**Massachusetts Commission for the Blind**

**Rehabilitation Council Minutes**

**For March 2, 2022**

The quarterly Meeting of the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind Rehabilitation Council was held virtually and called to order by Chair DeAnn Elliott at 1:04 p.m.

There were 26 attendees as of 1:45pm then 20 attendees at 2:30.

Attending: DeAnn Elliott, chair; Martha Daigle; Rebecca Davis; Naomi Goldberg; Jennifer Harnish (secretary) Cheryl Scott; Brian Switzer; Jerry Berrier

Regrets: Devon Meyer; Filomena Tripp; Jenifer Whitmore

Attending Ex officio Non-voting RC members: Commissioner David D’Arcangelo; Deputy Commissioner John Oliveira; Priscilla Ngome

MCB guests: Patricia Hart; Loran Lang; Carla Kath (Zoom host); Inez Canada; Nathan Skrocki

Guests: Robert Jones, Health, and Human Services; Sarah Wiles (Client Assistance Program); Mary Mahon McCauley Director of Mass Office on Disability; Bob Brown Content Strategist, and Joe DE Lucio both from the Executive Office of Technology Services and Security

There were seven voting members in attendance which does not meet quorum.

No discussion of the minutes from the December 8 RC meeting. Past minutes will be reviewed for approval at the next meeting when we next meet quorum. The RC now has eleven voting members so can meet quorum when all these voting members attend.

The Chair reminded new RC members of ethics training and the Open Meeting Law trainings they need to complete.

Corey Kadlik resigned his position on March 2, 2022, due to not receiving approval from the Governor’s office. His resignation was read to attendees:

Hi DeAnn,

I want to thank everyone on the rehab council for all their wisdom and support over the past 5 years. With this said, after some discussions with Kim, I think it is best that I resign from the council.  5 years is a long time to be part of a council with no voting rights. I fully understand that you have worked so hard to get me formally on the committee, but there has been no change since we last spoke. This is nothing against you or anyone on the council, but I see this as a lack of respect of my time and effort by the governor’s office.

I wish the council good luck in the future. Thanks for all you do for those who are blind in Massachusetts.

Cory Kadlik

Assistive Technology Specialist

Perkins Library

The Chair expressed concern about new voting members being added by the Governor’s Office without collaboration with the current RC. She apologized to current RC members for not first hearing of approval or lack thereof of potential members put before the Governor’s Office. She extended warm welcomes to the new members, who were not in attendance at the meeting. She also noted that their addition was not done in accordance with the by-laws of the RC. She welcomed applications from future potential members.

**Appointments to the RC**

Robert Jones Executive Office of Health and Human Services spoke about making a misstep in not focusing on those currently on the Board waiting for confirmation. he noted that appointed members are responsible for holding their position until they are replaced when their term expires, and resignations need to be made officially thru the Governor’s Office, so they have a record of the space being open. He also noted that the Governor’s Office is reviewing the by-laws of the RC to understand them better and that the Governor follows state statutes when making appointments. He and the chair discussed meeting to go over the existing processes and communication difficulties.

**Combined State Plan**

Chair extended appreciation to those involved in this project. Naomi Goldberg, member of the State Plan committee, described the role of RC in evaluating the efficacy of the Combined State Plan as well as providing feedback on goals and priorities. Priorities included: Increasing job retention for MCB consumers; increase employment options, continue internship program, improving keyboarding skills, coordinate with MassHire as a career center option, measure and evaluate MCB VR programming (see survey emailed by Patricia Hart to RC members also survey of partners of MCB to evaluate their perception of effectiveness of VR services. Assist VR consumers in developing skills needed for successful employment was an additional goal. Last goal is to continue to promote communication between MCB and its stakeholders. Please refer to documents attached to the meeting email sent just prior to March 2 for all details. Cheryl Scott commented that for the next State Plan process, allocating sufficient time for the entire RC to discuss and contribute to the plan is recommended. Request made to send survey to Patricia by March 5. Cheryl commented that it will be important to regularly update the RC on progress being made towards the identified goals and priorities, ways the RC can contribute and MCB efforts as well. She said that the MRC RC has a designated State Plan Committee to do this kind of task. Inez Canada noted that at MRC there are specific individuals assigned as liaisons for each goal and priority who can be contacted for updated information. The Chair invited RC members interested in joining such a committee; Cheryl Scott, and DeAnn both volunteered and the Chair will add this to the June agenda for follow up discussion.

