**State of California**

**Health and Human Services Agency**

**Department of Rehabilitation (DOR)**

## Blind Advisory Committee (BAC) Meeting

## Thursday, November 10, 2022

9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Hybrid meeting held in DOR Central Office, 721 Capitol Mall, Room 301

Sacramento, CA 95814, with virtual participation available via Zoom.

*Draft Meeting Minutes*

**In attendance**:

BAC members (in-person): Sandy Balani, Chris Fendrick, Sarah Harris, and Julie Parrish.

BAC members (by Zoom): Bryan Bashin, Margaret Buchmann-Garcia, Joe Smith, and Cheryl Thurston.

DOR staff (in person): Joe Xavier, Michael Thomas, Laura Rassmussen, Melissa Harris, Jennifer Wilbon, and Jessica Grove.

DOR staff (by Zoom): Peter Dawson, Jay Harris, Kate Bjerke, Eric Mazariegos, and Casey Cook.

Members of the public (by Zoom): Steve Clark, Laura Wilson, Shane Synder,

Shellena Heber, Margie Donovan, and Anita Aaron.

Members of the public (in-person): Max Duarte and Pete Benavidez

## Item 1: Welcome and Introductions

Chris Fendrick, BAC Chair, welcomed attendees, conducted a roll call, established a quorum and introduced DOR staff and members of the public.

**Item 2: Approval of the BAC Meeting Minutes and Review of Action Items**It was moved/seconded (Harris/Parish) to approve theSeptember 22, 2022 BAC meeting minutes as presented with one correction (member Sarah Harris)**:** An amendment said “California Council of the Blind.” It should be corrected to “California Council for the Blind.”

## Item 3: BAC Committee Members Network Updates

BAC members reported on matters of interest in their networks and communities. Highlights included the following:

* Sandy Balani: provided updates on the BEP program, the availability of a navy base location, and stated that prison visits are now up to three-day visits. Roadside rests are doing good. Discussion of cafeteria’s turning into micro-markets. Seeking to see if GSA (General Services Administration) can speed up their processes. Sandy went to the NFB state convention.
* Bryan Bashin: Bryan spoke about activities of the US Ability One Commission and the Pilot One program. Brian attended the NFB state convention.
* Margaret Buchmann-Garcia: The Center of Vision Enhancement (COVE) returned to providing in-person services in summer 2022 and is considering adding new services. They are struggling with employers hiring so will be looking into creating employment opportunities.
* Chris Fendrick: California Transcribers and Educators for the Blind and Visually Impaired will hold a conference in April 2023. This will be Chris' last meeting as chair as he has served two terms.
* Sarah Harris: the Margaret Buchanan-Garcia agency (COVE) and Resources for Independent Central Valley are hopefully going to collaborate on a vaccine clinic. The California Council for the Blind will hold a hybrid convention March 31 – April 2, 2023 at the Sacramento Arden Hilton.
* Julie Parrish: goal for the year is collaboration. Going to be starting an adult work program. Staff and students went to visit Lighthouse. The Step Program is now called WRAP (Workforce Readiness Academic Preparation). The Wayfinder Family Services and WRAP program are in collaboration with Cal State Los Angeles for efforts to start a work experience program.
* Joe Smith: has been in contact with the Department of Corrections about using JAWS with some of their prison forms to make them more accessible. Joe has been listening to podcasts that are related to services.
* Cheryl Thurston: reported on activities of the National Federation of the Blind of California, which will hold a convention in November 2022. She is serving on the senior division as treasurer. She has been elected again as vice president for the Diabetes Action Network

## Item 4: Fiscal Year 2021/22 Statistics, Performance Data, and Occupation Lists

Laura Rasmussen, District Administrator, DOR Blind Field Services (BFS) District, provided information regarding concentrating efforts on occupations that are not necessarily blindness related/not blind only jobs. Provided statistical summary of performance data and consumer occupations related to job placement. There were 373 successful closures this past year. Intakes are also up. Concentrating efforts on stem occupations that are not necessarily blindness related.

