

Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS)
Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB)
Advisory Board for Persons who are Blind or Visually Impaired
Meeting Minutes – April 3rd, 2025

Members Present:

- Chairwoman Eileen Akers; Stephen Thal; Mary Silverberg; Andrea Giudice; Katherine Guzman

Members Absent:

- Samuel Pride; Astread Ferron-Poole, Ex-Officio for the Commissioner, Department of Social Services, Elizabeth Rival

Other Present:

- Carol Jenkins, BESB Director; Mary Burgard, Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor; Jennifer Proto, ADS Legislative Liaison; Lisa Drew, BESB Administrative Assistant; Anthony Spence for Astread Ferron-Poole, Ex-Officio the Commissioner, Department of Social Services; Wendy Lusk; Phillip Magalnick; Charlotte Copenhaver; Lori St. Amand, BESB Volunteer Program Coordinator; Catherine Summ, Education Program Supervisor; Chris Lassen, Adult Service Supervisor; Krystal Kelly, BESB Vocational Rehabilitation; Alexis H;

Chairwoman Eileen Akers called the meeting to order at 10:07 a.m.

New board members Paul Duquette and Kristen Dockendorff were introduced.

Public Comment

- No public comments.

Action Items

- Approval of December 19, 2024, Minutes: The minutes for December 19th were adopted and approved.
- Approval of January 16, 2025, Special Meeting Minutes: The minutes for January 16, 2025, were adopted and approved.

Old Business

Bureau Program Updates – Director Carol Jenkins

- Provided staffing updates: new hires included a VR technologist, VR counselor, a teacher, and an orientation and mobility specialist. Additional roles, including a second teacher and an adult services supervisor, are in recruitment.
- A new BESB website is under development.
- A new case management system is being implemented.

Bureau of Services for Persons who are Deaf, DeafBlind, or Hard of Hearing

- Updates were provided as part of the broader agency initiatives.

5. Legislative Update – Jennifer Proto, Legislative Liaison, ADS

Appendix

- The Governor's budget was released in February.
- The Appropriations Committee is in negotiations.
- Advocacy for increased funding was encouraged.
- Katherine Guzman shared positive outcomes from contacting legislators.

- Jennifer Proto will resend contact details for legislative leaders and forward the legislative update document to Lisa Drew.

6. Advisory Board Applicants and Resignations

- Carol Jenkins reviewed the current composition of the Advisory Board, term expirations, and appointment authorities.
- Noted vacancies include a Governor-appointed parent position.
- A discussion was held on appointment processes and the need for improved recruitment materials.
- Kristen Dockendorff recommended simplifying the recruitment process.

New Business

Letter from a Parent of a Blind Child

- Andrea Giudice agreed to finalize and distribute the letter summarizing concerns raised at another meeting.

Collaboration: SRC and Synergy Update – Phillip Magalnick

- Katherine Guzman presented the updated Synergy Summary Report.
- Four original points were discussed; one financial recommendation was removed due to progress.
- Remaining recommendations:
 1. Adjust the BESB Program Manager title and status.
 2. Create a second-in-command Bureau Chief position.
 3. Provide BESB with a purchasing card.

- The Board agreed to review the updated summary by April 15, 2025, and respond to Lisa Drew with endorsements or requests for further discussion.
- Katherine Guzman will send the final recommendations to Commissioner Porter following the board review.
- A discussion was held regarding the RSA audit concerns. Carol Jenkins noted that BESB had not been monitored as expected. The board agreed to await new members' input before formal adoption of Synergy recommendations.

Points to Good and Welfare

- Andrea Giudice announced the Cheshire Lions Dinner Dance (May 5, 2025) and the Berlin Lions Deep Sea Fishing Tournament, also in May, for the visually impaired.
- Chairwoman Eileen Akers will schedule a follow-up conversation with Chris Lassen regarding outstanding questions.

Adjournment

- A motion was made and seconded to adjourn the meeting at 11:55 am.

