**State of California**

**Health and Human Services Agency**

**Department of Rehabilitation (DOR)**

## Blind Advisory Committee (BAC) Meeting

## Thursday, May 9, 2024

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. Public locations listed on agenda.

**Meeting Minutes**

**In attendance**:

BAC members (in-person): Sarah Harris, Guillermo Robles, Sandy Balani

BAC members (by Zoom): Joe Smith, Margaret Buchmann-Garcia, Julie Parrish, Chris Fendrick

DOR staff (in-person): Sue Pelbath, Laura Rassmussen, Jay Harris, Shannon Coleman, Jennifer Wilbon

DOR staff (by Zoom): Peter Dawson, Eric Mazariegos, Kelly Snow, Casey Cook, Joe Stansil

Members of the public (in-person): Max Duarte, Leslie Gibbons, Silvana Rainey, Steve Clark

Members of the public (by Zoom): Shellena Heber, Stella Woodall, Eduardo Juarez

## Item 1: Welcome and Introductions

The Chair, welcomed attendees, conducted a roll call, introduced BAC committee members, and established a quorum.

**Item 2: Introductions of DOR staff and public**

The Chair introduced department staff and members of the public.

## Item 3: Approval of the BAC Meeting Minutes and Review of Action ItemsThe chair established that there was not a quorum and no items needing actions could be discussed during the meeting.

**Item 4: BAC Committee Members Network Updates**

BAC members reported on matters of interest in their networks and

communities. Some highlights included the following:

Committee members comments and questions

* BEP program updates
* Various members discussed what was going on in their programs, past conferences attended, and/or important events that took place and will be taking place this year
* Discussed summer program at COVE and employment services
* CRP updates

**Item 5: Office of Civil Rights Report**

Shannon Coleman with Office of Civil Rights provided BAC members information on sexual harassment claims and reviewed calls, complaints, and closures. Shannon provided the complaint phone number and informed members where the phone number is advertised. Shannon clarified that non- jurisdictional means it is not EEO related. Shannon shared that complaints come from different districts and there were no complaints from BFS. Shannon discussed the number of complaints on average per year and stated it is a mix of both consumers and employees. None were CRP related.

Committee members comments and questions

* Asked what “non jurisdictional” refers to
* Where do complaints come from

Department comments and questions

* Discussed how complaints are handled at OCB
* Mentioned adult work experience individuals receive sexual harassment training

Public comments and questions

* Would like to know where the phone number is advertised
* Asked if the number of complaints received were considered to be low
* Questions were asked regarding policy and asked if CRP’s were involved
* Would like to know what type of complaints the department receives

**Item 6: Deaf and Hard of Hearing advisory board member, Michelle Bronson**

Michelle presented to BAC members about what is going on in the deaf and hard of hearing community. Michelle discussed challenges and the request for Deaf Field Services. Michelle mentioned the need for resources and discussed resistance that is seen when it comes to hiring individuals in the deaf and hard of hearing community.

Committee members comments and questions

* Discussed partnerships

Department comments and questions

* The department is giving attention and training to this area

**Item 7: Untangling OIB and Specialized Services Division**

Jay Harris, OIB Manager, provided an overview of the Older Individuals who are Blind program. Specialized Services Division is comprised of several sections including OCB, OIB, BFS, BEP, DHHAS. Jay discussed independent living centers and the OIB program. OIB is for a restricted portion of the population (55 and older can participate in the OIB program). Jay discussed funding sources. Individuals cannot come to the program with an employment goal.

Department comments and questions

* Discussed problems and obstacles heard from consumers

Committee members comments and questions

* Asked if this program deals with other disabilities or if all individuals for the program are blind
* Would like to know how an individual gets referred to the program
* Can individuals come to the program with an employment goal

Public members comments and questions

* Questions were asked regarding funds and how funds are allocated

**Item 8: BFS Success Stories**

Maricarmen Carreno was invited to share her story and experiences. She is currently a teacher for the visually impaired.

**Item 9: Directorate Report**

Joe Xavier, DOR Director

Federal level updates

* Discussed the Workforce Innovation, and Opportunity Act (WIOA)
* No changes to Title IV
* Discussed services to youth and businesses
* How can individuals advance in employment
* Governor’s May revise to be released
* Social Security Administration updates
* RSA and VR grant updates

State level updates

* Discussed the state budget for 2024-2025
* Budget, there is a 38-billion-dollar shortfall
* Reached a 17.3 billion dollar solution for the gap that exists
* Freeze on announcements/awards that are over $1 million, pending the May revise
* Governor’s May revise will be out 05/10/24
* System reforms on the way

Department level updates

* The Disability Innovation Fund grant was made available last month, it is $230 million dollars, up to 10 million dollars per award, spread over 5 years, opened up to public and non-public entities
* Continued access to reallotment dollars
* Discussed name change for DOR, expect to see it in the trailer bill language in the near future, changing the name requires legislative action, if adopted (July timeframe) will be moving forward with rebranding
* DOR budget, $576 million
* Discussed Voice Options Program
* DOR continues to seek candidates that represent the community DOR serves

Committee members comments and questions

* Questions about upscaling and employment and asked for examples
* Questions about the name change for the department
* Questions about membership organizations and disability innovation

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

* Discussed what was going on in the BEP program including: vacancies and filled positions, award announcements, Marine Corp. interviews, RSA, and equipment purchases
* OCB starting to see more BEP candidates, discussed staff hires, program updates
* SB105 updates
* Discussed BFS applications, costs, wages, staffing updates, employment information
* Provided OIB program updates

Committee members comments and questions

* Questions about equipment purchases for the BEP program
* Questions about OCB evaluations and training

Public members comments and questions

* Questions were asked about the BFS report
* Questions were asked about BEP training

**Item 11: Self-Employment Options other than BEP**

Yukiko Long, BFS Staff Services Manager, provided information regarding self-employment support. Some highlights from the presentation included: defining self-employment, what DOR can and cannot provide, discussion of assessing the self-employment setting and the scope of services, and Individualized Development Plan.

Department comment and questions

* Discussed what type of businesses people are opening
* Encourage people to take business classes

Committee members comments and questions

* Questions were asked about home businesses and worker’s compensation

Public members comments and questions

* Asked what type of businesses are people interested in pursuing

**Item 12: Identify future agenda items**

* Would like legislative updates at the next meeting
* Would like TPP (Transition Partnership Program) presentation at August meeting
* Would like to hear a self-employment success story
* Would like to discuss consumer responsibility and accountability

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