# Massachusetts Commission for the Blind

Rehabilitation Council Minutes

For September 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. The Chair noted that the Open Meeting Law has extended the provision allowing meetings to continue using remote methods. This method will continue until at least March at which point the RC will discuss future meeting methods. The Commissioner and the Chair shared thoughts that the Zoom platform has allowed for far greater participation then when meeting in person. The importance of in person interactions was also mentioned.

The number of attendees was not recorded.

Members in attendance: DeAnn Elliott (Chair); Jennifer Harnish (Secretary); Jerry Berrier; Naomi Goldberg; Priscilla Ngome; Devon Myer; Cheryl Scott; Brian Switzer

Regrets: Jenifer Whitmore; Rebecca Davis; Martha Daigle; Deputy Commissioner John Oliveira

Attending Ex officio RC members: Commissioner David D’Arcangelo

MCB guests: Regina DiMarzo (Zoom host); Michael Saccone (new MCB Director of Communications); Nathan Skrocki; Lauren Lang (General Counsel)

Guests: cheryl cumings; Inez Canada; Sandra Burgess; Sarah Wiles

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

An initial discussion of the abbreviated (due to lack of access to the recording when the minutes were done) minutes from the June 1, 2022, RC meeting was held with two corrections noted. Jerry Berrier made a motion to hold off on voting on acceptance of the minutes seconded by Naomi Goldberg until the December meeting once information from the recording provided during this current meeting was reviewed. A roll call vote was held, and approval of the motion occurred. A motion was made by Jerry Berrier to approve all minutes that were not voted on due to absence of quorum over the past two years. Cheryl Scott seconded the motion. A roll call vote was held, and the motion passed. The Chair will give those minutes to Lauren Lang who holds them for the RC and MCB.

## Update on membership:

Filomena Tripp, a recent new member, spoke by phone with the Chair and said she is not able to serve because she is no longer employed by SILC, so the RC will be seeking a new SILC representative.

## Discussion of the MCB Internship Program:

Joe Buizon (MCB Director of Employment Services) explained that the program has been running for almost 20 years. Discussions about the program between VR counselors and their consumers begin as early as Thanksgiving and Christmas because of the increased availability of high school and college students. Interests and skills as well as potential training needs are part of the discussion. Core internship placements have been at sites including Institute for Human Centered Design, Massachusetts office on Disability, Mass Eye and Ear, Carroll Center for the Blind, Perkins and many more sites including new sites developed each year. Companies interview candidates and share feedback with MCB including soft skills. Benefits of the program include the opportunity to receive guidance on accommodations and ways to build social interactions on the job; planting the seed for future employment; adding to diversity on a resume; 70% of internship participants over the years are on track to become employed. There were over 60 interns this past summer in locations throughout the Commonwealth. The soft skills training that is required as part of the program including emotional intelligence, interpersonal skills, manners, note taking, dress on the job, handshake skills. Multiple internships over the summers are encouraged to explore and build employment skills and experience. Interns can also find their own internships and bring those to MCB.

Jaafar Alogaili shared about his internship experience at the Carroll Center for the Blind this past summer. As a recent graduate of Boston University majoring in Psychology. He detailed aspects of his internship including supporting the summer Youth in Transition students in adapting to being away from home, easing anxiety, and working directly with two students on the autism spectrum; he noted this was his first experience working directly with individuals on the spectrum as opposed to only learning from books. He reported having three job interviews lined up for work in the autism field. Jaafar described how his earlier work experiences in internships helped him adjust to living and working in settings using English which is not his first language. Priscilla Gome’s spoke about Jaafar’s strengths and his drive and her experience with him at MCB. Benefits to the organization bringing on interns were also shared such as staff gaining supervisory experience. The Commissioner recognized John Oliveira for his role over the years in the internship program.

## Commissioner’s Update

This is MCB RC liaison Regina DiMarzo’s flast meeting as she will be leaving MCB for a new position. The Commissioner said to direct requests to him**,** and he will route them appropriately. On the job’s topic, he noted that data are showing that those with disabilities are faring marginally better than those without disabilities; this trend is plateauing. MCB is seeing individuals seeking upward mobility in careers as opposed to seeking of first-time jobs. Anecdotal data is showing gains. The MCB Dashboard shared by Nathan Skrocki shows gains in registrations, 9 in process with turnaround at about 3-5 business days. MCB is adding new employees to the unit to increase speed of processing registrations. 4,000 open SR cases including child and adult cases.660 open VR adults and about 200 Pre-ets cases and 21 transition-age cases. Closed cases include63 children’s’ cases, about 1300 SR adult cases, 13 successful VR closures, and 16 non-successful. Numbers are as of the start of the current fiscal year. Nathan invited requests for other information that might be able to be shared on the Dashboard.

