MCB Statutory Advisory Board Minutes

March 28, 2022

Present SAB:

Joe Abely, Chair

Kim Charlson

Susan Foley

Dr. Howard Purcell

Amy Ruell

Present MCB:

David D’Arcangelo, Commissioner

John Oliveira, Deputy Commissioner

Shandra Gardiner, Chief Financial Officer

Nathan Skrocki, Director of Policy and Compliance

Samantha Linden, Director of Training & Staff Development

Patricia Hart, Policy

Approximately five members of the public also attended.

Joe asked the SAB to approve the February meeting minutes and they were approved.

The meeting was recorded with local recording permission.

Commissioner Update:

* Status of $850,000 included in the FY22 Final Budget in account 4110-1000 - David said that he is optimistic that MCB will be able to spend or encumber all or almost all of the earmark over the next three months. He shared that one of the vendors is fully booked through June and that another expects to be fully booked by the end of May. John thinks that MCB will only miss on spending the full amount if consumers who have signed up for the services back out. Amy reported that one consumer has been told that the funds are all spent. John said that that information is incorrect and that he will remind all of the VR counselors tomorrow that there still are funds available.
* Status of the 2022 reallotment fund RFR Process – David said that the RFR’s have either been awarded or are about to be awarded. One of the projects is to develop a VR welcome kit that will provide more consistent branding and consumer information. Another is to conduct an in-depth survey on consumer use of assistive technology. John said that several of his staff members will be able to update the SAB on these projects, possibly at the June meeting. Susan suggested that the agency present the project findings at national VR meetings and also asked that the contractors present the findings to the SAB when the projects are completed.
* Current FY spending against the GAA – David and Shandra presented a spreadsheet showing expenditures, encumbrances, and committed funds. Shandra said that the problem in spending all of the funds is that, because of staffing shortages in groups homes, there are three Turning 22 consumers whose families have not be able to find the residential placements that they need. Funds had been set aside for these consumers since residential services are very expensive. In addition, $400,000 had been set aside for a web survey of consumers but the execution of the survey and subsequent spending has been delayed by concerns expressed by Local 509 about the details of the survey. Shandra also noted that 3010 VR funds cannot be spent until Social Security reimbursement funds are spent so there might be some of those funds left over.

Program Updates:

* Dashboard on Registrations, Process, and Outcomes – Nate said that he is working on a simplified dashboard to present to the SAB soon. He would also like to include graphics. Joe asked for 2019 figures to be added and Nate said that he will include them next time. Nate also said that during the past week, the interface between Aware and OnBase has been implemented after three weeks of testing. Eighty new registrations have been processed correctly using the interface. There were 200 registrations in February. Susan suggested that monthly numbers would be helpful. Nate will provide that data next month. Amy and Kim express their appreciation of Nate’s responsiveness to consumer issues that they contact him about.
* Joe asked whether successful rehabilitation closures are lagging. John said that we may have somewhat fewer closures this year compared to the excellent performance last year. He will analyze the data and report next month.
* John reported that a new Amazon robotics manufacturing facility has opened in Westborough and that one MCB consumer has been hired to work there. We will conduct an in-service there next week and hope that more MCB consumers will be hired.
* Susan suggested that MCB include in the new VR welcome kit questions about how the consumer heard about MCB services in order to gauge the effectiveness of the marketing campaign. John said that that will be included.

Update on staffing changes and levels:

* John reported on recent hiring results:
1. The social worker position in Western Massachusetts remains unfilled because the two top applicants refused the job. The delays (an average of three months due to mandatory state procedures) between a posting and a job offer often end up with the candidate accepting another job.
2. The hiring for the Regional Director position in Springfield in close to being completed.
3. The management analyst position in the Central Register is still not filled because the two top candidates also declined because they had accepted other positions.
4. The Orientation and Mobility Instructor position is also not filled because the only applicant accepted another position with the VA.
* Susan inquired about MCB’s retention plans. David said that retention of working-age staff is not the major problem. MCB is losing employees to retirement for the most part. There are two or three more staff becoming eligible for retirement later this year.

Status of effort to automate notification of blindness to assessors for tax exemptions:

* David said that the regulations have been finalized. Loran Lang worked hard on this. No public comments were received either in writing or at the public hearing.
* He has met with the Department of Revenue Division of Local Services about the secure computer interface. There is still technical work to be done.
* We are working on an opt-out form for registrants and also on messaging for consumers and staffs of assessors’ offices.
* The target date for implementation is July 1.

Update on phone system procurement:

Kamilia is the project manager for this effort. She is reaching out to Local 509 and consumers for input. The state will pay for the back-end costs and MCB will pay for the particular requirements that it specifies.

Update on PPE available to MCB staff:

David said that fit testing for staff who require N95 masks has occurred. KN95 masks have been distributed to other staff.

There were no questions from the public at this meeting.

Next meeting: Friday, May 6 at noon.