**Massachusetts Commission for the Blind**

**Rehabilitation Council Minutes**

**For September 1, 2021**

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.

**Member & Guest Introductions**

Chair DeAnn Elliott welcomed all in attendance.

Secretary Jennifer Harnish and Jerry Berrier reported being sworn in as full voting members of the RC during the past week

Jennifer confirmed being able to record the Zoom meeting locally, and the Chair reported that the recording will be available on MCB’s YouTube channel soon after the meeting. The chat function was not enabled for the meeting so chat content will be spelled out for purpose of minutes and also posted on the MCB landing page.

The Chair reported that Nancy Trzcinski, RC member for the past six years rotated off the Council in order to be able to serve on a new Board for the Commonwealth. She was recognized (in absentia) for her many years of service.

**Leslie M. Leslie, stand in member was thanked for her service; the new representative from the Federation of Children with Special Needs, is Rebecca Davis.**

**Attendees (by Zoom)**

DeAnn Elliott (Chair); Charles Curti; Deputy Commissioner John Oliveira; Patricia Hart; Inez Canada; Jennifer Harnish (secretary); Jerry Berrier; Cory Kadlik; Martha Daigle; Naomi Goldberg; Rebecca Davis; Lauren Lang; Regina DiMarzo; Mary Otiato; Patricia Hart; Greg Donnelly

Regrets: Richard Curtis; Commissioner David D’Arcangelo; cheryl scott; Carla Kath; Priscilla Gome; Jenifer Whitmore;

Charles Curty and Cory Kadlik continue to wait for their nominations to be approved by the Governor’s office. Charles said he will not continue with the RC without official confirmation and that he feels it is disrespectful of the RC and its members and constituents that there are such long delays in confirmations. The Chair will write a letter with the concerns regarding nominations and send around the RC for signatures of those willing to sign. The Chair also raised the ongoing research she and Lauren Lang have been doing with regard to the number of members the RC is supposed to have , how many are required to be people with disabilities, and how to strive for diversity on the RC including racial, ethnic and geographical diversity. These matters will continue to be looked into and discussed at future RC meetings so that the RC will be able to vote which they are not currently able to do due to absence of quorum and knowledge of how many voting members are needed in total.

Minutes from the June 2, 2021 RC Meeting are available but could not be voted on due to absence of quorum.

**Update from the Education sector**

Department of Elementary and Secondary Education presenter and RC member Martha Daigle

Federation of Children with Special Needs presenter and RC applicant Rebecca Davis

Rebecca is interested in learning more about the numbers of children with visual impairments there are and a staff member from MCB will reach out to her with this information. The statistics of how many VI students were negatively impacted by the changes in special education services as a result of the Covid-19 pandemi were also of interest. Rebecca and the Deputy Commissioner gave TVI’s positive feedback on the ways in which so many of them had stepped up to meet their students’ needs.

Martha Daigle discussed the topic of compensatory services , which can be requested by families if they believe their child is not receiving services designated on the IEP. Reasons for difficulties include chronic medical conditions on leading to chronic absences; ability to safely participate in hybrid learning; and lack of family resources for internet coverage, and impact of those at home being challenged by providing oversight of their child’s remote education while working from home. The Department of Education posted information on topics such as compensatory services, impacts on transition-age students such as graduation delays from non-completion of requirements due to pandemic impacts on delivery of and participation in services. Martha recommended service coordinators and Case Workers from MCB as important resources for families with questions.

**Problem resolution services are also available for families with concerns that their child is not receiving services as listed in the IEP.**

Rebecca referred to the Transition Planning Form that is used to assist in developing goals relevant to the child’s post-secondary education goals.

Combined State Plan

Tricia Hart presented on this topic. The current state plan for VR services is part of the Workforce Investment larger plan which is in effect from 2020-2024 and is due for an update to be done in 2022. One part of the update is the Rehabilitation Council’s input made to MCB and then MCB’s response to this input. Trisha related the helpfulness of having a subcommittee from the RC to the last State Plan section. The RC also contributes to the section on goals and priorities.