Questions and comments from members of public:

* Steve Clark: commented on short-hour closures and consumers working the number of hours they wanted to work. Consumers only want to work enough hours so their social security payments are not jeopardized. Steve would like to know (per Laura’s report) what is causing the rise in numbers from last year.

## Item 5: California Transcribers and Educators for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CTEBV) – California Transition Forum Discussion

Chris Fendrick, BAC Chair, would like to help k-12 education by putting together a survey. The survey would be sent to DOR counselors and the counselors could involve family members and students, teachers and interested parties, to discuss the best time for The Transition Forum to take place.

## Item 6: Workability

## Sarah Candee, Chief, DOR, Cooperative Programs Section and Peter Dawson Regional Director, DOR Blind Field Services, provided information on Workability Programs. There are 4 types of workability programs, 1, 2, 3, and 4. Workability 1, is not a DOR program, they are grants that are funded by the Department of Education for students with disabilities. Workability 2 programs are funded by DOR for adult schools. Workability 3 programs are at the community college level, are 4 programs are at the university level. Workability 2, 3, and 4’s are considered 3rd party cooperative agreements. They are contracts between the college and DOR, to serve mutual consumers, (students with disabilities who attend the college and are also DOR consumers). The college is required to provide some match funding that helps leverage federal dollars that provide opportunities for staffing and resources to provide vocational services to consumers.

DOR has approx. 230 contracts statewide and of the 230 contracts, 18 are workability programs.

Match component is where the college must provide some match. There were changes to the regulation which made it challenging for colleges and universities to sustain and provide the same amount of match to maintain their budget size and programs have dropped. There are a lot of requirements for invoicing and documentation (per federal regulations) that is monitored from RSA. Programs have also closed due to changes in college administration and because the program is small. Decisions to close programs were made by the colleges, not DOR. Requirement of 3rd party cooperative agreements (which is a specific contractual federal regulation), requires that the entity DOR is partnering with, provide state or local fund match, which allows leverage of federal funds which assists with paying for DOR staff and costs and the program staff on the college side. Hopefully over the next several years, the number of workability programs will expand and increase. Work is being done at the community college/chancellor level to see if there are opportunities to support some of the match for programs so less of the burden would fall on the individual colleges. Yearly conferences are held (DOR attends) and the programs are discussed.

Overall numbers, including BFS, last year, 933 consumers were served through the workability 3 program and 505 consumers were served through the workability 4 programs. Current workability participants/current numbers, 731 in the workability 3 program, and 254 in workability 4 program.

Questions and comments from the BAC members:

* Margaret Buchamann-Garcia: had a question regarding match funding, and the requirements of workability program? What is discouraging colleges from participating in the workability program?
* Sarah Harris: how long can someone stay in the workability program after they finish school?

Questions and comments from members of the public:

* Jessica Grove: Deputy Director of the Vocational Policy and Resources Division, reported that just under 80% is funded by federal money.
* Margie Donovan: would like to know if a student from out of state is going to a college in a state that has the program, are they eligible for the program? Does DOR talk to college administrators about this program?

## Item 7: DOR Clarification to Individual Service Providers (ISP)

Laura Rasmussen, District Administrator, DOR Blind Field Services (BFS) District, and Michael Thomas, Assistant Deputy Director, on behalf of Sue Pelbath, Deputy Director, Specialized Services Division. Regulations from the ISP/CRP vendor packet state what a person needs to do to be an ISP/independent contractor with DOR. Regulations state “insurance as required”. Minimum automobile insurance is required. No other insurance requirements are mentioned. DOR is in the process of putting together a team and work with the legal department to address insurance for ISP’s.

Action item: DOR to report at the next BAC meeting (2023) on the DOR’s insurance requirement for ISP’s and providers.

## Item 8: BFS Success Stories

Taryn Morris. Taryn shared her story. Taryn came to DOR in 2015 after receiving her bachelor’s degree in communications. She is currently an Assistive technology instructor at ATF.

