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Massachusetts Commission for the Blind  
Virtual Town Hall – May 1, 2020

Massachusetts State Seal

Slide 2

Opening Music

MCB Consumer

Barry Spiro

Slide 3

Welcome

Photo of Commissioner David D’Arcangelo in front of a U.S. flag

Commissioner

David D’Arcangelo

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AGENDA

* Programs & Services: John Oliveira
* Orientation & Mobility: Meg Robertson
* Assistive Technology: Alexander Pooler
* Employment Services: Joe Buizon
* Children’s Services: Susan Lavin
* Older Independent Blind: Karen Hatcher
* Questions & Answers

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OVERVIEW

* MCB provides social and vocational rehabilitation services to almost 26,000 consumers.
* We aim to provide quality services that enhance the lives of our consumers by promoting independence, dignity and self-determination.
* We achieve this by partnering with community agencies, healthcare providers, employers and, most importantly, our consumers and their families.

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AGENCY OVERVIEW

* 1 of 15 agencies in the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS)
* Almost 150 Employees
* 4 Offices
  + Boston (Regions 3, 4 & 6)
  + New Bedford (Region 5)
  + Worcester (Region 2)
  + Springfield (Region 1)

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SIX REGIONS OF MCB

Map of Massachusetts Cities and Towns

Region 1 – Western region highlighted in light blue

Region 2 – Central region highlighted in green

Region 3 – Northeastern region highlighted in light purple

Region 4 – Metro-west region highlighted in orange

Region 5 – Southeastern region highlighted in pink

Region 6 – Greater Boston region highlighted in yellow

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Programs & Services

Update

Deputy Commissioner

John Oliveira

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VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (VR)

* VR services assist older students and adults to prepare for, achieve, retain, or regain employment. The VR program is federally funded with a State match. (950 consumers actively receiving services)

Image on the right-hand side of the slide: An individual with dark skin tone who presents as feminine, and two individuals with light skin tone, one who presents as feminine and the other who presents as masculine and older, sitting together at a table. There is a laptop and pieces of paper on the table.

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VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (VR)

* Part of our VR program, the Randolph Sheppard program prepares individuals who are legally blind for a career in concession management. (There are approximately 29 vending stands operating across the Commonwealth).

Image on the right-hand side of the slide: A person with light skin tone and short dark hair who is standing behind a concession counter with a Massachusetts Commission for the Blind sign on the left-hand side of the concession stand.

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SOCIAL REHABILITATION (SR)

* Social Rehabilitation (SR) services assist in the adjustment to blindness and support maximum personal independence and living in community. SR services are targeted to children 0-13, seniors and anyone not served by VR including consumers in the Deaf-blind extended supports unit. The SR program is state funded. (2,200 seniors and other non-vocational adults actively receiving services)

Image on the right-hand side of the slide: A person with light skin tone holding the hand of another person with light skin tone between their own. The person whose hand is being held has a blanket on their lap.

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VISION REHABILITATION THERAPY (VRT)

* MCB’s Rehabilitation Teaching (RT) services prepare individuals who are blind to perform daily living skills safely and independently in any environment. Specialized teaching services include training in activities of daily living such as cooking, kitchen organization, safety and appliance use and self-care (grooming, clothing organization and care).

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COVID-19

Response

MCB’s Continuity of Services

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MCB Working Through COVID-19

* MCB left our physical offices on Friday, March 13 and were open for business on Monday, March 16.
* MCB’s typical Counseling process has Counselors equipped with laptops that have mobile internet access (MiFi), which enables use of email & webmail, access to the web (teleconferencing & video conferencing WebEx & Zoom)

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MCB Working Through COVID-19

* Counselors have access to our Cloud-based off premises Client Management System (AWARE)
* MCB’s Central Registration has registered 55 new registrants, processed ~200 travel cards, Identification cards, Massachusetts Equipment Distribution Program applications, Disability Placard applications and Certificates of Blindness.

