MCB Statutory Advisory Board Minutes

September 10, 2021

Present SAB:

Joe Abely

Susan Foley

Amy Ruell

Kim Charlson

Present MCB:

David D’Arcangelo, Commissioner

Carla Kath, Director of Communications

John Oliveira, Deputy Commissioner

Mary Otiato, Director of Policy & Strategic Initiatives/Ombudsman

Loran Lang, MCB General Counsel

Regina DiMarzo, Assistant to the Commissioner

Patricia Hart, Policy Development

Approximately 15 members of the public also attended.

Joe Abely chaired the meeting. Since Chris Kauders, the chair of the SAB, has passed away, Joe Abely was nominated to be SAB Chair and was elected. A moment of silence was observed in honor of Chris’s memory.

Joe asked the SAB to defer approval of the July meeting minutes until the next meeting.

The meeting was recorded with local recording permission.

**Discussion of the MCB FY 2022 budget**

Joe requested monthly reports of budgeted vs. actual expenditures. David said that he would like to provide that kind of report, but he will need to ask for legal advice. Joe said that he would like a tutorial on how to use the Comptroller’s website to extract the relevant information.

**Review of proposed dashboard for tracking MCB performance**

The SAB reviewed the dashboard that Mary has developed with Susan’s and Judy’s help. Mary said that people were not attending eye appointments earlier in the year and the increase later in the year is attributable to catching up on the pent-up demand from the pandemic. There were 1,293 new registrations January through July, 2021. 182 consumers applied for VR services during the nine-month period, January through September, 2021 period. There were only 1,063 new registrations January through December, 2020. 193 consumers applied for VR services during this twelve-month period.

Susan and the other SAB members expressed concern about how a continuing increase in demand may mean that counselors will see an increase in caseload size by December/January. There was a discussion about caseload and a question about how MCB is preparing for it. David said that MCB’s “What’s Your Vision?” (WYV) campaign may also result in some increase in registrations in the fall as the campaign continues.

Susan suggested that MCB find a way to collect data from newly registered persons on whether the campaign has influenced them to seek MCB services. She also suggested the MCB track the number of consumers who are referred to the VR program from MCB’s social rehabilitation program. David added that MCB’s operation of the Accessible Instructional Materials (AIM) Library will likely lead to increased referral of school-age consumers for services. Loran said that she will develop legal releases for parents to allow the library to refer children for services.

**Status of $850,000 included in the FY22 Final Budget in account 4110-1000 and other budget matters**

Joe asked about the earmark for the provision of accessible devices, assistive software and equipment and supportive technology training and services by qualified private providers and whether MCB has developed plans to spend it. David said that he and John are currently developing specific plans and Requests for Response (RFR) for these services. John said that one RFR would be released later in the day for assistive technology training; this contract will be awarded on September 24. Joe requested that David and the SAB discuss this subject each month going forward.

Joe also asked about the MCB telephone system procurement. David said that there have been many complaints from consumers about both the agency’s previous voice-activated system and the current dial-by-number setting. Susan suggested that, with the rapid pace of technology, MCB should try to plan for future telephone needs. David said that he is planning to develop an RFR for a vendor to provide MCB with advice on selecting the most advanced, yet accessible, system. Amy mentioned that a number of companies such as Bank of America provide callers with a choice of voice or dial-by-number responses. She recommends that type of system. Amy also recommended that MCB convene a focus group of consumers to better identify requirements for a new system. Kim said that the Perkins Library is facing the same challenges with its telephone system and that she would like to share information with MCB. David welcomed this suggestion.

David reported that the FY 2021 reversions were approximately:

* $90,000 for assistive technology
* $2.6 million for Deaf-Blind Extended Supports (mostly due to DBES consumers not using residential services to the extent expected)
* $2.65 million that had been budgeted for other services that was unused due to the pandemic

David also reported that the Secretary of Administration and Finance has allowed MCB to carry over $850,000 in unspent funds into FY 2022 from FY 2021 which is highly unusual.

Joe also asked about the amount of rent that the agency has saved due to the office closures and downsizing. David said that it is approximately $150,000 for this fiscal year.

**Update on the “What’s Your Vision?” campaign:**

Carla shared a number of metrics about the campaign such as that there were approximately 11,000 visitors to the MCB website in July and that MCB’s emails to consumers were opened 34% of the time which is considered to be an excellent metric. About 450 consumers follow MCB on platforms such as LinkedIn and Twitter. The campaign runs through October. Joe said that the SAB would like to continue to receive updates on the campaign. Several SAB members said that they see the ads frequently and think that they are very good. Susan suggested that futures campaigns aim to focus more on rural and minority populations.

**Update on safety protocols for MCB employees:**

David reported that staff are required to wear masks in the Boston office. Staff are wearing masks in consumers’ homes or to meet with them outside. Governor Baker has established a vaccination requirement for state employees that goes into effect on October 17. MCB has been working with employee unions on all these matters,

**Other updates:**

John reported that MCB’s VR program has achieved a 25% increase over the previous year in the numbers of rehabilitated consumers during FY 2021. Many of the jobs obtained have an annual wage above $70,000, a few over $100,000.

Joe asked for an update about the feasibility study on the establishment of a for-profit business employing the blind. David said that he has recently met with Kevin Lynch at National Industries for the Blind to discuss the NIB concept paper on for-profit businesses that employ the blind. The SAB discussed possibilities which include e-commerce as self-employment.

**Public comments:**

* One person said that she has had difficulty obtaining a certificate of blindness after applying on the website. Mary apologized and said that she would email the consumer a certificate. This consumer’s comment led to a discussion by the SAB about the difficulties that many consumers have communicating to MCB by email as well as by telephone.
* One consumer said that she appreciates the agency’s employment initiatives but is concerned that seniors seeking employment may be left out.
* Another person expressed thanks for the support groups on Cape Cod operated by Sightloss Services under contract with MCB and for the contributions and attendance by Karen Hatcher, MCB’s Older Blind Independent Living Program Director.

**Next meeting:**

October 8 at noon.