## Item 9: Directorate Report

Joe Xavier, DOR Director, reported on national, state, and departmental topics of interest. Highlights included the following:

Acknowledgements and commemorations

National level updates:

* RSA commissioner, there is no news regarding the appointment process.
* CSABR and NCSAB held at the beginning of the month in Texas; DOR was not able to attend. RSA presentations/continued focus on program performance both on outcomes and fiscal performance

State level updates:

* AB24 signed by Governor Newsom at the end of September. The policy has been modernized to reflect independent living as it is experienced in the OIB (Older Individuals Who are Blind) Program. The bill did not create a new mandate. It continues to use the $150k dollars that was allocated. Now can serve ages 18 through 55 (OIB is 55 and older). The services will be funded through grants to community-based organizations. The provision in the bill enables the department to use OIB providers without going through a competitive process. That will be administered in conjunction with the OIB grant. The bill will become effective January 2023.
* The Passage of AB1195 was signed at the end of September by the governor. It affirms that the state should serve as a model employer for hiring individuals with disabilities. It affirms the requirements of departments and agencies to develop an affirmative action plan to increase the number of individuals with disabilities in the workforce. Departments can target individuals with disabilities to fill vacancies.
* The State Digital Equity Plan is led by the Department of Technology and DOR will play a key role in the development. The plan ensures broadband for everyone, and that all Californian’s have access and availability to broadband. Barriers for example can include individuals who live in rural areas, individual who are aging, and individuals with disabilities.
* Stretch/impact goals. It is DOR’s effort to double student services from serving 30,000 youth a year to 60,000 a year and accomplishing this goal within months not years.

Department updates:

* Department of Education began to monitor webpage accessibility and conducted a review of DOR’s webpages to make sure there was no discrimination against individuals with disabilities with accessing programs and services. There were 3 findings: key board users did not have access to all content. Key board users were unable to visually determine where they were on the webpage, and background lacked sufficient contrast for low vision users.
* Key positions: Peter Frangel was appointed by the governor as the Strategic Initiatives Officer. Gene Cooper is the newest Executive Assistant Deputy for Administrative Services. Currently in the recruitment process for a Chief Information Officer and Chief Deputy Director. More transitions to come.
* Holidays are approaching. This can be a difficult time for some in the community. Be vigilant to individuals that need extra support during this time. Act with care and compassion.

Questions and comments from the BAC members:

* Chris Fendrick: inquired as to what onboarding and training looked like from a management perspective.
* Sarah Harris: suggested training that relates to specific content and to include disability history and discuss the Blindness Movement for example for different consumer groups.

Questions and comment from members of the public:

* Anonymous: would like to know if there any more details that can be shared about website accessibility and any media information going out about OIB, Time to be Bold Program.

## Item 10: DOR Specialized Services Division (SSD) Report

* Michael Thomas Assistant Deputy Director, DOR Specialized Services Division on behalf of the Sue Pelbath. Acknowledgements and commemorations. Holidays are approaching and DOR is working with food shelters/banks and would like to encourage others to volunteer, donate, or contribute for the State food drive.
* Laura Rasmussen, District Administrator, DOR BFS District. SB105 was cancelled in October. Training and implement on-going training for new counselors. BFS is working with a low vision optometrist who will conduct some trainings for all staff. The history of BFS celebration will be 20 years in July 2023. Not changing the BFS name right now but it will be a topic of discussion in the future. SB105 will be July 12-14, 2023, (held at the OCB (Orientation Center for the Blind in Albany, CA). The 12th will be focused on manager training, the 13th will be an all-day training focused to QRP’s, and the 14th will be the celebration of 20 years of SB105. Student Services applications are at a high of 374, the highest received to date. Applications for students with disabilities are down. BFS generates a huge number of complex authorizations.
* Peter Dawson, Regional Director, DOR BFS. OCB plays a big part in getting individuals employed. Focusing on student services and discussion of apprenticeship programs. Statistically, students who get work experience at a young age, are going to be more successful in the long run with both getting a job and keeping a job as an adult.
* Kelly Snow, Manager, DOR Business Enterprise Program (BEP) informed BEP Manager, Carlene Guzman, will be leaving DOR as she has accepted another position at another state agency. The hiring process for that position has been approved and will be circulating to the public next week. A Trainer position will be circulated soon. The 9th Circuit and the arbitration in South Carolina now allow the navy to give DOR priority for San Clemente. Should be awarded in November or December. DOR will start looking at new locations and vending routes and look at micro markets and maybe downscaling cafeteria and snack bars.
* Eric Mazariegos, Acting Administrator, DOR Orientation Center for the Blind (OIB). A few OIB changes, the fall session started September 26th and goes through December 23rd. SB105, will be at the OCB site. Eric is still the Acting Administrator which has been extended to February. Will be interviewing for a food service tech. The first shipment arrived for the sports court and will be installed the first part of December.
* Jay Harris, Manager, Older Individuals who are Blind Program. Current updates are in the BAC report. Currently interviewing for analyst position. RFA still running on time for the beginning of the calendar year, January 1, 2023.

