



**State of Connecticut – Department of Aging and Disability Services
Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB)
Advisory Board for Persons Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired (ABPBVI)
Meeting Minutes**

Date: Thursday, June 12, 2025

Time: 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Location: Zoom

Chairperson: Eileen Akers

I. Call to Order and Roll Call

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Eileen Akers at 10:05 a.m.
A roll call was conducted confirming a quorum of voting members.

Voting Members Present:

- Eileen Akers (Chair)
- Katherine Guzman
- Steven Thal
- Paul Duquette
- Kristen Dockendorff
- Anthony Spence for Astread Ferron-Poole, Ex-Officio for the Commissioner, Department of Social Services

Voting Members Absent:

- Alexis Harris
- Andrea Giudice

Staff and Guests:

- Carol Jenkins (BESB Director)
- Lisa Drew (BESB-Admin)
- Mary Burgard (BESB VR Program)
- Lori St. Amand (BESB Volunteer Program)
- April Matton (BESB Adult Service Program)

Members of the public

- Phillip Magalnick (SRC Chairman)
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II. Approval of Minutes – April 3, 2025

Motion: Katherine Guzman

Seconded: Steven Thal

Vote:

- Eileen Akers (Chair): Yes
- Katherine Guzman: Yes
- Steven Thal: Yes
- Paul Duquette: Yes
- Kristen Dockendorff: Yes
- Anthony Spence for Astread Ferron-Poole, Ex-Officio for the Commissioner, Department of Social Services: Yes

Outcome: The minutes of April 3, 2025, were unanimously approved.

III. Motion – Letter to Commissioner Dr. Amy Porter

Subject: Request to draft and send a formal letter outlining the board's concern about the Program Manager title classification and requesting alignment with the Director of BRS structure.

Motion: Katherine Guzman

Seconded: Steven Thal

Vote:

- Eileen Akers: Yes
- Katherine Guzman: Yes
- Steven Thal: Yes
- Paul Duquette: No (expressed belief the issue had been resolved)

Outcome: Motion passed with three (3) in favor and one (1) opposed. The letter will be drafted and circulated for board review.

IV. BESB Program Updates

A. Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program – Mary Burgard

See Appendix A for full report.

Highlights:

- Two new staff onboarded: Chris Goudarzy (Tech) and Allie Baranauskas (Counselor)
- Upcoming interviews: bilingual Spanish-speaking counselor and one additional counselor (June 26)
- Extensive outreach and professional development efforts including participation in CSAVR, tech conferences, and training with the Department of Mental Health
- Summer cybersecurity camp for transition-age students at CCSU

B. Business Enterprise Program (BEP) – Tyrell Sampson

See Appendix B for full report.

Highlights:

- All seasonal vending locations operational for summer
- Pepsi contract in final negotiation for 5-year extension
- Micro market opportunity being explored with DAS
- Political outreach efforts ongoing in Washington, D.C.

C. BESB Agency-Wide Updates – Carol Jenkins

See Appendix C for full report.

Highlights:

- New hires in VR, Children’s, and Adult Services
 - Ongoing recruitment for TVI and other positions
 - Work with BRS and BITS to procure a new case management system
 - VR satisfaction survey and policy manual updates in coordination with SRC
 - General BESB outreach flyers developed and distributed
 - BESB staff picnic held June 3, 2025
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V. Budget Report

(See Appendix D)

Carol Jenkins presented BESB’s budget report for FY2025. Noted increases to VR allocations and continued funding for services under the Older Blind Program. Carol indicated a projected \$450,000 increase in the FY26 budget, citing need for additional TVIs and wraparound services.

VI. Public Comment

No comments were raised from public attendees.

VII. Adjournment

Chairwoman Eileen Akers adjourned the meeting.

Time of Adjournment: 12:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Lisa Drew

ADS-BESB

June 14, 2025



Appendices

Appendix A: VR Program Update – Mary Burgard

The VR Program had two new staff start in May. Chris Goudarzy is a Rehabilitation Technologist. He will be covering the Northwest part of the state. He is Bilingual in Spanish and Turkish and will be doing evaluations in those languages as well.

Alie Baranauskas is a new VR Counselor covering the North Central part of the state.

We have interviews for a Bilingual Counselor for Spanish covering the State and a VR Counselor for the Southern part of the state on June 26th.

Conference and Outreach

1. VR Counselor Coordinator and VR Supervisor attended the Council of State Administrators for Vocational Rehabilitation in April. Sessions covered self-employment, intake streamlining, champion businesses, and success stories.
2. BESB VR sponsored the May 30th Conference on Individuals with Disabilities. Ten VR staff attended.
3. Transition Coordinator attended the Capacity Building Workshop in Charlotte, NC. Attendees included CT State Department of Ed, DDS, BRS, BESB, and parent advocates.
4. BESB sponsored the CT Technology Conference (June 9–10). Five staff attended with an outreach table.
5. Presented alongside Bureau on Aging and Social Security on wraparound employment services for clients over age 55.
6. A VR counselor completed "Champions for Diversity & Health Equity" training through DMHAS.
7. Provided bilingual outreach and training at the Village to 21+ staff with new Spanish/English materials.
8. Additional presentations: Greater New Haven Transit Riders Forum, MFETV, Southeastern CT Center for the Blind, EO Smith High School.

