MCB Statutory Advisory Board Minutes

July 30, 2021

Present SAB:

Joe Abely

Susan Foley

Amy Ruell

Kim Charlson

Present MCB:

David D’Arcangelo, Commissioner

Carla Kath, Director of Communications

Mary Otiato, Director of Policy & Strategic Initiatives/Ombudsman

Regina DiMarzo, Assistant to the Commissioner

Patricia Hart, Policy Development

Approximately 25 members of the public.

Since Chris was ill, Joe Abely chaired the meeting. Joe asked the SAB for approval of the June meeting minutes and they were approved.

The meeting was recorded. DeAnn Elliott, MCB Rehabilitation Council chair, asked for local recording permission. The chair gave permission for a local recording. Regina said that she was unable to turn it on at her end for a technical or policy reason. DeAnn asked for the policy to be sent to her and the SAB members. Joe asked that MCB enable permission to record at future meetings.

Kim also asked MCB to send to SAB members a link that can be forwarded to members of the public for future meetings since the link on the webpage is not easy to find.

The meeting began with comments from members of the public on a number of subjects:

* One person said that there was not enough time at the last meeting for participants to question MCB employees about their concerns. David said that he can only address union and personnel matters generally in a public meeting but that he is working closely with the unions on Covid-related issues.
* Kim said that she hopes that MCB is addressing consumer safety issues related to staff resuming in-person visits. John said that MCB is working with service providers such as CCB and MAB so that all agencies can develop and implement the best safety practices.
* A member of the public again expressed concerns about a recent certificate mailing that misaddressed some certificates. David and Mary said that although only about 100 certificates were sent to the wrong addresses through a clerical error, the agency apologizes and is taking steps to prevent any recurrence of such a serious error. Mary is developing a policy that will address the security of data extraction and will require that several MCB staff check any data extraction for this kind of clerical error and will also require other safeguards. The SAB can review the draft at the September meeting.

The Commissioner and SAB discussed the MCB budget:

* MCB has hired a new budget director named Gina Vitale. She will be invited to attend the next SAB meeting.
* Joe asked if MCB is planning to revert the approximately $6 million that shows as unencumbered on the comptroller website. David said that MCB is only likely to revert a few hundred thousand dollars. He explained that we are still reconciling accounts and that factors that will obviate the need to revert include: Chapter 257 rate increases for providers, retroactive staff salary increases, and almost $5 of federal grant funds that will be carried over to next year.
* Joe said that the comptroller website is very confusing. David said that he will send Joe a PowerPoint about the website and Joe requested that someone from MCB walk him through it.
* Joe asked about MCB’s plans to spend the increased funding appropriated by the Legislature. David said that the funding is for assistive technology devices and training. He is looking into whether a Request for Response (RFR) process needs to be used to select providers or not.

Proposed Metrics Dashboard and Central Register:

* Mary presented an Excel dashboard that includes metrics on both services and registration. She said that the number of consumers registered as of July has been approximately 1,000, so the yearly total may be 2,000, a very high number for MCB. There was an exceptionally large number registered in June and July. Susan pointed out that this does indicate pent-up demand due to the pandemic.
* There was also some discussion of ways to expand the dashboard to include relevant caseload statistics. It was agreed that Susan and Judy Savageau will continue to advise Mary on refining and expanding the dashboard.
* Mary also reported that the Central Register mailed out 24,000 certificates of blindness during the past month so that consumers could receive an updated certificate without have to call to request one.
* Amy asked why the certificate is now one-page instead of the previous triplicate form. Mary said that we cannot batch print the triplicate form for a mass mailing but that consumers may photocopy the new form. Also, MCB counselors and social workers are now able to print out certificates themselves and mail them directly to consumers, a much faster process.
* David also reported that as part of the Central Register Business Process Re-Design, he has reached out to the city/town assessors’ association to see whether a system can be devised for MCB to email the certificates to the cities and towns as a bridge to the future.

Commissioner’s Update:

* David reported the Accessible Instructional Materials (AIM) Library has successfully transitioned to MCB’s oversight. The current manager and staff have been hired by MCB and students are receiving their books for the upcoming year.
* David said that MCB is planning to hold another Virtual Job Fair in September or October. The event will be attended by job-ready consumers who have submitted their resumes for review by potential employers. The consumers will be asked to present an “elevator speech” to two different panels of employers. Hopefully, the consumers will get constructive feedback and, ideally, job offers.
* David announced that MCB has hired a new Director of the Orientation and Mobility Program, Alison Bull, who he hopes will be invited to a future SAB meeting. David also said that plans are underway for White Cane Day on October 15.
* David is going to resume discussions with the MBTA and Mass DOT that were underway before the pandemic on topics such as Blind Access Cards and cards for other transportation discounts. It would be great if all of the required ID’s could be combined with the Real ID being implemented in Massachusetts and nationwide. Amy pointed out that there is a new Registrar of Motor Vehicles, Colleen Ogilvie, and that it is a very opportune time for this dialogue.

The SAB members agreed that they will soon schedule upcoming monthly meetings through December.