Appendix

Bureau Program Updates – Budget

BESB Budget Report

March 2025

A. Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) FFY 2024

a. Original VR Grant: \$3,584,073.00

Maintenance of Effort (MOE) Reduction: \$4,206.00

Total VR Grant: \$3,579,867.00

Reallotment: \$80,796.00

Total VR Grant with Reallotment: \$3,660,663.00

VR Remaining Balance: \$2,067,322.61

b. Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS)

i. Pre-ETS Total 15% Reserve: \$549,099.45

ii. Pre-ETS Remaining Reserve: \$261,411.21

c. Supported Employment (SE)

i. Part A: Adult Remaining balance: \$22,500.00

1. Returning Full Amount

ii. Part B: Youth Remaining balance: \$22,500.00

1. Returning Full Amount

B. Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) FFY 2025

a. Original VR Grant: \$1,774,156.00

Total VR Grant: Haven't received full grant

VR Remaining Balance: \$1,774,156.00

b. Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS)

i. Pre-ETS Total 15% Reserve: \$266,123.00

ii. Pre-ETS Remaining Reserve: \$266,123.00

c. Supported Employment (SE)

i. Part A: Adult Remaining balance: \$4,980.00

ii. Part B: Youth Remaining balance: \$4,980.00

C. Business Enterprise Program (BEP)

a. Remaining Balance: \$3,426,527.02

**D. Independent Living/Older Blind (IL/OB) FFY 22024
(Adults Over Age 55)**

a. Beginning Balance: \$370,257.00

b. Remaining Balance: \$215,885.28

**E. Independent Living/Older Blind (IL/OB) FFY 22025
(Adults Over Age 55)**

a. Beginning Balance: \$160,674.00

b. Remaining Balance: \$160,674.00

F. Independent Living (IL) SFY 2025 (Adults Under Age 55)

a. Beginning balance: \$ \$29,744.46

b. Remaining balance: \$ \$4,940.45

G. Children's Services SFY 2025

a. Beginning balance: \$3,747,530.00

b. Remaining balance: \$\$858,507.49

Appendix

BESB Advisory Board

3-20-25

Children's Services Program Updates

Staffing and student updates:

BESB staff:

There are currently 32 Education Consultants, four O&M instructors, one Rehabilitation Instructor, and one Quality Control Reviewer in Children's Services (a total of 38) who

are all directly supervised by the Children's Services Education Supervisor.

One of the new Education Consultants started on Oct. 4, 2024, and the other on March 7th.

The fourth O&M instructor will start on March 21st.

There is one approved vacant Education Consultant 1 position. During the last recruitment for two Education Consultant 1 positions and one O&M instructor we were able to fill one of the EC 1 positions as well as the O&M position.

The Quality Control Reviewer is currently out on leave and is anticipated to return at the beginning of May. In her absence, the Children's Services Education Supervisor and the Vocational Rehabilitation QCR (whose time is being cost-allocated to Children's Services) are performing her duties.

- 13 itinerant teachers utilize the Education Supervisor as their primary BESB liaison.
- There are currently 949 active Children's Services clients. When I last reported this past September there were 924. This represents an increase of 25 active students.

- Due to the recent increase in staffing, as well as the documented need to continue to increase staff, the Children's Services budget does not have sufficient funds to support additional programs and activities, and adaptive educational materials. Some examples of programs and activities impacted are: Expanded Core Curriculum activities, parent events, in-service trainings, low vision exams, etc. Some examples of educational equipment and supplies impacted are: assistive technology, low vision aids, dark lead pencils, etc.

The BESB Buzz:

Twice yearly, the Children's Services newsletter is published electronically and in print. The newsletter is also translated into Spanish. At the time of this writing the English and Spanish editions of fall issue of The Buzz were not available on the ADS website.

Spring and fall in-service events for district educators:

- Children's Services conducted its annual series of fall in-services for education team members in Wethersfield. Over 200 people participated in the trainings.

§ Large Print: 9-30-24

§ Braille: 10-01-24

§ Preschool: 10-15-24

§ CVI (Academic): 10-15-24

§ MI/VI Day (participants attend one day): Oct. 21-22, 2024

Respectfully submitted by Catherine Summ, 3-6-25

Adult Services

ADULT SERVICES PROGRAM REPORT, March 20, 2025

In the Adult Services program, as noted in September, work with OIB-TAC, the Older Individuals with Blindness Technical Assistance Center, has been completed. Each discipline developed standard assessment tools that staff members use to guide the development of goals with clients when constructing Independent Living Plans. As reported earlier, the Client Satisfaction Survey was piloted. The Policy and Procedures Manual is undergoing internal ADS legal review before being forwarded to the ADS Commissioner.

For clients over 55, late in 2024, 800 large print calendars were printed and distributed. From April 29 through May 1, Adult Services will hold its second BESB Silver Summit in Cromwell. Approximately 50 ILOB clients in open plan

status will gather for a three-day, two-night event undertaken with the assistance of Blind Savvy, a national training consultancy, on maximizing independence in the home and in the community.

