

State Of Connecticut

Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS)

Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB)

State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) to BESB

DRAFT MINUTES

March 19, 2025

Members Present:

Melissa Thompson- Treasurer, Laura Knapp, Enaida Mendoza, Heide Sulewski, Carol Jenkins-BESB Director, Shelley McDermott, Phillip Magalnick- Chairman, William DeMaio- Vice Chairman, Lucretia Jones-Secretary, Contessa Big Crow-Jenkins, Laurianne Florio, Jay Brown, Shannon Gale, Joseph Carbone, Bernadette Jackel, John Carnemolla, Jim McCollum

Others Present:

Ashley Morgan

Members Absent:

Jennifer Jenkins, Brandy Altergott, Deb Reed, Nicole Jezairian, Marilyn Wenzel

Welcome:

Call to order: Chairman Phillip Magalnick called the meeting to order at 10:04 am. A quorum was present.

Public Comment:

None

Unfinished Business:

December and January Special Meeting Minutes

Chairman Phillip Magalnick asked for a motion to be made for the minutes from the quarterly meeting and the Special meeting. Melissa Thompson made a motion to accept both meeting minutes, seconded by Heidi Sulewski. Motion passed unanimously, none opposed and no abstentions.

Treasurer's Report

Melissa Thompson reported that the SRC still has a budget of \$10,000.00 and that we have yet to spend anything at this time.

Work Group Reports

Chairman Phillip Magalnick reported that the membership committee is working on fielding applications for members that would be appropriate to Director Carol Jenkins to send off to the governor for appointment to the council. They are also working on creating an onboarding and training system for new and current members to give a better understanding of the SRC and how it works and the role and duties that the council is responsible for. This led to the introduction of new member Jim McCollum. Jim McCollum has been active in NFB for about ten (10) years, he is currently doing a non-on-the-job training situation for the Center for Disability Rights in West Haven. He is looking forward to serving on the council and getting to know everyone.

Chairman Phillip Magalnick also gave a brief on the satisfaction survey committee. They met with Diana Collins a political science professor at Central Connecticut State University to help navigate the committee through what would be needed to update our satisfaction survey. They worked on a sample questionnaire that could go to all VR clients (present or past closed cases) to engage on whether they had a successful or unsuccessful outcome with their VR experience. The committee is also looking for ways to gauge where services can be of use and improved upon to ensure that everyone is getting what they need to get, keep, and be promoted in a job.

Chairman Phillip Magalnick turned the VR Policy workgroup over to Director Carol Jenkins to discuss. She stated that the VR Policy Manual is the guiding force behind the VR program. This manual

outlines the procedures and processes that VR must follow when it comes to running the program. The committee has made great strides in updating this four (4) chapter long manual. They are currently working on chapter three (3). There is a very specific process and the federal regulations that need to be followed from the WIOA and RSA standpoint. She feels the committee is making very good progress on this update. Chairman Phillip Magalnick stated he is proud to be a part of this committee as he is learning the ins and outs of the VR program and how it operates. Having Enaida Mendoza on the committee also gives the perspective of someone out in the field utilizing this manual he stated. He stated he is looking forward to when the finalized version is presented to the council for feedback.

Synergy Report Follow Up

Chairman Phillip Magalnick gave a brief synopsis of what the Synergy Report was for new members. He stated that they were a third-party company that came in and performed an audit on the BRS and BESB programs to see where the agencies could make improvements, and to ensure the agencies were within the RSA policies and procedures. After the report came out and was discussed at the special meeting in January, Chairman Phillip Magalnick and Vice Chairman William DeMaio reached out to Joe Doney, RSA Liaison for DC. They then had a call with the Commissioner of ADS, and Director Carol Jenkins. Vice Chairman William DeMaio discussed that the DC liaison was happy to hear about the report and that the council was going about the proper process for them to get some issues rectified. He stated that the liaison liked that they were sharing the report with him and were looking to be problem solvers. The liaison was very positive and encouraging for them to discuss this with the Commissioner via a conversation rather than emails or letters as those could be misconstrued/misinterpreted. The liaison thought that Connecticut was doing well, there were no complaints reported or anything like that. Vice Chairman William DeMaio stated that he felt good after that conversation. This then led them to have the call with the Commissioner, she set up a meeting for her, Director Carol Jenkins and the SRC Chairman and Vice Chairman could have a phone call to discuss the issues the report found. They had this call yesterday.