Questions and comments from the BAC members:

* Sandy Balani requested Kelly speak to the group about purchases that are under $1000, implemented by RSA.
* Sarah Harris: in regard to the 374 student services applications received, would like to see a breakdown of ages for successful closures to see what age groups to focus on and where outreach needs to start. Would like to know if staff get specific training.
* Bryan Bashin: would like to know if vending machines are accessible to a blind person. Bryan shared new information about the federal workforce and shared statistics. Between now and next summer, Bryan suggested to get data on how things have improved at DOR in different areas in the past 20 years. Numbers would be helpful to see what DOR has accomplished.
* Chris Fendrick: would like to know if DOR or the Specialized Services Department looked at Vision Services Alliance?
* Joe Smith: inquired if marine bases have taken a step back in recognizing vendor programs? And would like to know if Jay will be involved with the new program that past legislature.
* Margaret Buchmann-Garcia: stated that personal goal money is earmarked for under 55 years of age. Margaret runs a small program and relies on some of the personal goal money to fund equipment for people that are 55 and older and expressed concern if funds are limited.

Questions and comments from members of the public

* Max Duarte: shared his experiences and knowledge as a blind vendor.

## Margie Donovan: commented that DOR needs to go back to the military establishments and assert authority based on the 9th circuit. Wishes to address vendor problems in the interview process for locations and that procedures established by the state are not being followed.

## Item 11: Service Provider Concerns in Los Angeles

Pete Benavidez, President & CEO, Blindness Support Services, Inc. Brenda Martinez, Director of Program Operations and Carmina Gutierrez, Program Manager for the Department of Older Adults. Pete discussed the need for more service providers in the Los Angeles area. There are 10 million residents in LA county, and 3% of the population are persons of low or no vision who could benefit from services. Pete’s purpose is to inform BAC what is happening in Southern California, and the lack of private agencies that specialize in providing services to the low vision community are dwindling.

Questions and Comments from members of the public:

Charles Nabarrete: agrees that more services are needed in the LA area.

## Item 12: Developing Guidelines and Standards Subcommittee

Sarah Harris, BAC Member will connect with Jennifer, Elena, Chris, Julie, and Anita to come up with a date in January to meet to discuss future meeting dates and get them on the calendar.

**Item 13 Business Enterprise Program Competitive Interview Process**

Kelly Snow, Manager, DOR Business Enterprise Program. The question was raised, “What’s the difference between the DOD (Department of Defense) interview process and a regular interview process for federal or state buildings.” What are the differences and why? There are 2 sets of questions/interview processes because the facilities are different.

Questions and comments from members of the public:

Paul Patche: mentioned the issue is during the interview process as the vendors are required to submit a business plan and the committees are not getting the same access to the information.

**Item 14: 2023 BAC Meeting Dates and Identification of Future Agenda Items**

Chris Fendrick, BAC Chair, would like to suggest the 3rd week, Thursday, during the months of February, May, August, and November. Chris will speak with Sue and Joe regarding the proposed dates.

Questions and comments from the BAC members:

Sarah Harris: suggested Bagley-Keene and Brown Act be discussed at the next meeting as a general reminder/refresher for all.

## Adjournment (4:00 p.m.)