**Statutory Advisory Board (SAB)**

**February 6, 2024**

**Minutes**

SAB Attendees: Blair Wong, Brian MacDonald, and Kathy Petkauskos

MCB Staff Attendees: John Oliveira, Nathan Skrocki, Lucy Evangelidis

Meeting Held via Zoom; Recordings made available to public on MCB YouTube channel

Public invited to participate through Q&A made at end of the meeting.

Minutes

Kathy motions to accept the minutes from the January meeting. Minutes accepted.

Commissioner Update: John Oliveira

SAB Vacancies update. John spoke with one of the candidates to answer some of her questions. There are 5 candidates for these openings.

General MCB updates. A meeting was held to discuss the staffing shortage in O&M, vision rehab therapists, and VR counselors. This might turn into a quarterly meeting to discuss ways to introduce more people to the field.

John met with the Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MCDHH) and discussed the shortage of interpreters. MCDHH felt strongly about an apprenticeship program for interpreters. They will look at funding options. MCB will also try to get additional information for the next meeting.

Brian asks if the interpreters are staff or is there an on-call list. John says the interprets are all freelance. MCDHH might have one or two they retain.

John spoke at the Boston Tax Coalition kickoff event at the Chinatown Trade Center. They provide free tax preparation for low-income individuals and legally blind individuals living in Boston. We provided some training and are lending some video magnifiers for them to use.

Brian asks if it is just the city of Boston or if it includes the greater Boston area like Allston or Brighton, etic. John says he thinks it’s the communities of Boston. The location that we lent the equipment to is in Roxbury.

Big Data Report update. MCB, the Carroll Center, National Braille Press, and Perkins met to review the results regarding people who are legally blind in MA and 65 years of age or older. This information is available to the public. They are also doing the same project on working age individuals.

Kathy asks the name of the organization that is coordinating the report. Johns says it is Vision Serve Alliance.

The National Industries for the Blind is continuing to move their entrepreneurship program forward. MCB will be participating for the third year, and we currently have four candidates that are working towards an entrepreneurship. It is a slow process.

We continue to plan our internship program and pre-ETS conference.

Fiscal Update. We’re operating under the continuing resolutions that are put forth by the federal government. The budget is coming in slowly. Because the full year budget hasn’t been approved, they are dispersing the grant portions in a much smaller amount than they would under a fully approved/passed budget.

The work continues on the governor’s budget. The process takes until July when the governor will sign the budget. We received an increase to cover wages and chapter 257 increases, so it took us up to 28.2 million dollars. It is a level funded budget. Earmarks are not included.

Personnel Update. There is a vacant O&M position. It is on its third or fourth round of posting. We have increased the number of positions at MCB. We added a new position called Policy Coordinator.

Dashboard Update: Nathan Skrocki

An RFR was put out for the dashboard and bids came in. We chose a company called Zagaran. On the top of our list of needs is accessibility for this project. They are confident they can do it quickly and we hope to roll it out by the summer.

Not a lot of changes in open SR and children’s cases. SR children cases increased by three (from 857-860) and SR adults increased by 15, for a total of 2,175. Not a lot of changes in VR. 733 open VR adult cases, 201 people in the pre-ETS program, and 14 transition youth.

8 SR children’s cases and 320 adults were closed so far this year. 78 successful VR closures and 61 unsuccessful VR closures for the fiscal year.

334 referrals to support services. 712 Certificates of Blindness, 79 IDs, 20 EDPs, 2 handicap placards.

Brian asks for an update on the all-consumer survey and strategic mapping. Nate says the survey should be very close as we just responded to questions from the Secretariat. Nate says there will be quarterly meetings with the team from the Secretariat to report on the status of various objectives and discuss progress.

Kathy asks if the SAB could have access to the strategic plan or if it is not something we can share. John says he will ask the Secretary in their next meeting.

Questions from the Public

Sharon Strzalkowski is calling in from Worcester and has been trying to find local tax assistance programs. She asks if the program John mentioned earlier is just for Boston. John says he thinks they contract throughout the state. He will see what is available in Worcester and reach back out to her.

Nona Haroyan suggests using a social media consultant to promote the field and reach a younger audience. John says that idea has been discussed and it is a very good one. The funding options will need to be discussed and approved. Nona also suggests doing talks at high schools and middle schools to introduce this field of work. John says that is another idea that has been discussed.

Dina Rosenbaum says ACVREP, who is their national organization that provides certification for O&M and low vision RTs just launched a digital campaign for recruitment of blindness professionals. She also asks if MCB is collecting information about consumers relative to additional disabilities or challenges. Nate says yes, there is data that we gather as part of our case management regarding additional disabilities.

Meeting adjourned.