Transition and Summer Programming

1. Two in-person college readiness trainings for students and parents at CCSU and Norwalk CC.
 2. Financial literacy and self-advocacy series for transition-age students through Sky's the Limit.
 3. Two virtual LEAP mentoring trainings for potential mentors.
 4. End-of-June: weeklong cybersecurity camp at CCSU, including evening activities and dorm residency.
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Appendix B: BEP Program Update – Tyrell Sampson

The BEP program is in full motion, with all seasonal vending locations operational. Managers and field reps are prepared for a productive summer.

Key Updates:

- Refreshing MOUs with sister agencies to sustain long-term vending service agreements.
- Finalizing a 5-year contract extension with Pepsi for long-term snack/beverage vending machine support.
- DAS has proposed a new micro market; the Statewide Committee of Blind Vendors voted in favor—this aligns with program growth and creates new manager opportunities.
- Director is currently in Washington, D.C., to meet with political representatives and stay informed on policy trends.

The program remains consistent in its operations and committed to sustainable business opportunities for current and future managers.

Appendix C: BESB Department Updates – Carol Jenkins

Staffing:

- **VR:** Hired Allison Baranauskas (Counselor), Chris Goudarzy (Tech Teacher), and Samantha Jenkins (Processing Tech). Interviews for bilingual and VR counselor roles in late June.
- **Children’s Services:** Hired Victoria Wallace (O&M), Kassidy Morrin (TVI), and Mike Pompano (Supervisor). One position filled, three more to be posted.
- **Adult Services:** Hired April Mattoon as Supervisor.

Technology:

- Collaboration with BRS and BITS to identify a shared, affordable case management system.

VR Program Coordination:

- Working with SRC workgroups to develop training, update policy manual, and enhance the satisfaction survey.

Outreach Materials:

- New brochures, flyers, and videos to promote VR services. A general BESB flyer was also created for outreach and education events.

Staff Engagement:

- Summer picnic held June 3, 2025, at Keney Park in Windsor for team building and welcoming new staff.
 - Office improvements underway: new chairs, monitors, docking stations, and conference room furniture.
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Appendix D: BESB Budget Report – June 2025

The attached budget file “BESB -Budget -Report-BESB -Board-June -2025” contains the detailed line-item breakdown of BESB’s FY25 financials, including allocations for VR, Older Blind Program, educational aid, and additional staffing needs. The report also outlines a projected increase of \$450,000 in FY26 to support expanded service delivery.

Appendix E: Legislative Report – Jennifer Proto

Full text from the document “2025 ADS Legislative Wrap Up – BESB Advisory” provided.

Includes detailed coverage of:

- FY26–FY27 budget appropriations for BESB programs
- Major bills passed: curbside voting accessibility, interpreter credentialing, ABLE program updates, Alzheimer’s task force
- Transfers: Driver Training Program from ADS to DMV
- Bonding: \$5 million authorization for aging in place
- Education law changes supporting special education and in-district capacity building
- Katie Beckett Medicaid waiver changes
- Failed legislation: TVI staffing methodology, wheelchair repair protections, subminimum wage study, etc.

(For the full legislative report, see the attached document “2025 ADS Legislative Wrap Up – BESB Advisory.docx”)

Would you like this compiled into a single Word document or PDF for distribution?

You said:

give the full legislative report will not attach any of the reports

ChatGPT said:

Certainly. Below is the **full text of the Legislative Report – Appendix E** from the *June 12, 2025 BESB Advisory Board Meeting Minutes*, presented in its entirety as requested:

Appendix E: Legislative Report – Jennifer Proto

2025 ADS Legislative Session Wrap Up

Date: June 12, 2025

BUDGET – PA 25-XX (HB 7287)

An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2027

§ 1 — General Fund Appropriations (FY26 & FY27)

Program	FY26	FY27
Personal Services	\$8,626,272	\$8,626,272
Other Expenses	\$2,042,575	\$2,182,575
Educational Aid for Children – Blind/Visually Impaired	\$5,036,360	\$5,036,360
Employment Opportunities – Blind & Disabled	\$416,974	\$416,974
Vocational Rehabilitation – Disabled	\$7,895,382	\$7,895,382
Supplementary Relief and Services	\$97,251	\$97,251
Special Training for the DeafBlind	\$264,045	\$264,045
Connecticut Radio Information Service	\$70,194	\$70,194
Independent Living Centers	\$1,025,528	\$1,025,528
Programs for Senior Citizens	\$5,036,165	\$5,036,165
Elderly Nutrition	\$5,141,074	\$5,141,074
Communication Advocacy Network	\$200,000	\$200,000
ADS Total (General Fund)	\$35,851,820	\$35,991,820