In employing four staff members with legal blindness, Adult Services continues to benefit most from the support of Special Assistants for the Blind. Two Rehabilitation Technologists each serve clients in half the state while studying for CATIS certification at the graduate level through UMass/Boston. Three Rehabilitation Teachers serve clients while working with the technologists to differentiate technology training from rehab teaching. Three Orientation & Mobility Instructors serve clients in open status by dispensing canes and shades (glare shields, or sunglasses) from stock, immediately upon first contact with clients, later ordering replacement items. Four Social Workers now spearhead the adoption of revised protocols for prompt, comprehensive case management and service delivery. Recruitment is underway for the next Adult Services program supervisor, as the incumbent retires April 1 after twenty-plus years. In the Volunteer Program, recruitment and placement of volunteers continues. The ILOB program thrives thanks to a major influx of funding from Social Security Reimbursement

Funds that the VR program is not presently in a position to use, and which the BESB Director aggressively pursued and obtained for use by Adult Services.

Chris Lassen, AS program supervisor

Report from Jennifer Proto

Legislative Update to the BESB Advisory Board

by Jennifer Proto, ADS Legislative & Administrative Advisor

4-3-2025

[HB 7025](#), An Act Concerning Updating the Staffing Methodology for Teachers of Visually Impaired Children, would eliminate reference to an outdated statutory formula (CGS § 17a-812(b)(3)) that credits 6 points for each child learning braille (10% of our student caseload) and 1 point for each non-braille student (90% of our caseload), with a recommendation of one full-time certified teacher who instructs students who are visually impaired assigned per 25 points credited.

The new replacement language aligns with our current practice by requiring consideration of the instruction levels established in the student's individualized education plan

(IEP) or 504 service plan, the student's geographical location, and other relevant caseload management factors to determine the number of teachers needed to serve the school districts. Considering multiple factors relevant to the unique needs of students with blindness or visual impairments allows for a more realistic determination of teacher workload and to efficiently utilize teacher capacity to effectively serve as many students as possible within our budgeted resources.

Wasn't voted out of Human Services Committee but we hope to work with the Chairs to get it added to another piece of legislation.

[SB 1158](#), An Act Concerning the Establishment of a Department on Aging, has the stated goal of aligning agency functions and improving efficiency and service delivery, but for several reasons we have opposed this bill.

Over the last 30 years, services for Connecticut's older adults have gone through several restructurings (1997, 2013, and 2018). Each time this restructuring occurs, we must shift the focus of our limited administrative resources to creating new infrastructure, policies, and process flows -

which drains support away from our frontline staff and their critical work. With the last restructuring in 2018, we brought services for older adults and people with disabilities together under one umbrella. We embraced this move, as it made sense in light of Connecticut and national demographic trends. It is also structured this way at the federal level under the Administration for Community Living (ACL), in recognition of the fact that the prevalence of disabilities increases as we age.

Fracturing our services yet again will set us back in terms of our ability to effectively meet the needs of older adults in Connecticut. This was voted out of the committee, but as there would be a cost associated with it, we are hoping that fiscal barrier will stop this legislation in its tracks.

[sHB 6932](#) An Act Concerning the Establishment of a State Interpreting Standards Board, as its title indicates, would establish a new standards board for interpreters. The bill would allow interpreters who hold different certificates or credentials from recognized credentialing organizations to apply to the Board for an approved credential equivalent,

substitute, or waiver for a set period of time. The bill additionally requires the board to establish education, training and certification requirements for interpreters working in community, educational, legal, and medical settings and operational standards for interpreter agencies and service providers providing interpreting services in these settings. The board would handle all complaints concerning noncompliance, hold hearings under the Uniform Administrative Procedure Act (UAPA), and refer them to local law enforcement or credentialing agencies as needed.

We have also opposed this proposal due to timing and had requested that our new Director, who has been onboard for just 3 months, be given time to learn about the services, understand the challenges and potential solutions, and work to set a course that meets the needs of the community. That may include the creation of an Interpreting Standards Board, it may mean focusing on recruitment into the profession, or it may reflect best practices from other states. And currently this position is funded through temporary ARPA funds which is not sufficient to cover existing requirements, never mind new ones.

This was also voted out of the committee, but we are trying to negotiate a compromise to amend the bill later during session.