Chairman Phillip Magalnick noted that since the Synergy Report was a consultant, it does not need to be shared with the RSA Liaison for DC unless there were no changes or progress made to correct the issues. We would only need to send them a copy if the SRC wanted RSA to step in to help make those changes if we couldn't attain some changes on our own. Chairman Phillip Magalnick also stated that during the call yesterday, not everything was discussed and that it was alluded to the fact that maybe there were some rehabilitation violations and that the feeling at the RSA was that we were doing better than other states. He also stated that the call was good because he and Vice Chairman William DeMaio did most of the talking while the Commissioner listened and was very generous with her time. They were brutally honest with the things that were observed. The Commissioner stated that she was never interviewed by the consultants, Chairman Phillip Magalnick stated that he would be reaching out to Synergy regarding this. They came away feeling positive about the future outcome and that the Commissioner and her staff are there to support us in what we are doing. Chairman Phillip Magalnick stated that maybe a new workgroup could be created to come up with some ideas to mitigate some of these problems. Vice Chairman William DeMaio mentioned that the ultimate part of the SRC is to support Director Carol Jenkins so she can move forward to make positive marketing and advertising for the BESB program since many people have a negative impression of BESB. He was happy to hear that the finance department was doing better now with working with Director Carol Jenkins with reports in the formats she needs in a better time frame. He also mentioned he likes that the Commissioner has a professional organization that could help with the advertising and marketing for BESB to help get our name out there in a more positive light.

New Business:

Director's Report

Please refer to Appendix A for the full report from Director Carol Jenkins and Appendix B for the full Budget Report.

VR Supervisor's Report

Mary Burgard, VR Supervisor presented the current state of the VR program and open positions. VR has recruited for four (4) open positions. Three (3) VR Counselors, one (1) is Bilingual and a Rehabilitation Technologist. We have a Technologist Starting April 4th, Chris Goudarzy. We also filled one (1) of the VR Counselor positions for Hartford area, she will be starting on April 14th. We were unable to fill the Bilingual position and will be posting again at the end of April.

Transition Activities: We put on a 5-week virtual event for Advocacy for our transition students- eight (8) students participated. Our Transition Counselor and VR Counselor Coordinator are doing two in-person college prep workshops. One will be at Central Connecticut State University on April 4th from 9am to 3pm, and the other will be at Norwalk Community College on April 25th 9am to 3pm.

VR Staff Participated in an all-day Youth Summit put on by Dept of Labor and BRS. We also had a resource table at Veterans Resource Fair and Disability Resource Fair at Mohegan Sun with over thirty (30) Vendors.

Shelley McDermott asked if the special assistant job that will be vacant once the person transfers to the VR role will be replaced, Director Carol Jenkins stated that at this time they will not be replacing that position and will continue with three (3) special assistant positions.

Legislative Updates

Chairman Phillip Magalnick will reach out to Legislative liaison Jennifer Proto for an update. She was unable to make the meeting due to another meeting, but he does not know if there have been any updates at this time since legislation is going on at this time as well.

Bethesda, Maryland Spring Conferences

It was asked is any BESB staff would be attending the SCR National Conference in Bethesda, MD. Director Carol Jenkins stated that Mary Burgard and Jonathan Richmond would be attending, she is unable to attend this year. She also stated that there would be a fiscal component this year, that she supports some staff from the fiscal department to go if they are able to so they can learn more about the

fiscal aspect and such. Vice Chairman William DeMaio asked is a report could be presented in writing prior to the next meeting so that SRC could hear some positive values or networking relationships available. Director Carol Jenkins stated that she doesn't see that being an issue and that Mary Burgard, VR Supervisor, should be able to do that when she returns from it. Chairman Phillip Magalnick stated that this is an eight (8) daylong conference, that the first few days (Monday-Wednesday of the April conference) will have that fiscal component. He stated when they were on the call with the Commissioner's office that she mentioned some fiscal staff would be attending those meetings to get some training. He will be attending but only two (2) days of the NSRC conference. He will also present a report in writing for council members to look over prior to the next quarterly meeting.

