**Massachusetts Commission for the Blind**

**Rehabilitation Council Minutes**

**For June 2, 2021**

The quarterly Meeting of the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind Rehabilitation Council was called to order by Chair DeAnn Elliott at 1:00 p.m. Quorum was not established and the Chair noted that there had not been quorum for the past three meetings either so once quorum can be reached, the minutes of those meetings will be reviewed in order to be voted on.

**Member & Guest Introductions**

Chair DeAnn Elliott welcomed all in attendance.

Discussion on methods and accessing of RC minutes recording occurred. For this meeting, Commissioner D’Arcangelo gave permission to the RC secretary to make her own Zoom recording and to be able to share it with those requesting the recording. MCB will discuss further other options for recordings and sharing of them.

**Attendees (by Zoom)**

DeAnn Elliott (Chair); Commissioner David D’Arcangelo; Jennifer Harnish (secretary); Jerry Berrier; Richard Curtis; Inez Canada (standing in for Naomi Goldberg); Priscilla Ngome; Cheryl Scott; Jenifer Whitmore

Participants: Deputy Commissioner John Oliveira; Patricia Hart; Carla Kath; Lauren Lang; Regina DiMarzo; Mary Otiato; Robert Jones; 13 members of the public.

Regrets: Martha Daigle; Leslie M. Leslie; Nancy Trzcinski; Charles Curti; Cory Kadlik

A total of 29 participants (including RC members were on the call as of 10:05 A.M. as reported by Regina DiMarzo, Executive Assistant (Zoom host)

Minutes from the March 3, 2021 RC Meeting are available but could not be voted on due to absence of quorum.

The Chair welcomed attendees to consult the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils for information and she will share information on an upcoming webinar on creating and updating By-Laws. The Chair invited any RC members to assist in the updating of the current By-Laws.

Robert Jones of the Department of Health and Human Services said that he is in process of reaching out to nominees to expedite the confirmation process. The Chair thanked him for this effort.

**State Plan**

Tricia Hart reminded the RC members that the Massachusetts State Plan is due for renewal in March, 2022. Discussion of the Plan is recommended to begin occurring at the September RC meeting, pending achieving quorum.

Zoom meeting concern

The question was raised as to whether participants who are not named or listed with a phone number be removed from the meeting for IT security reasons. The Commissioner expressed the need to continue exploring guidance on holding meetings by zoom. The Chair concurred.

**Commissioner’s Report**

Commissioner D’Arcangelo reported that reopening discussions continue and some reopening has begun, with plans for a hybrid work environment of tele-work and in-office work being discussed with the Dept. of Health and Human Services, unions, and industry/labor as well as constituents with a hopeful start time of this summer. . Reallotment projects and wearable device projects continue.

Other projects include streamlining the Charlie Card process with the MBTA and also a meeting with eye-care professionals regarding the new registration system.

In response to an RC member’s question, the Deputy Commissioner noted that most MCB services continue to be provided virtually, however some Rehabilitation Teachers have been volunteering to work in consumer homes to teach skills that they have not been able to teach using remote methods; MCB mobility staff have also been able to work in the field since early 2021.

The Commissioner replied to a question about impact of current economic situation on those with disabilities and referred to reports generated by Kessler Foundation and the University of New Hampshire indicating that people with disabilities have been impacted disproportionately more than those without disabilities. The Deputy Commissioner reported that between July 2019 and June 2020 MCB placed 126 individuals for employment.; he said that number was lower likely due to impact of the pandemic on lay-off rates. From July 2020 to June 2, 2021 MCB has placed 142 individuals, a 31% increase. Funding for apprenticeships is being discussed. The Chair requested the updated statistics on employment impact on MCB consumers from what was noted in June, 2020.

**Deputy Commissioner report**

MCB held an information day for college-bound seniors, discussing topics like accomodations, obtaining assistive technology, finding hired readers among other topics. MCB also held the Visions of Collabboration conference attended by TVI’s, Pre-Ets service providers, and consumers. Work on the October 1 employment fair continues. Soft skills training was held, with 78 individuals interested in a summer internship. Half have confirmed placements and the remaining are in the works. Opening Ceremonies will be held June 10. Internship positions will be a mix of virtual, hybrid, and in-person.

The Return on Investment study is being done by PCG. It is currently in the Information stage, identifying what information is going to be used . The second stage will be the Research stage, with tools potentially including focus groups, surveys and much reaching out to consumers to gather information not only on quality of jobs and services provided but also on quality of life after services. . The Commissioner mentioned a full stakeholder plan that is part of the project

Update on the State budget

The Chair reported that the House and the Senate approved an earmark of $850,000to the Social Rehabilitation account.