The Chair said that the RC Annual Report was submitted to the RSA and is attached to the email sent prior to the current meeting. Patricia Hart thanked for her role in guiding this project.

**Commissioner Report**

Commissioner D’Arcangelo reported that MCB is in the middle of the budgeting process and reported that MCB will be fully matched again for federal VR dollars. MCB has been active in providing technology services and devices for VR consumers and continues to seek out other consumers in need of such supports. MCB is exploring and evaluating potential new communication platform to replace the current phone system. Other efforts include electronic checkbook system for submitting purchase orders; continuing to seek central registry staff member; and he recognized departure of Carla Kath.

**Deputy Commissioner Report**

Planning for the Hiring Event/Job Fair has begun with some changes being considered. MCB is planning for Visions of Collaboration virtual Seminar being held on April 1. Summer internship selections have begun; organizations are welcomed to provide him with information on their needs for interns. RFR Housing placement program has met its 25-person capacity, serving VR and SR consumers in finding housing.

In person services continue as well as remote depending on consumer preference. Vending program Jim McManus started in December working with the program to find new ways of reopening vending stands. The Randolph Shepard program was accepted as a vendor for the military dining program. As of January, MCB was five shy of target goal for VR placements. National Industries for the Blind opportunity for MCB to develop online opportunities for individual consumers to market their products online. Twelve consumers are being evaluated for this opportunity. Training modules held online beginning late-March. Individuals to start their own E-Commerce or marketing businesses thru this opportunity. Reallotment projects have been assigned to project managers. Data hygiene, Welcome kit, Follow-up on past program with New England College of Optometry on pipelines of new consumers as they transition from low vision to legal blindness; and a project on impact of Covid-19 on VR consumers. There will be a meeting with MRC on a five year grant they received from RSA on alternative ways of working with VR consumers. Targeting consumers 18-30 years old. Add-on to current services for those having difficulties obtaining employment as well as individuals with a secondary disability including autism as well as a grant for service provision to individuals with mental health concerns.

Financial statement was circulated to the RC by the Commissioner. The Chair congratulated Carla Kath on her new position with the Treasurer’s Office starting March 7.

**Landing Page**

There was a meeting with consumers on January 19 to discuss potential content of the page and related issues. One topic was how to welcome individuals and organizations to send questions to the RC thru the landing page. Jerry Berrier and Bruce Howell performed accessibility reviews of the page.

Coworkers joined Robert Brown, Content Strategist at the Executive Office of Technology Services and Security to speak regarding the office’s role with accessibility and capabilities of the mass.gov web pages, including the RC’s landing page. Content of the page is determined by MCB and the RC; Bob’s departments role is to assist with the content management system and related questions and needs. Current landing page placed on screen share in the Zoom. It was read and described by Mr. Brown. Discussion of how to receive feedback submitted by individuals reading the page. His department staff can walk thru with interested parties how to refine the page contents. With Carla’s departure, contact for editing questions would go to Kamilia Drogosz. There is also a self-help knowledge base provided by Bob Brown’s department with accessibility information currently being added. Joe Galluccio with EOTSS also joined the call and noted that he and his team can assist with any input on accessibility of the site. Third party audits are done for example recently by WGBH. Bruce Howell’s accessibility recommendations are being sent to their team.

**Other business**

The Chair asked the Commissioner about the new phone system being considered. She asked about a way for consumers to provide feedback.

KMBS, the vendor for this project, is gathering information from MCB staff, stakeholders including consumers. Listening sessions will be held in March where phone systems names and features that are working well can be passed along. He noted it has been 20 years since the last system was chosen. Nuance voice driven technology was working well until it was not being updated by the company and calls began dropping, not coming thru.

**Public Comments**

No comments.

**Next meeting June 1, 2022, 1-3pm.**

**Meeting Adjourned**

The RC Meeting was adjourned at 2:58 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted by Jennifer Harnish, Secretary

The above minutes were approved during the Sept. 7, 2022 RC quarterly meeting, held remotely by Zoom, with a majority of members present.