MCB Statutory Advisory Board Minutes

May 14, 2021

Present SAB:

Christopher Kauders, Chair

Joe Abely

Kim Charlson

Susan Foley

Amy Ruell

Present MCB:

David D’Arcangelo, Commissioner

John Oliveira, Deputy Commissioner

Loran Lang, General Counsel

Mary Otiato, Director of Policy & Strategic Initiatives/Ombudsman

Carla Kath, Director of Communications

Regina DiMarzo, Assistant to the Commissioner

Patricia Hart, Policy Development

Approximately 15 members of the public

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

Commissioner Update - Meeting with BSCB and MCB response summarizing the meeting

* David said that the meeting had been very productive. Brian Charlson of BSCB agreed and said that the follow-up email had addressed many of the concerns. Brian said that it was agreed that the Commissioner will meet regularly with the presidents of NFB and BSCB. He also said that he had been glad to hear that closure of the MCB Springfield office is not being considered at this time.

Commissioner Budget Update

* David reported that the current FY 2022 budget proposal of the Massachusetts Senate is the same as the Governor’s proposal. Everyone agreed that it is likely to be amended as the process goes forward.
* David said that he endeavors to communicate budget information to both SAB and Rehabilitation Council members in a timely fashion. David showed the SAB a dashboard that shows current FY 2021 expenditures that is also available on the Comptroller’s website.
* Joe Abely said that the SAB would like periodic financial statements and information on expected future spending. David said that it is hard to speculate about the details of future spending.
* Chris said that the SAB just wants the documents that the agency prepares on a quarterly basis. It would be great if Shandra, as the CFO, could answer any specific questions for about 20 minutes at the next meeting.
* Amy asked whether there is any way for consumers to receive equipment from MCB without having an open case. John said that there is not since the agency is accountable for the expenditure of both state and federal funds. He did say that an individual’s case can be opened quickly if speed is required.
* Joe Abely asked about the exact amount of rent reductions and related costs and those cost savings and how they will be allocated between accounts in FY 21 and FY22. There was no answer.

Commissioner Update - Statutory Review Process

* David reported that review is a technical process meant to point out outdated provisions and language. The legislature will draft any amendments and will hold public hearings on any proposed legislation. MCB’s review document is now being reviewed at the EOHHS legal department and will be further reviewed by the EOHHS legislative staff before further steps are taken. When and if it is forwarded to the legislature for consideration, the normal legislative review and public hearing process will be carried out.
* Kim represented the SAB at the MCB internal meetings on the statutory review. She said that it was a collaborative process that was well worth doing since the statute needs modernization.

Commissioner Update - Progress on recommendations in reports on reallotment projects

* Mary reported that it is too soon to have formal reports. MCB will be drafting an update to its VR state plan in October/November and will be addressing the results of the reallotment projects at that time.
* Carla said that based upon the reallotment projects related to the “What’s Your Vision?” campaign, MCB is undertaking a new reallotment project this year to buy advertising time. Analytics are being collected on this campaign and will be available after the project is completed in October.
* John and Susan discussed the work on the feasibility of internet-based businesses for blind consumers. The Florida agency for the blind has been a leader in this area, developing tax preparation services and a web store for refurbished assistive technology equipment. John intends to continue to explore this area for employment opportunities.
* David said that the reports of all the completed reallotment projects are on MCB’s website. Chris asked that this subject be part of the agenda of the July SAB meeting.

Commissioner Update on the transition of the contract to manage the AIM Library

* David said that the transition is in process and that the agencies are finalizing the inter-agency services agreement (ISA).
* Joe raised several questions: What will happen if the ISA is not approved in time? Who will act as trustee at the American Printing House for the Blind? David said that John Oliveira is currently a trustee. Joe did mention that while John is the trustee for the MCB APH account someone will need to be appointed for the Library. John also said that the transition will occur. The staff positions are being posted and we do not anticipate any problems.
* Kim recommended that MCB communicate with AMSVI about the transition. John agreed and said that we will do that shortly since the plans are firming up.

“Dashboards” for tracking MCB performance

* Susan discussed the Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) research that includes data from 50-60 VR agencies on employment, applications, etc. She offered to help MCB set up s similar dashboard. Judy Savageau also offered to help. Mary said that we are looking at data such as age, service program, services received, and employment. Mary is putting together a list of ideas and would appreciate Susan and Judy’s help as they are both experienced researchers. Susan and Mary will update the SAB at future meetings.

Employee performance

* David reported that MCB employees have been doing very well with remote work. The Governor has not released exact plans for the coming months but MCB is ready and able to adapt to the post-covid requirements. MCB has been able to continue with operations and remote services during the past months, unlike many other agencies both within the state and in other states. Susan suggested a need to review agency communications systems during the post-covid period to enable staff to work either remotely or in the office. David agreed. Judy Savageau pointed out the need to consider and address social isolation when staff are working remotely.

Next meeting: June 18 at noon