MCB Statutory Advisory Board Minutes

June 18, 2021

Present SAB:

Christopher Kauders, Chair

Joe Abely

Susan Foley

Present MCB:

David D’Arcangelo, Commissioner

Loran Lang, General Counsel

Carla Kath, Director of Communications

Regina DiMarzo, Assistant to the Commissioner

Patricia Hart, Policy Development

Approximately 45 members of the public (a mix of consumers, provider staff, and employee representatives of Local 509).

Chris asked the SAB for approval of the May meeting minutes and they were approved.

The meeting was recorded.

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

* Assistive Technology Training – Consumers, interns, and provider staff expressed appreciation and support for MCB funded training in assistive technology. Concern was expressed by several individuals about continued funding for the MABVI program. David agreed that the program has been beneficial to consumers and said it is not possible to predict the future since the final state budget has not been enacted yet. Chris asked David to provide an update at the July meeting on funding for this training.
* A member of the public expressed concerns about questions on a recent MCB survey about gender and personal relationships. She recommended that in the future MCB consult the Fenway Health Center for advice on such questions.
* Covid Concerns – There were several comments supporting mandatory masking for MCB staff and consumers. David explained that Governor Baker has not mandated masks for employees or citizens. The specifics of MCB’s policies for MCB staff resuming home visits are currently being negotiated with employee union, Local 509. Chris asked David to update the SAB in July about the re-opening plan.
* Staff representatives of Local 509 voiced their concerns about:
  + The timely and transparent communication of management decisions to staff, especially in regard to the closing of the Worcester and New Bedford offices.
  + Problems with the touch-down office spaces in those two areas: lack of mail facilities, inability to receive walk-in consumers, inadequate space for storage of supplies.
  + Logistical problems related to proposed use of demonstration kits of rehabilitation supplies. Some staff find them awkward to have to return later to teach the consumer how to use his or her personal device. (Note: This proposal has been dropped by MCB.)
  + Staff vacancies.

The Commissioner and SAB discussed the MCB budget:

* David updated the SAB on the FY 2022 budget negotiations in the legislature. The final result is unknown but David is prepared to implement whatever is finally enacted and signed by the Governor.
* Joe asked whether Shandra can provide him with a tutorial on the MCB budget details that have been posted on the Comptroller’s website. He would also like to understand how the earmarks for assistive technology and the Talking Information Center have been and will be disbursed. He requested a report on this at the July meeting.
* Joe also asked about FY 2021 reversions. David said that the final figure is unknown as the year has not ended but that a rough estimate is about $500,000, half from the Turning 22 account. Joe also asked for a report about the final reversions at the July meeting.
* Joe also requested information about agency’s savings from rent reduction. David said that, since the savings partially come from EOHHS chargebacks relative to the downsizing at 600 Washington St. in coming years, it is difficult to be precise. Joe requested that Shandra provide the figures for Springfield, Worcester, and New Bedford for FY 2021 and FY 2022.

Reports on reallotment projects

SAB members discussed the reports on the Comprehensive State Needs Assessment (CSNA) and the feasibility of blind enterprises, and other projects. There are many recommendations in these reports. Understanding that not all of the recommendations can be implemented immediately, the SAB would like MCB to prioritize the recommendations, which MCB agrees with, which are to be addresses immediately, which in the long-term, etc. Mary could not attend this meeting because of an urgent need to go overseas. Susan said that Mary has sent her a spreadsheet with the recommendations and that she has provided her input to Mary.

Susan asked David what his highest priorities are among the reallotment projects. He answered: VR issues; the “What’s Your Vision?” outreach campaign, and the “Quest for Independence Pre-ETS Best Practice Guide” graphic novel. Susan said that she is looking forward to Mary’s summary report. Joe requested the TV schedule for the “What’s Your Vision” campaign. He has not seen the spots although some of the other participants said they have seen them.

David reported that he has met with staff from the Department of Revenue about the tax guide projects; one of them will be for tax preparers, another for consumers. He has also met with Kevin Lynch of NIB about the viability of for-profits enterprises for the blind. David also reported that the new fellow at New England College of Optometry has come on board to increase low-vision services in rural communities in the state.

David expects that increased outreach resulting from the “What’s Your Vision?” campaign and the modernized Central Register facility for doctors will result in increased caseloads for MCB. Susan said that the SAB is particularly interested in the caseflow: referrals, applications, and closures. Mary, with Susan and Judy Savageau as advisors, intends to draft a dashboard-type report using available data. Susan also added that VR agencies nationwide have experienced a marked drop in applicants as a result of the pandemic.

Recording of SAB Meetings

A participant asked whether the Bay State Council of the Blind may post a tape of the meeting on its website. Loran Lang answered that the organization may post a link to the MCB recording which will be posted on the Mass.gov website.

Next meeting: July 30 at noon. There will be no meeting in August.