SRC Email and Phonenumber

Director Carol Jenkins spoke to the IT team for ADS regarding this email and phonenumber. They can create a distribution list for SRC and any emails that come in can be automatically forwarded to SRC members who have access to it can respond to any emails. This can be set up for just a few members having access or the entire council, it is up to the council what they would like to do. For the phonenumber, they can set up a voice mailbox where consumers can leave messages. This would send an email notification to members that have access that a voice message was left with the message attached in as an audio file. Members can either call into the mailbox or hear the audio file attached to the email. Chairman Phillip Magalnick opened this up for discussion. John Carnemolla mentioned with the email for SRC, the members would still need to respond to these emails with their personal emails as there would not be a way to send anything from this forwarded email. Chairman Phillip Magalnick agreed with this and stated the phone voicemail seemed the best option. Everyone seemed to agree until state issued email addresses could be obtained. This was not an item that was voted on as it was an operational issue not a council issue.

Meetings Through Zoom or Teams

Director Carol Jenkins mentioned that BESB was able to obtain a Zoom account for several service programs within BESB, VR being one of them. Zoom is a more accessible platform for individuals than Microsoft Teams. With Jaws software users it will let the person know the shortcut keys to do certain things where Teams does not, much more user friendly. Several members mentioned that they prefer Zoom over Teams as well due to some issues with sound, computer accessibility, and overall functionality. Zoom was chosen to use for all future meetings, was not voted on as it was an operational issue and not a council issue.

New Business Brought to the Council by Members

This is a new topic that Chairman Phillip Magalnick would like to add to the meetings for any members to discuss business brought to them or noticed by them. At this time no one had anything new to discuss.

Chairman's Report

Chairman Phillip Magalnick did not have much to report he stated. He stated he is very happy with everyone stepping up to volunteer for the workgroup committees and supporting the program in general. He stated that back in September's meeting a few members volunteered to form a workgroup to discuss an SRC retreat. Shelley McDermott stated she was part of that group and would discuss this with him in more detail. He mentioned that there would be a meeting to discuss the state's transportation issues. Several members mentioned they would like more information on this. He stated that he would get that flier out for all SRC members to have so they can attend the meeting is tonight 3-19-2025 at 6pm via Zoom.

Good and Welfare

Chairman Phillip Magalnick asked if anyone had anything they would like to share during this time, related to SRC or not. Vice Chairman William DeMaio mentioned that he was following an organization called Glide (glidence.org). They are coming up with a robotic white cane that will be a big game changer for the blind community. It will have AI, GPS, a light arm, vibration, and a few other features. He

thinks that BESB should get some more information on this new device that could be very helpful for the blind community. Enaida Mendoza mentioned that the Bridgeport American Job Center is having a job fair on the 26th of this month over on Lafayette BLVD in Bridgeport. Chairman Phillip Magalnick asked if VR sends out anything to all VR clients regarding fairs of this nature, Mary Burgard stated that all VR counselors share this information with their clients anytime something is coming up even if it's not in the client's region, so they are informed.

Adjournment

Chairman Phillip Magalnick asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Lucretia Jones made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Laura Knapp. Motion carried unanimously, none opposed, and no abstentions. Meeting was adjourned at 11:30am.

Appendix A

BESB Updates

March 2025

A. Staff Vacancies

- a. In VR, there are two Pre-ETS Counselor positions, one bi-lingual counselor position, one rehabilitation technology teacher, and one processing technician position being worked on for recruitment.
- b. In Children's Services, two TVI positions and one orientation and mobility position are currently being worked on for recruitment.
- c. In Adult Services, the supervisor position has been posted for recruitment.

B. New Case Management System

- a. BRS, BESB, and BITS are still currently working to obtain a new case management system in which both agencies can afford and maintain for the long-term.

C. New Agency Website

- a. The new agency website has been launched. it brings a variety of fantastic new features that you may have already seen on other state agency websites. The site is now organized by service type (Employment, Education, Independent Living, Accessibility, and Advocacy), making it much more user-friendly. The search functionality has been enhanced, allowing users to easily search both across the site and beyond with greater use of tags and keywords. The new website also includes a wealth of resources, including information about programs that intersect with ours and those that we frequently get inquiries about, as they support our consumers. There's also a banner on the site directing consumers to the ADS Information mailbox, which is monitored by the Commissioner's Office for any questions or comments.

D. VR Workgroups

- a. The BESB Director has been working with SRC workgroups on training materials for new SRC members to ensure understanding of federal regulations and responsibilities, updating the VR policy manual, and re-developing the VR satisfaction survey to better address priorities of information needed.

Appendix B

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