor and Workforce Development are restructuring how unemployment is given out in Massachusetts and launching new tools. Their work impacts this committee. Important to align our future meetings so Cheryl Scott can participate.

MCB has been doing regular work and also 24 new reallotment projects. Set to spend $2.3 million of $2.5 in reallotment funding. Massachusetts is one of most aggressive states in scope of activity.

AIR valued meeting with RC. It helped shape project. Commissioner suggested we invite someone to speak about one of the 24 projects at next meeting.

Carla Cath is new MCB director of communications. MCB is on all social media platforms. New blog. Website updated . Suggestions welcome.

Outreach to consumers, surveys, robo calls, as well as input from VR counselors has increased information for database.

Return to MCB’s office environment will be phased and deliberate.

40% of successfully closed VR consumers negatively impacted by COVID (loss of job, reduced hours, etc.)Important to keep these consumers connected to work force. May maximize this time by getting training or credentials. Some success stories, like consumer who received $110,000 job offer, and some employers still hiring, but set back of ten years in job gains in two months. Economy will recover, and consumers will be part of it.

The Worcester and New Bedford MCB offices will stay in their current locations on a month-by-month basis for another year. An RFR for the Boston office is on hold.

The Carroll Center has been conducting trainings on how to use Zoom. A book on using Zoom with Jaws is available via The Carroll Center for about $20.

## Nominations & Vote for new Rehabilitation Council Chair (Bruce):

Bruce thanked everyone for their contributions. Interesting times, including two commissioners and an avoided order of selection. Grateful to MCB staff for wonderful work!! Bruce nominated DeAnn Elliott. Floor was opened for other nominations. Chuck Curti seconded. Vote was unanimous-DeAnn Elliott is new Rehab Council Chairperson.

DeAnn asked for support of group in this position. Difficult times ahead. Also opportunity. Confirmation of new members is priority because RC will need full involvement of each member as we address challenges. Appreciative of efforts made by Bruce, Mary and Commissioner; Commissioner will email Chief’s secretary one last time to inquire about status of appointments. We need to review list of RC membership to ensure most up-to-date information is being provided. Inez Canada noted that vacancies can affect MCB funding. RC has pending approvals and also unfilled seats. RSA said unconfirmed members can vote; filling vacant seats is required. DeAnn will meet with Regina, Trisha and Commissioner to discuss.

## Other Business:

MCB has submitted State Plan, which will be approved. Many thanks to Trisha, staff and sub-committee.

September 2nd is the tentative date for the next meeting.

## Meeting Adjourned

The RC Meeting was adjourned at 11:40 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted by Karen McCormack, Secretary

(Note: It was later determined that quorum was not met at this meeting. Dispensation of minutes will be rescheduled for the soonest date in which there is quorum.)