**State of California**

**Health and Human Services Agency**

**Department of Rehabilitation (DOR)**

## Blind Advisory Committee (BAC) Meeting

## Thursday, August 8, 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, Sandy Balani, Julie Parrish, Joe Smith

BAC members (by Zoom): Cheryl Thurston, Chris Fendrick, Guillermo Robles,

DOR staff (in-person): Peter Dawson, Laura Rassmussen, Jay Harris, Jennifer Wilbon

DOR staff (by Zoom): Eric Mazariegos, Kelly Snow, Michael Thomas, Dayanire Villachica, Jessica Hatcher, Ana Cristina Mendonsa, Laura Clark

Members of the public (in-person): Silvana Rainey, Steve Clark

Members of the public (by Zoom): Shellena Heber, Stella Woodall, Margie Donovan

## 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.

Public comment and questions

* There are concerns regarding the rise in appointment cancellations across various sectors and due to cancellations, businesses incur significant costs and disruptions
* Would like the BAC to consider (as a recommendation to the Department of Rehabilitation), to allow vendors to invoice for travel time for lost service hours
* Request BAC members place this topic on the next agenda for further discussion

## Item 3: Approval of the BAC Meeting Minutes and Review of Action Items The 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/conventions attended, and/or important events that took place and will be taking place this year
* Openings at Hatland
* Upcoming CCB board meeting
* Member announcement: a member will be finishing this term as education representative

Public members comments and questions

* Valley Center for the Blind recently had a grand opening; this is their third facility
* Provided updates on a new department at Sterling Adaptives

**Item 5: Consumer Handbook**

Peter Frangel and Megan Davis from DOR’s Policy and Program section went over the Student and Consumer Handbook, a guide to preemployment and employment services.

Committee members comments and questions

* Does a minor need parental involvement during the planning process
* Is the parent still involved after parental consent is given
* Is there an ASL version of the handbook
* Suggested ASL, captioning, and voice-over all be done in the same video
* Would like to know when the handbook was last reviewed
* Asked about current large print standards

Department comments and questions

* DOR can contact individuals under 18 but cannot provide services until there is parental consent and then parental involvement would be the parent’s decision
* There is an ASL version
* The handbook is often looked at and revised when there are changes
* Discussed publication standards, standard is 14 font
* Consumers get the handbook when they sign up for services
* Counselors are encouraged to go over the handbook with consumers
* Looking at ways to make sure customer service is effective
* The preferred choice of communication is the way consumers receive the handbook

Public comments and questions

* Many consumers do not know about their rights and responsibilities, what can be done to have the information more accessible
* The handbook does not mention that it can help individuals advance in their job
* The department needs to make sure clients understand their rights and responsibilities and have access to the handbook

**Item 7: Legislative Updates**

Kim Rutledge, Deputy Director, Legislation and Communication, DOR. Kim provided an update on current and upcoming legislation that may affect the way the department conducts business and provides services. Kim reviewed bills that affect the blind community, including: AB 2950, AB 2648, AB 2636, AB 1906, AB 438, AB 3193

Department comments and questions

* Discussed problems and obstacles heard from consumers
* Proposed bills ultimately go to the governor’s office

Committee members comments and questions

* Questions asked regarding the different bills
* When does the department do an analysis of a public bill and what is the process
* Questions were asked regarding funds and how funds are allocated

Public members comments and questions

* Asked for clarification regarding certain bills

**Item 8: BFS Success Stories**

Eric Gustafson was introduced by his counselor, Moses Babafemo. Eric earned his Ph.D. from UC Santa Barbara. Eric signed up with DOR in 2007 and explained how the department helped him to succeed. Eric is currently a senior software engineer at Google. He has been with Google since 2020.

Committee members comments and questions

* Asked Eric what he does at Google
* Asked if Eric worked remotely or in-person
* Asked how long Eric has worked for Google

Department comments and questions

* Would like to know if Google employs many individuals with vision impairments
* Would like Eric to explain how DOR has helped him
* Asked Eric what he looks at when it comes to assistive technology

**Item 9: Directorate Report**

Joe Xavier, DOR Director

Federal level updates

* Discussed the Workforce Innovation, and Opportunity Act (WIOA)
* Discussed federal reallotment dollars
* Increased funding brought to California

State level updates

* Governor published a video message about youth leadership
* Governor shared video that he has a disability
* Focusing on how resources are being used
* Reductions to be expected
* Department vacancies and unfilled positions discussed
* Announced retirements and appointments, nearing the two-year mark of administration

Department level updates

* DOR continues to seek candidates that represent the community DOR serves
* Submitted the vocational rehabilitation workforce state plan
* Corrective action plan with RSA completed in May and is now closed
* Discussed Disability Innovation Fund Grant
* Discussed disaster and incident response
* Discussed positions for the executive and leadership teams, vacancies, and what’s been filled
* Talked about general funds, salaries
* Talked about apprenticeship model
* Explained how funding works

Committee members comments and questions

* Questions were asked about job funding
* Questions about reallotment dollars
* Questions about department vacancies and filling counselor positions

Public comments and questions

* How many employees work at DOR
* Talked about department vacancies

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

Department comments and questions

* Discussed OIB program and OIB funding
* Discussed vacancies in the OIB program
* Awarded $8 million for the coming OIB year
* Do not yet have the quarter reports for OIB
* Discussed what was going on in the OCB program including making tentative offers for new positions
* Upcoming in-person, self-defense class and kayaking trip at OCB
* BFS updates include introducing new team manager
* BFS discussed how many consumers are served in the program
* 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
* SB105 updates, will be in September
* Discussed BFS applications, staffing updates/introduced new team manager, shared the number of individuals served (5,290)

Committee members comments and questions

* Questions about staffing for the various programs and asked how to get qualified staff
* CRP vacancies
* How are funds going to be spent to benefit consumers/what strategies are being used
* Shared funding concerns position concerns
* If a program has difficulty spending money, reach out to the department

Public members comments and questions

* Discussed program spending
* Questions regarding funding for nonprofit organizations

**Item 11: Student Services and California School for the Blind TPP Program**

Laura Clark SVRC/QRP, DOR, Blind Field Services Division. The BAC learned about the successful partnership between DOR and the California School for the Blind and how they work together to prepare young adults for their future.

Department comment and questions

* Discussed opportunities and resources for students
* Discussed Workforce Investment Opportunities Act
* Shared student stories
* Students are taught what they will need in the workplace
* Guide students towards a career goal
* Students receive career and college planning

Committee members comments and questions

* Shared experience attending the school

**Item 12: Identify future agenda items**

* Would like to discuss policies and regulations
* Would like to see a report of what type of jobs consumers are getting and where they are placed at
* Would like to have a discussion regarding the need for braille and the shortage of braille instructors
* Would like to have a discussion regarding why nonprofits are failing/struggling
* Would like the BAC to consider as a recommendation to the Department of Rehabilitation, to allow vendors to invoice for travel time for lost service hours

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