Statutory Review

The Chair described some elements of the Statutory Review process that has been occurring. As a member of the review committee, she reports that much outdated language has been removed or refreshed and modernized. The next step as this goes thru the legislature is to include opportunity for public comment. Lauren Lang, a member of the review committee stated that the document is now being sent to the Executive Office of Health and Human Services as the next step in the process.

In response to a question, Lauren lang said that Human Resources has required and RSA does require that that programs and services be looked at thru the lens of diversity, equity and inclusion, although the language is not specifically mentioned in the Statute. She welcomes language of this sort to be submitted for consideration for inclusion. The Chair also welcomes such language for the RC By-Laws project.

Reallotment Projects

The Commissioner confirmed that MCB received $1,000,000 in reallotment funding this year; however he said he didn’t think they would leverage all of it. He said because they did not know how long Covid would last, they initiated only a few projects. In addition to the ROI project mentioned above, Carla Kath described the What’s Your Vision project a VR media campaign working with Marketing Doctor includes digital, broadcast and traditional media segments in print. The first launched mid-May. Marketind Doctor reported that in the last two weeks of May ads running on Facebook had the greatest response. Overall using Facebook, YouTube and LinkedIn as the digital media channels targeting consumers, eye-care professionals, employers and caregivers. Overall number of impressions on these sites were 750,000; Video views on the Public Service Announcement were almost 400,000 and the click thru rate was 1.15%. Comments received on the sites were positive. The radio and broadcast TV placements went out at the end of May with placements during prime time media for example, during Good Morning America and The Today Show as two examples. The campaigns will run thru the beginning of November with special emphasis around October events like the employment fair, White Cane Awareness Day, World Sight Day, and National Disability Employment month. The Chair noted that the PSA was produced using last years reallotment funds. .

The Chair asked about any work being done on follow-up with last year’s reallotment projects. Mary Otiato noted that the Deputy Commissioner is working with that project’s research group on a webinar regarding autonomous vehicles to come out at a conference in August. Also, the Return on Investment project came out of work with PCG on MCB closures; the Commissioner also mentioned hearing from Indiana or Oregon and MCSAB. He noted MCB has been so busy. The current discussions being held on apprenticeships came out of a project from last year as well as reviving the discussions with Kevin Lynch on feasibility of business enterprises. All projects are available in accessible format on the MCB website . Mary noted that the What’s Your Vision campaign and the electronic registration system project have positively influenced eye-care professionals in terms of referrals and the diagnoses being reported during the registration process.

Public questions & answers

David Kingsbury expressed positive feedback for the ROI study with regard to the broader qualitative measures being included and also use of focus groups. He mentioned this study as a possible future MCB Town Hall topic when completed. He then shared his concern that the Chat feature of Zoom recordings is not accessible to screen reader users so for example, when a link is posted to the chat like in the current RC meeting, it could not be read by screen reader users. Being able to save the Chat contents would be seen as a reasonable accommodation given that sighted individuals can access that information. The text file generated during a recording contains the Chat information so he will access that from the Secretary’s recording.

Jane Perry was next recognized by the Chair. She reports being a SR consumer and was glad to hear about the earmark in the State budget.

 She reported that the MCB mailbox on Newsline is still not running. And that she finds it difficult to use the dial by name directory system MCB currently has in place, preferring the voice feature that it used to have.

Brian Switzer was next recognized by the Chair. He expressed interest in becoming a member of the RC and has just submitted his resume to the Chair. Regina noted that she had received his resume and sent it to Robert Jones.

Carla noted in reply to Jane’s comments that MCB is working hard in coordination with Kim Charlson and Gina Russo to work with Chris Danielson of NFB to get the MCB channel revived. The Commissioner noted that email and social media are adding subscribers and that MCB welcomes all ideas for other places to provide their material. In response to Jane’s question about the dial by name directory, the Commissioner said they have made more refinements of that system and they recognize that it isn’t going to be ideal for everyone, but that the previous voice system was dropping 40% of the calls . Regina reported the recent revisions included an option to dial the seven-digit extension, and that all counselors now have state-issued cell phones. The Commissioner also noted that if the caller waits until the end of the message they can leave a message on the voicemail and the receptionist will get right back to the caller. The Commissioner also mentioned that between 10-2 there is an open Zoom link for the virtual blindness registry that can be used.

Pressing 3 also allows the caller to leave a message under General inquiries, and that they are working to get Jan Doremus (MCB operator) set up to be able to take calls live. .

The next meeting of the RC will be on Wednesday, September 1 from 1:00 to 3:00. Future dates for RC meetings are:

December 8, 2021

March 2, 2022

June 1, 2022

September 7, 2022

All dates are Wednesdays and all meeting times are 1pm-3pm.

The RC Meeting was adjourned at3:12.

Respectfully Submitted by Jennifer Harnish, Secretary.

These minutes are for informational purposes only.