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MCB Working Through COVID-19

* More than 70% of MCB staff have been newly trained on Zoom for remote service calls and internal meetings, including a virtual meeting with almost 60 MCB Stakeholders on March 20th and a virtual all-staff call on March 27th with 129 participants that followed several other all-staff calls since March 10th.

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MCB Working Through COVID-19

* Working with TIC and affiliates to share MCB messaging on the hour, every hour since the March 10th MA State of Emergency declaration. Our Social Media has gotten the message out and our Social Media metrics have increased exponentially.

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MCB Working Through COVID-19

* Our Assistive Technology (AT) unit continues making AT deliveries in PPE to ensure safety for staff and consumers, along with continuing to provide remote AT assistance and training.

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MCB VR Success Stories During COVID-19

* A VR Consumer was working remotely as a software engineer for three years with a starting salary of $83,000. During the stay-at-home order, he was offered and accepted a new position as a full-time software engineer for an educational technology and publishing company. He started April 6, 2020 at a base salary of $110,000 plus bonus.
* A VR Consumer has been hired by a theatre company on a full-time basis as a ticket agent and customer service representative. He is working remotely and has been employed over 90 days and has been retained despite COVID-19 lay-offs.

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Orientation & Mobility

Meg Robertson

Director O & M

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ORIENTATION & MOBILITY SERVICES

* Direct O&M training on hold
* Phone interviews for new referrals
* Trouble shooting O&M issues
* Encouraging practice of long cane skills
* Encouraging the learning of GPS apps, in familiar environments
* Sending out replacement O&M equipment
* Review of street crossings & environments for future instruction
* On-Line O&M Training Continuing Ed. Courses

Image on the right-hand side of the slide: A person with light skin tone and short hair standing on a sidewalk next to a shorter person with long dark hair who is holding a long cane. Both individuals are facing away from the viewer. The taller person has their left arm resting on the shorter person’s shoulders.

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ORIENTATION AND MOBILITY SERVICES

* Check-in with current and past O&M students
* Access to food options
* Boredom & social isolation
* Verbal review of routes using safe O&M techniques related to social distancing guidelines
* Review different ways to sanitize guide dog harness & long cane
* Resources for face masks
* Face mask causing disorientation
* Future planning: additional O&M techniques/routes

Image on the right-hand side of slide: Older person with light skin tone standing on a sidewalk. The person is wearing sunglasses and a hat and using a white cane.

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SOCIAL DISTANCING

* Adaptive Guiding
* Voice Guide
* Hand on guide back
* Use of extra cane between guide and self
* Shopping carriage
* Options for not going out
* Use of long cane for ID

Image on the right-hand side of the slide: One person’s arm holding another person’s arm slightly above their elbow. There is a green traffic light in the background.

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Assistive Technology

Alexander Pooler

Assistive Technology Director

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Assistive Technology

**Assistive Technology is working with our consumers remotely on their technology issues:**

* Deployment and training on Low Vision Devices
* Help in downloading software to develop touch typing skills like Talking Typer
* Assistance in configuring ZoomText:
  + How to change magnification?
  + How to change mouse pointer?
  + How to change contrast?
* Questions related to free access to VFO software JAWS, Fusion, and ZoomText until June 30, 2020

<https://portal.freedomscientific.com/SponsoredSoftware>

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Assistive Technology

**Distance Problem Solving:**

* JAWS Tandem - A JAWS Tandem connection serves as an online meeting between two JAWS users. A meeting can be conducted over the Internet, which is known as a Tandem Center session, or over a private network, known as a Tandem Direct session. The primary connection method is through Tandem Center, a gateway server responsible for creating meeting IDs, verifying proper use of JAWS Tandem, and providing a path between the two systems. After the session is established, the controller can manage and run the target system's desktop.

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Assistive Technology

**Remote Working and Learning for our Consumers:**

* Many schools and businesses are using work/learn from home software such as:
* Jamboard
* EdPuzzle
* Blackboard
* Moodle
* Canvas
* Google Classroom
* Zoom, WebEx
* Microsoft Teams

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Employment Services

Joe Buizon

Employment Services Supervisor

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Employment Services

What does Employment Services do?

