**Statutory Advisory Board (SAB)**

**March 7, 2023**

**Minutes**

SAB Attendees: Howard Purcell, Chair, Colleen Moran, Blair Wong, Brian MacDonald, and Kathy Petkauskos

MCB Staff Attendees: David D’Arcangelo, Commissioner, Shandra Gardiner, Loran Lang, Michael Saccone, Nathan Skrocki, Thelma Williams, and 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.

Call to accept Minutes from February 7, 2023 meeting.

Moved and accepted.

Commissioner’s Update

The Commissioner stated that overall MCB is in a strong financial position. We are more than halfway through the fiscal year and are on track in terms of spending. The biggest challenge MCB faces repeatedly is in the Turning 22 account. This account is harder to project therefore if we have reversions, it is usually in that account. Earmark is fully spent. Does not mean consumers cannot get services.

Currently in the middle of the budget process for the next fiscal year starting on July 1st (state).

The Chair asked if the Statutory Advisory Board (SAB) can contribute ideas in terms of reallotment projects? The Commissioner said anyone from the SAB, Rehabilitation Council (RC), or the public can share their ideas. He also mentioned how there is a process for approval of these ideas.

Shandra Gardiner: Chief Financial Officer at MCB

Last week the Governor’s budget was passed, also known as House One and it’s the Governor’s budget recommendation. The Governor sends their budget proposal to the House who will then look at it and determine whether they have any additions or amendments. Once the House passes their budget it will go to the senate who will also decide if they would like to see any changes made. Once the Senate comes up with their budget, they will compare it to the House budget. Any differences will go to the conference committee and then back to the Governor for their signature. Once it is passed into law it is called the General Appropriations Act. As of this point, we are just looking at budget proposals. Shandra said MCB will keep the SAB updated as we continue through the budget cycle.

The Chair asked Shandra if she has a sense of what the budget will look like based on the first run through and if MCB is feeling good about it? Shandra said MCB feels like we are in a great budget position. If you compare this Governor’s budget to last year’s, we are about $70,000 more. Turning 22 account is our largest, around 15 million dollars.

The Commissioner discussed the complexities of transferring funds from one account to another.

The Chair stated that in budgeting it seems it would be critical to try to anticipate what the needs are going to be for the following budget cycle.

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The Commissioner said we do a great job of spending our state dollars every year as those are the funds we have direct control over at MCB. Although we have less control over the federal money, MCB still does a great job of expending most if not all the funds. Shandra stated that every year before we get a budget, an exercise is sent to the program directors and budget centers asking them what they need to run their programs successfully. Everything MCB asked for was fulfilled in the Governor’s budget.

Shandra talked about the next steps following the approval of the Governor’s budget which includes the listening sessions held by the Ways and Means Committee. MCB is scheduled to attend the hearing on March 21st. The Chair asked Shandra how the public finds out about where the Budget Testimonies take place. The Commissioner said people can find that information on the legislature’s home page. Mike posted a link in the chat. Shandra stated that MCB is currently in a mid-year exercise that comes from EHS. Our Budget Centers evaluate if there are any additional needs in their programs or places where they might not spend as many funds in a year.

Shandra discussed reversion rates and the role played by the COVID 19 Pandemic. The mid-year review provides MCB with the opportunity to shift funds within appropriations if necessary.

Staffing Updates

The Chair asked if the Commissioner or Shandra have any comments about personnel matters and if we are still looking to fill positions. Shandra said she is hiring a Budget Director if anyone knows anyone who might be interested. The Commissioner stated we are at full employment right now including positions in the process of hiring.

Brian MacDonald asked Shandra how the Governor’s budget looks compared to last year when you consider inflation. Shandra stated it is about $70,000 higher than the previous Governor’s budget. The Purchase of Service rates are on two-year rate reviews. Nothing will change this year.

Secretary Walsh started a week ago and is making her way through all the agencies. The Commissioner is confident in her abilities and will know more about the board once he is able to have meetings with her.

The Chair asked the Commissioner to share anything about his tenure and what is coming up for him.

The Commissioner stated that his appointment is for a five-year term which is ending in August 2023. He has yet to have discussions regarding this matter but will keep everyone updated.

Nathan Skrocki: Director of Policy and Compliance at MCB

Shandra explained where the reallotment funds come from. Every year the federal government sends a notice saying that there are other states that have VR dollars that have gone unused. MCB can apply for those funds by outlining projects we want to use that money towards. In the past 4 years we have gotten every penny we applied for. Nathan said he has worked on 21 or 22 projects over the past 4 years. Those include research projects, surveys, and other things that help MCB evaluate how we do business and how we want to continue doing business moving forward. Two of the projects we worked on last year were with the New England College of Optometry (NECO). The Chair stated that MCB and NECO’s relationship was built before he was ever a member of the SAB.

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The first project Nate talked about looked at the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on vocational opportunities in the existing labor market, specifically for people with visual impairments (in partnership with the Institute of Human Centered Design). From this survey we were able to read comments from participants and learned the top fields they were working in. This survey also looked at employment projections and the effects of the pandemic on some of these positions.

Nate talked about another project that looked at disability as a qualification for employment (in partnership with UMASS and Work Without Limits). One of the major takeaways was the benefit that eliminating the need to commute had on our consumers. The digital accessibility specialist position was also highlighted as an up-and-coming field for people with visual impairments.

The next project Nate discussed focused on the exploration of factors associated with outcomes and vocational and social rehabilitation programs and looked at the uptake of state rehabilitation services (in partnership with NECO). Nate then discussed our current survey with Mass Inc., which is not a reallotment project. It is 22 questions long. Right now, they are designing communication methods. The survey is scheduled to start later this month and will run through April. Statistics and reports will be given to MCB by the end of June. We are targeting a minimum of 2500 responses.

The Chair asked Nate and the Commissioner to respond to the common concern people have about spending money on a survey that we should be using to directly support the consumer.

The Commissioner said this money must be used for the specific project they applied for. Also, these projects help us to modernize and know how to best use our programs and services.

Questions

David Kingsbury states the importance of the surveys but points out that the public has limited knowledge of the results through the website. He suggests sending out emails and social media posts about the studies as well as organizing Town Halls to discuss results.

The Commissioner states that we have done a combination of these things in the past. Some are available on the website, and anyone can reach out and ask us to send them the results. Nate will be happy to discuss any of the projects with anyone.

Brian MacDonald shared how they use braille in their surveys to best communicate with the larger population.

Questions from the Public

Sharon Stralkowski asked for an update regarding a session she participated in about the MCB phone system. The Commissioner said we are waiting for the new administration to decide. It is proposed to be an integrated approach.

Bruce Howell wanted to clarify that although MCB spent all the earmark funds that does not mean that the services are not available to consumers. The Commissioner said that we still provide services even though those funds have been expended. The Chair will look at the upcoming meetings and make sure they do not fall on any summer holidays.

Motion to adjourn.