**Statutory Advisory Board (SAB)**

**January 7, 2025**

**Minutes**

SAB Attendees: Blair Wong, Brian MacDonald, Kathy Petkauskos, Nancy Rumbolt-Trzcinski

MCB Staff Attendees: John Oliveira, Justine Muir, Nathan Skrocki, Lucy Evangelidis, Loran Lang

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

Blair motions to accept the minutes from the December meeting. Minutes accepted.

Commissioner Update: John Oliveira

Budget process is continuing. The fiscal team is working on the FY26 budget.

We completed updating our annual internal control process.

We continue to manage our job postings. Several new staff are starting soon. One retirement is coming up at the end of the month.

The CFO candidate had personal issues that prevented them from taking the job. The position has been reposted and already has 22 applicants.

We have received our second disbursement from the federal government. A portion of our VR grant, OIB grant, and supported employment grant came in. We will probably receive the balance of our funds in March or April.

John will attend the Governor’s State of the Commonwealth address later this month.

Brian asks if the RSA issues have been resolved? John says yes, they were all settled back in May/June.

We received $350,000 from our social security reimbursements. Our team filed another claim for $46,000.

Programs and Services Update: Justine Muir

Our Orientation and Mobility (O&M) team is actively preparing to host a virtual town hall this spring, with a focus on guide dogs. Title: “Unleashing Potential: The Roll of Guide Dogs. Overview about O&M and our role in the guide dog process, followed by a representative or two from a guide dog school (TBD), then some brief testimonials/discussions from guide dog users, and finishing with a Q&A session. This event will be open to anyone interested and we will share details as soon as they are finalized.

The O&M team is also preparing to conduct a variety of human guide trainings – they are Train the Trainer sessions where our team trains individuals in 4 areas (central, metrowest, southeast and western, MA) so that they can then be the ‘experts’ or trainers of others at their site, as needed.

Members of our Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) team are putting the final touches on internal preparations for our spring conference, set to take place at the end of March. This event is primarily aimed at Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVIs), Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialists (COMS), and other professionals working with youth, especially within the school systems. The conference will feature speakers and vendors, with informational tables dedicated to sharing details about Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) for consumers ages 14-22.

Our Employment Services team has already begun recruitment for the summer 2025 internship program. If anyone is interested in hosting an intern – or knows of any businesses or agencies that might be – please reach out to Carol Cullins, our Employment Services Supervisor.

Dashboard Update: Nathan Skrocki

869 open SR children’s cases and 3,365 open SR adult cases.

215 open VR youth cases and 758 open VR adult cases.

In 2024 we had a total of 2,313 closed SR adult cases and 131 closed SR children’ cases (most of which moved into VR).

In 2024 we had 1,819 new registrations, close to 8,600 COBs, and close to 1,200 MCB IDs.

Brian asks if COBs expire. Yes, they expire after a year. The IDs are good for 5 years.

Kathy asks how these requests are processed. 95% are processed through the registration team. Most of the case managers can also produce COBs.

Blair asks if there is a reason COBs expire after one year. Nate says it is for tax abatement purposes.

Brian asks how many people in the whole state are legally blind. Our registry has recently been updated, and we are at the 27,000 mark.

Blair recommends using a tactile sticker on COB envelopes to limit the production of duplicates.

Questions from SAB Members

Blair asks if MCB would host a virtual town hall to bring the community together on a regular basis. We hold them 2-3 times a year already and cover different topics. If we do them more often, we have noticed a significant decrease in attendance. We have support groups that meet on a regular basis. John says if anyone has any ideas for programs you would like to see to please reach out to us.

Kerlyne asks for clarification regarding the Social Security Administration putting funding toward organizations that hire people who are blind or visually impaired after coming off SSDI or SSI. John says there is a complex calculation that involves time from now until the expected retirement age and how much money was saved vs spent. You must apply and follow all the guidelines for filing, nothing is automatic about this process.

Questions from the General Public

Sharon Strzalkowski let Justine know that the central MA chapter of the Bay State Council of the Blind can help if she needs input from end users of the O&M services. She also let everyone know that the American Council of the Blind has weekly community calls.

Nona Haroyan asks if the guide dog event will include new technology updates specifically Glidance and the WeWALK cane. Justine says this will be on a consumer-to-consumer basis with their O&M instructor. Nona also talks about how all meetings should continue to have a hybrid component to make it accessible to the public. The input was appreciated, and a hybrid model should be attainable with research and practice.

Brians reads questions from the chat. Dennis asks which region has the highest population of blind and low vision individuals. The numbers across regions are very similar because of the structure we set up. The size in terms of territory differs among regions.

Bruce Howell asks if it is possible to make the COB process automated online. Nate says the cost of automating this would be a lot and we are able to handle things well at this point.

Meeting adjourned.