Naomi Goldberg and Jerry Berrier along with DeAnn Elliott offered to serve on this subcommittee. Holding meetings of this subcommittee after 3:30 on Wednesday afternoons was discussed with dates to be finalized by email after the full RC meeting. Cheryl Scott will also be invited to attend these subcommittee meetings based on her role in drafting the state plan.

**Trisha also explained that the word “combined” refers to the fact that there are about 15 state agencies that are part of the Workforce Investment System. MCB has its own goals and priorities though that are separate from those of other agencies.**

**Deputy Commissioner’s report**

(The Commissioner was not able to attend this meeting so the Deputy Commissioner will include any information he might have related)

Internship Program

MCB placed 65 interns, some in virtual placements and some in-person. Programming around internships was done virtually. He noted that input from interns was that virtual meetings assisted them by having no travel time especially for those coming from outside regions.

Competitive employment rate increased by 25% from last year. MCB staff are back with in-person services as of August 9. Virtual support continues to be offered as well. Some college students have decided to take a year off to allow the pandemic impacts to settle down while others are back in college classes.

The Job Fair is in the works and it will include an employer education seminar, one-minute consumer “pitch” to employers, and follow-ups from employers who would like to schedule interviews. MCB continues to look for new internship partners for interview panels. The public awareness campaign continues.With unemployment checks running out, the hope is that more consumers will increase their job searches. MCB is working with the Department of Career Services Mass Hire new office on virtual and in person offerings and referring consumers to them.

Update on Federal funds and the State budget

The Deputy Commissioner reported that MCB is applying for additional reallotment funds from the Federal government to pursue some additional small projects. MCB will also have an increase in Social Security reimbursement funds due to the increase in placements. This money is used first which allows a delay in using funds from the RSA grant.

Randolph-Shepard Program

He reported that this program is being significantly impacted by the Future of Work initiative because of the significant decline in number of employees going into federal office buildings for work. Only Five out of 27 stands in the state are currently open. The Deputy Commissioner is holding meetings with vendors to discuss the situation and MCB efforts to support this program with other opportunities.

The Chair thanked the Commissioner for sharing the Dashboard , an Excel spreadsheet with details on the financial status of MCB . In response to a question by the Chair, the Deputy Commissioner said he will look into why there was a drop in the numbers in the 3010 Vocational Rehabilitation account. He did note that the reduction did not result in any reductions in services.

The Chair reported that the House and the Senate approved an earmark of $850,000to the Social Rehabilitation account in addition to other funds and expressed thanks to the legislature and all who advocated for this funding increase. MCB has an RFR out for organizations to bid for provision of SR training services; MCB expects to have funds awarded in October. Until that time, consumers services will continue to be funded by existing accounts.

Finally, the Deputy Commissioner said he will give an update on the Return on Investment project which has been holding focus groups with consumers, at the December RC meeting.

The Chair noted the creation of two landing pages, one for the RC and one for the Statutory Advisory Board. Individuals can visit these pages to access information about these groups. The Chair requested that information on the current draft versions of the RC page be sent to her via email. A virtual meeting will also be held to discuss the landing page sometime in the coming month.

**Public questions & answers**

Regina said the number of people on the call today ranged from 24-27.

Inez Canada invited a guest of the meeting, Liz Miska, to introduce herselfLiz is a visually-impaired attorney from Central Massachusetts interested in being considered for an RC position. The Chair invited her to submit her resume. She provided her address: Deann.Elliott@gmail.com

Next RC meeting date

The Chair announced that the next RC meeting will be held on December 8, 2021, from 1pm-3pm.

Future dates for RC meetings are:

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 at3:02.

Respectfully Submitted by Jennifer Harnish, Secretary

These minutes are for informational purposes only.