* Work with consumers in conjunction with the VR counselors to assist individuals to prepare and eventually obtain gainful employment

How has our work changed during this historic time?

* Helping any number of consumers apply for unemployment benefits

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Employment Services

JOB DRIVEN PROGRAMS

* Aid Consumers with Job Applications
* Summer Internship Program
* Virtual Mentoring Program

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Employment Services

JOB DRIVEN PROGRAMS

* Mock Interviews
* Moving October Job Fair to a Virtual Job Fair
* Employment Now initiative – CHA and MEE
* Continue to Reach out and Engage with Employers

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Children’s Services

Susan Lavin

Director of Programs

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Children’s Services- Overview

Children’s Social Workers (CSW’s) promote the

education and wellness of legally blind children and

their families by providing:

* Case management
* Educational advocacy and parental support   
  through the special education process
* Socialization and recreational\* opportunities,
* Information and referral for a variety of services and benefits

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Children’s Services- Overview

* Information and referral for a variety of services and benefits
* Assistance and advocacy in accessing public benefits and in-home support services
* Respite\* and flexible family supports\*
* Certifications for the Talking Book Library

\*Title XX/income eligibility applies. These are promulgated yearly based on 200% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines.

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Children’s Services- Overview

MCB Registry: Age 0 -14

Table with 8 rows and two columns. First column: Region, and second column: # of INDIVIDUALS

Western MA – 1: 180 individuals

Central MA – 2: 205 individuals

Northeast – 3: 231 individuals

Greater Boston – 4: 229 individuals

Southeast – 5: 188 individuals

Boston – 6: 187 individuals

Total: 1220 individuals

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Older Independent Blind (OIB)

Karen Hatcher Director OIB

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Program Details

* FEDERAL GRANT FUNDING SUPPORTS THE OIB PROGRAM (TITLE VII – CHAPTER 2 VR ACT OF 1973 AS AMENDED)
* GOAL: TO PROVIDE INDEPENDENT LIVING SERVICES AND SUPPORT OLDER INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE BLIND. MCB ENCOURAGES ALL CONSUMERS TO MAINTAIN THEIR INDEPENDENCE AT HOME AND IN THEIR COMMUNITY.
* ELIGIBILITY: MA RESIDENT, LEGALLY BLIND AND OVER AGE 55

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Before/After COVID-19

Table with two columns and seven rows. The first column is before COVID-19 and the second column is After COVID-19. In the following numbered list, the number contains service information from before COVID-19, and the sub-bullet “a” contains information about how the service is completed after COVID-19.

1. NEW CONSUMER INTAKE / HOME VISITS
   1. REMOTELY BY PHONE
2. LOW VISION AIDS / DEVICES HAND DELIVERED
   1. MAILED TO CLIENT
3. REHABILITATION TEACHING / TRAINING “LIVE”
   1. REMOTELY BY PHONE
4. LOW VISION PEER SUPPORT GROUPS “LIVE”
   1. REMOTELY BY PHONE
5. OIB PRESENTATIONS AT SENIOR CENTERS
   1. REMOTELY PEER GROUPS
6. DIABETIC MANAGEMENT AND SUPPORT GROUP
   1. PILOT REMOTE TRAINING
7. PERKINS TALKING BOOKS MAILED
   1. BARD DOWNLOADS

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Questions?

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Our offices are closed.

But our services continue.

MCB logo with letters M, C, and B in blue and corresponding braille above each letter and Massachusetts Commission for the Blind under “MCB”

1-800-392-6450

MCBinfo@mass.gov

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Connect with MCB

Website: [www.mass.gov/mcb](http://www.mass.gov/mcb)

Twitter/Instagram: @massblind

Facebook: @masscommblind

LinkedIn: Massachusetts Commission for the Blind

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Closing Music

MCB Consumer

Barry Spiro