With regard to the budget, the Commissioner reported that MCB has received increased funds from the Governor’s budget and legislature emphasis on assistive technology. MCB is pursuing more reallotment projects. They are wrapping up two projects: the first with the New England College of Optometry looking at changes in diagnoses and prevention in order to help forecast cases that might be coming in.and the second with the Institute for Human Centered Design looking at impact of Covid on the labor market and how that has helped or hindered those with visual impairments. A third project with University of Massachusetts Boston is looking at traits and qualifications that might naturally come with having a disability might and how these could relate to what employment partners are looking for in their hiring qualifications. Reports when these projects are finalized will be available on the MCB website. A podcast project and a project with a vendor called Sleek Machine which has identified various types of VR consumers and then targeted different types of video montages The Commissioner said that consumers and other stakeholders are being reached out to by the RFR projects for their input on the projects. An attendee asked if there are roles for MCB consumers to play in proposing reallotment project topics and he encouraged individuals to reach out to make suggestions. When asked though about holding targeted meetings like a town hall with a focus on consumer input on potential projects, he said he had to consult the RSA guide to determine whether that would be appropriate in the reallotment process.

With regard to the MCB phone system, procurement is underway. But when MCB was told by EHS that other agencies were also in line for a new telecom system, MCB has had to shift to waiting for the other agencies in front of them to receive their systems. He said it could be early 2023 before they might get one. MCB has done what they are required to do and know they are getting an IPR system using voice recognition. The specific system and when it will be installed is still up in the air. He said that all agencies waiting should have new phone systems that meet accessibility requirements. Customization of systems can occur to meet specific needs of the agencies consumers

The state budget was passed and signed into law; MCB has received additional funds for assistive technology. He reports that the process of using these funds has been specified by the legislature, so MCB is working to gather information on how to proceed with using these funds in line with legislature requirements. He said there will be no interruptions in services to consumers during the process. The Chair asked that the process be done in a timely manner to avoid delays and also offered support from the RC where needed for say phone system testing.

## Deputy Commissioner’s Update

The Deputy Commissioner sent his regrets; the Commissioner shared that the National Industries for the Blind project creating and implementing an E-commerce website. One consumer has likely started selling thru the platform and two others are in process. The consumers are learning the aspects of using the platform and then marketing their products The Chair proposed including the data on the NIB project in the spreadsheet of information available from MCB to the RC. With regard to the Randolph-Shepard program, only a few vendors are back due to the slow opening back up of office buildings. Long term solutions to this issue are being sought.

## Governor’s Executive Order

This order reconstituting the Rehabilitation Council implements the national law with regard to those with disabilities. The Chair noted positives like Ex-Officio members being counted towards quorum because lack this allow the RC to be empowered to conduct its business. She emphasizes the importance of protecting the ability of the RC and consumers to bring feedback to MCB. She identified concerns about the order such as lack of clarity on terms of members and how to achieve diversity goals. The Commissioner discussed the Executive Order

598 reaffirming and reconstituting the Rehabilitation Council can be read on-line; website and link were shared on the Zoom screen. He noted that the order came out May 24 about a week before the RC meeting; the Chair expressed concern that the RC had not been included in any discussions about the creation of the Order during the months prior to it being issued. The commissioner said that MCB received it the day before it was issued and had not been part of any discussions with the Governor on the Order and that MCB thought the RC had worked this change out with the Governor. The Chair stated that the RC was not consulted and that her discussions with MCB staff earlier in the Spring on the significant discrepancies. between the RC membership list that the Governor’s office had and what the RC had. The Commissioner said he did not know where the feedback to the Governor on the Order came from, and he offered to look into this. The Commissioner said he did not see the Order as a radical departure. Naomi Goldberg proposed that the RC might form some work groups to address some of the specific areas such as one to identify RC nominees. Such work groups or committees would allow for more work to be done outside of the quarterly meetings. The Membership Committee does exist but needs to meet to work on filling the two open seats. The Chair referred attendees to the attachments included in the meeting announcement email for this current meeting for details on the Order and her detailed examination of how it compares to the Rehabilitation Act and previous Orders. The Chair stated that she would like to continue working on this issue because she is not comfortable with the full content of the Order. Inez Canada said that the MRC RC has not yet received a new Executive Order. She noted a concern with one part of the order where the Governor can directly appoint individuals to the RC without consulting the RC first to try to avoid having new members who do not have an interest in the work of the RC. The Chair noted an additional item of concern which is that quorum could be achieved by only counting members in attendance, leading potentially to recommendations and decisions being made by a very small number of individuals. She reports being alarmed by the Order and encouraged others to read the documents that were sent out.

## New business

### No new business was raised.

## Public Comment Period

No public comments were made.

## Next RC meeting: Wednesday, December 7, 2022, 1:00 to 3:00 PM

The meeting was adjourned at 3:08 PM

If you need a reasonable accommodation, please submit your request at least two weeks in advance to Miracle Jones, MCB ADA Coordinator, by email at miracle.jones@mass.gov or by phone at 617-210-5054. Requests made less than two weeks before the meeting will be considered but may not be possible to fill. Please inform the ADA Coordinator if you will need American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters and/or Communication Access Real Time Transcription (CART) services.