§ 5 — Insurance Fund Appropriations

| Fall Prevention | \$382,660 (FY26) | \$382,660 (FY27) |

§ 7 — Workers' Compensation Fund Appropriations

Program	FY26	FY27
Personal Services	\$634,783	\$634,783
Other Expenses	\$48,440	\$48,440
Rehabilitation Services	\$595,631	\$595,631
Fringe Benefits	\$467,987	\$467,987
Total	\$1,746,841	\$1,746,841

POLICY LEGISLATION

§§ 319–320 – Curbside Voting for People with Disabilities

Removes the “temporary” limitation for disability-related use. Requires designated curbside voting zones. Prohibits campaigning within 20 feet.
Originated as SB 1514

§ 363 – Driver Training Program Transfer

Transfers the Driver Training Program from ADS-BRS to the DMV (effective July 1, 2025).
Originated as SB 1251

§ 367 – Income Disregards Under TFA

Adds income disregard for stipends received through job training programs (including BRS) under Temporary Family Assistance.
Originated as HB 7104

§ 13(h) – New Bond Authorizations

Approves up to \$5 million in FY26 in state bonds for ADS to fund aging-in-place grants-in-aid.

KEY POLICY BILLS

HB 6932 – Interpreting Standards Board

Creates a board to oversee interpreter education, training, certification, and complaint resolution.

- Board duties include credentialing, waivers, and registration
- Bureau for Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing oversees registration process
- Changes annual reporting deadline from Jan 1 to Sept 1

SB 1358 – Nonprofit Human Services Provider Compensation

Requires annual rate increases for nonprofit contractors, starting July 1, 2027, indexed to the CPI. Prevents rate reductions when CPI falls.

sHB 7107 – Disability Employment & ABLE Program Updates

- Transfers DMV driver training unit for people with disabilities
 - Creates a task force to expand state employment for individuals with disabilities
 - Updates to the Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) program:
 - Aligns eligibility with federal law
 - Allows admin fee payments by treasurer
 - Exempts ABLE accounts from asset tests in all means-tested programs
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LONG-TERM SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

PA 25-16 – Alzheimer’s & Dementia Task Force and Related Provisions

- Criminal background checks required for LTC staff
- Alzheimer’s task force and state plan established
- Biomarker testing must be covered by health insurance
- Nursing home residents qualify for community college tuition waivers
- Enhanced protections and notice for residents facing involuntary transfer
- Supports for alternative placements near family/support systems

PA 25-17 – Non-Discrimination in Long-Term Care Facilities

- Prohibits discrimination based on protected classes
 - Requires printed nondiscrimination policies and cultural competency training
 - Ensures privacy during medical care
 - LTC Ombudsman must track complaints
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MAJOR EDUCATION LEGISLATION IMPACTING BESB

SB 1 – Special Education and School Resources Reform

- Creates Early Childhood Education Endowment
 - Expands requirements for contracts with private special ed providers
 - Launches special education grant programs in FY27
 - Establishes Office of the Educational Ombudsperson
 - Requires statewide database of special education resources
 - Mandates hiring of instructional support partners in every school (2026–27)
 - SDE must study disproportionate identification of minority students in special education
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PA 25-42 – Katie Beckett Medicaid Waiver Reform

- Lowers maximum age from 21 to 18
 - DSS must develop a plan to eliminate the 331-person waitlist
 - Plan due Oct 1, 2026; annual survey of waitlist applicants required
 - Adds home modifications as a service under the waiver
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FAILED LEGISLATION – RELEVANT TO ADS AND BESB

- **HB 7025 – TVI Staffing Methodology Update:** Would've revised caseload calculation to include IEP/504 plans and geography. *Did not advance from committee.*
- **HB 7106 – Wheelchair Repair Protections:** Mandated faster repairs and increased transparency. *Passed House, tabled in Senate.*
- **HB 5607 – Subminimum Wage Task Force:** Would have examined elimination of subminimum wages for people with disabilities. *Passed House, tabled in Senate.*
- **HB 7187 – Employment Assistance Programs Reform:** Required OPM to implement 2024 report recommendations. *Not advanced from Appropriations.*
- **HB 6105 – Independent Bureau for Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing:** Proposed creating a stand-alone bureau. *Did not move past committee.*
- **SB 1158 – Re-establish Department on Aging:** Would re-create the department separate from ADS. *Tabled by Senate.*
- **HB 6865 – General Government Implementation Bill:** Contained changes to workforce boards and other structural elements. *Passed House with amendments, but not taken up in Senate.*