**State of California**

**Health and Human Services Agency**

**Department of Rehabilitation (DOR)**

## Blind Advisory Committee (BAC) Meeting

## Thursday, February 9, 2023

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.

**In attendance**:

BAC members (in-person): Chris Fendrick, Joe Smith, Julie Parrish

BAC members (by Zoom): Bryan Bashin, Sandy Balani, Sarah Harris, Cheryl Thurston

DOR staff (in person): Joe Xavier, Victor Duron, Sue Pelbath, Michael Thomas, Laura Rassmussen, Jay Harris, Jennifer Wilbon,

DOR staff (by Zoom): Peter Dawson, Eric Mazariegos, Kelly Snow, Georgeta Tanase, Deyanire Villachica, Carmen Ramirez

Members of the public (in-person): Margie Donovan, Steve Clark, Leslie Givens

## Item 1: Welcome and Introductions

Chris Fendrick, 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
Motion**: Joe Smith moved a motion to approve the meeting minutes from the November 10, 2022, BAC Meeting. The motion was seconded by Bryan Bashin.

**Vote**: Sandy, yes. Bryan, yes. Sarah, yes. Julie, yes. Joe, yes. Cheryl, yes. Chris, yes. The motion passed.

Committee members comments and questions

* Information was shared that DOR did a survey of employment outcomes in 2018 and 2019 and that the survey was not a topic of discussion on the agenda for today. Asked if this topic will be addressed at the May meeting.
* The department was asked to follow up on a question regarding vendor information.

Public Comment:

* Vendor records were to be updated, on-line, by March 2022. It is now almost March 2023, and the vendor update still has not been updated.

## Item 3: BAC Committee Members Network Updates

BAC members reported on matters of interest in their networks and

communities. Highlights included the following:

Committee members comments and questions

* California Council of the Blind is getting ready for their convention. The pre-convention starts March 3rd, and there is an in-person convention in Sacramento, March 31 - April 2.
* ACB will be starting their leadership seminar the first weekend in March and the following weekend, an in-person seminar in Washington.
* CTEBVI is approaching, April 20-23.

Public comment

Information shared about BADIE (Benefits of Audio Description in Education) and explained what the program is about.

**Item 4: BAC Election**

Chris Fendrick has been chair, the last 2-terms and his term is ending. 2 open positions need to be filled, chair and vice chair. Chris opened the discussion up to the committee. Chris nominated Sarah Harris as Chair. No other nominations.

**Motion**: Chris Fendrick nominated Sarah Harris as Chair. The motion was seconded by Bryan Bashin.

**Vote**: Sandy, yes. Bryan, yes. Chris, yes. Sarah, yes. Julie, yes. Joe yes. Cheryl, yes. Motion passed.

**Motion**: Sarah Harris moved a motion to nominate Chris Fendrick as vice-chair. The motion was seconded by Joe Smith. No other nominations from the floor.

**Vote**: Sandy, yes. Bryan, yes. Julie, yes. Joe, yes. Cheryl, yes. Chris, yes. Motion passed.

**Item 5: Initial discussion on the standards and guidelines for service providers regarding assessments and instructional practices.**

Sarah Harris led a discussion about standards and guidelines for service providers regarding assessments and instructional practices. Sarah explained the guidelines, processes, and standards. Discussed what the Taskforce committee will do and will come up with different standard levels.

Committee members comment and questions

* Input was requested on how to make services better for consumers.

DOR comment

* OIB program conducts program and compliance reviews/checks.
* Discussed CRP’s and fee for services. Consumers can rely on their counselors to help determine what is best (for consumers).

Public comment and questions

* Asked for clarification regarding the taskforce subcommittee idea.
* Public members shared their experiences.
* A member of the public discussed RFA for OIB report and suggested the department take a look at the current assessment tools that are currently being used.

**Item 6: RSA Update re: BEP**

Kelly Snow discussed changes around purchases under $1000 implemented by RSA. Kelly explained the acquisition amount was set at $5000, meaning equipment was defined as anything over $5000. If the cost was less than $5000, it was not considered equipment, it was considered a supply.

DOR comment

* Previously, the program had paid for items for vendors that are now costs the vendors must absorbed. It is a huge financial shift. The costs are per unit. Anything under $1000, must be purchased by the vendor.
* The purchase changes went into effect October 1, 2022. This will be an on-going conversation with working and understanding how vendors are affected.

Committee member comments and questions

* Committee members discussed conversations between vendors about downsizing cafeterias to micro markets. Mentioned how hard it is for vendors to stay in business.
* A question was asked if the purchases of supplies by vendors can be used as a business write off.

Public member comments and questions

* Questions were asked about vending machines and card readers. Asked if some of the equipment could be purchased under job retention?

**Item 7: AB 2480 Update**

Sue Pelbath gave a brief overview of AB 2480 which was passed and went into effect January 1st. AB 2480 provides independent living services for adults who are newly blind, 18 and older. Jay Harris discussed the Zero Dollar Grant. Michael Thomas mentioned the main goal is to make sure that those who need the services, can acquire the services.

Committee member comments and questions

* Requested clarification and asked if this particular fund is for clients or non-clients. Questions about how funds can be used? Can the funds be used for OCB?
* Member shared their thoughts about AB 2480.
* A question was raised inquiring if undocumented blind people living in California are able to take advantage of this opportunity.

Public members comments and questions

* Public members discussed and asked questions about the Zero Dollar Grant and shared their thoughts about AB 2480.

**Item 8: BFS rehabilitated closures by age**

Laura Rasmussen District Administrator, DOR Blind Field Services (BFS). Laura reviewed her reports and trends.

Committee member comments and questions

* A question was asked about closures and services received.

Public members comments and questions

* A public member asked about the percentage of job retentions.

**Item 9: Directorate Report**

Joe Xavier, DOR Director and Victor Duron, Chief Deputy Director. Joe introduced and welcomed Victor Duron, Chief Deputy Director.

Federal Level Updates

* Dante Allen was nominated to be RSA Commissioner but it was not confirmed. He was renominated this past month.
* The Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation, National Council of State Agencies for the Blind, The National and State Rehabilitation Councils; there will be a spring forum in April 2023 in DC.

State level updates

* The Governors proposed budget for 2023-2024 has published.
* The Department of Health and Human Services is pursuing a waiver for temporary housing and pursuing a waiver that enables counties to provide temporary housing funding to individuals with significant mental illness.

Department updates by Victor Duron

* The department received a recent grant called the California Sub Minimum Wage to Competitive Integrated Employment Project, otherwise called, CSP. The funds will be used to study targeted interventions for people with the most significant disabilities who are or are in sub-minimum wage or are contemplating a sub minimum wage setting.
* Although there is a budget deficit, the department does not anticipate a direct impact to DOR.
* The department is looking at housing and homelessness, which has an impact on the communities the department serves.

Member comments and questions

* Joe and Victor were asked if they were aware of the concerns brought forth by BEP vendors and asked if there were any remedies or conversations.

Public member comments and questions

* A public member expressed appreciation for the department.

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

Eric Mazariegos, Acting Administrator, DOR Orientation Center for the Blind. The winter session began January 9. The sports court was completed in December. Host site for SB 105.

Sue Pelbath, Deputy Director, DOR Specialized Services. Discussed the grant for Jay’s program.

Kelly Snow Manager, DOR Business Enterprise Program (BEP). Shared information regarding BEP.

Jay Harris, Manager, Older Individuals who are Blind Program. Discussed OIB program and what is going to be the focus of the program over the next 5 years.

Peter Dawson, Regional Director, DOR BFS. Discussed various reports and reviewed statistics. Discussed the upcoming SB 105 conference.

Laura Rasmussen District Administrator, DOR BFS. CRP’s are able to now apply for vendorization for: job exploration counseling, post-secondary counseling, work place readiness training, and instruction and self-advocacy. A student with a disability is defined as age 16-21 in a school program or they can be in a bridge year/gap year going to an independent living center. Applications are up 150%.

Michael Thomas Assistant Deputy Director, DOR Specialized Services. DOR has priority over the housing buildings. Even with converting state building into housing, DOR still has priority because it’s still owned by the state.

Committee member comments and questions

* Questions were asked about the 12-week sessions for students.
* Asked if it is required the director know braille?

Public comments and questions

* Question: What is OCB doing about students physical appearance (attire, dress code, etc).
* A public member noted in the BFS reports, there is no mention of time spent on activity dues and wanted to know if it will that be included in future reports.
* Asked about the department’s response to the issues of misbehavior and allegations of sexual misconduct.

**Item 11: Hearts for Sight Foundation**

Joseph Burton, Director, shared information about the Hearts for Sight Mental Health Program in Southern California. They are licensed to provide services in California, including telehealth services.

Member comments and questions

* Members asked the department to share this resource.

Public comments and questions

* American Council of the Blind put together a mental health and wellness committee. This committee is not providing clinical services but provides information and referrals.

## Item 12: Developing Guidelines and Standards Subcommittee

Will later discuss dates and times for the Taskforce Subcommittee and AB 2480 Meeting.

**Item 13: 2023 BAC Meeting dates and identification of future agenda items**

Future BAC meeting dates were announced.

**Follow up items for next agenda**

Chris Fendrick led discussion regarding follow up items.

* Wanted to know where the committee was at with getting in nominations and filling positions.
* Would like to see residential program data by next meeting.
* Discussed the vendor listing update and asked if last year’s deadline will be extended to this year.

**Adjournment (3:49 p.m.)**