**State of California**

**Health and Human Services Agency**

**Department of Rehabilitation (DOR)**

## Blind Advisory Committee (BAC) Meeting

## Thursday, November 09, 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. Public locations listed on agenda.

**In attendance**:

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

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

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

DOR staff (by Zoom): Eric Mazariegos, Luis Rodriguez, Jessica Hatcher, Sky Ntxwj, Deyanire Villachica

Members of the public (in-person): Jimmy Fremgen

Members of the public (by Zoom): Leslie, Gibbons, Steve Clark, Margie Donovan, Gena Harper, Mitch Pomerantz, Cory Hanosh, Pete Benevidez, Aaron Espinoza, Shellena Heber, Stella Woodall, Stacy Cervenka

## 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 Items

## Motion: Guillermo Robles moved a motion to approve the BAC meeting minutes from the August 10, 2023, BAC meeting. The motion was seconded by Sandy Balani.

**Vote**: Sandy, yes. Julie, yes. Sarah, yes. Guillermo, yes. Bryan, yes.

Chris, yes. Cheryl, yes. The motion passed.

**Item 4: 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

* Bryan Bashin will be retiring from the BAC Committee.
* Sarah Harris appointed to a committee that will be working on improving transportation for individuals with disabilities.
* Discussed the November 2023, BEP annual training conference.
* Discussed upcoming changes regarding Social Security.
* Various members discussed what was going on in their programs, past conferences attended, and/or important events that took place.

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

The BAC received a report on sexual harassment claims reported to OCR as well as outcomes.

Department comments and questions

* Shannon Coleman with OCR could not attend today’s meeting but will attend the February meeting.
* There have been no substantiated claims.
* Training continues within the department.
* Sexual harassment training occurred at the November 2023 BEP education conference for vendors.
* Training will be included with the onboarding of new vendors.
* State agencies were contacted, and their policies were looked at.
* Data will be presented at the next BAC meeting.

Committee members comments and questions

* The department has a new training officer.

Public members comments and questions

* Pleased to hear there were no allegations.
* Would like to know if any policies have been updated or amended.

**Item 6: update on Service Standards Task force**

Committee members comments and questions

* The last Task Force Meeting took place in September.
* Resources were shared such as the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Perkins Paths to Literacy and Technology.
* Would like to know what instruments counselors are using and what recommendations are being given to students.
* Ensure employers can provide accessibility but make sure the consumer is ready for the job skills.
* Discussed performance standards.
* Consumers need ongoing/continued support as they move into their job.
* Would like to see a network of data collection.

Department comments and questions

* OCB has 10 credentialed teachers.
* Assessments give counselors an idea of what a person needs.
* Discussed training and participation.

Public members comments and questions

* Discussed web-based jobs and the importance of having this type of skill.

**Item 7: Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRP) Certification Process**

Janelle Tisher, Resources Specialist, DOR Community Resources Development Section provided an overview of the CPR certification process.

Committee member comments and questions

* Questions were asked regarding the OIB certification process.
* Is there any requirement that blind people be on the Board of Directors or in senior management?

**Item 8: Disability Access Services**

Monica Handley, Section Chief DAS, provided the BAC with a presentation about Disability Access Services. DOR’s goal is to increase employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

No committee or public comment.

**Item 9: BFS Success Stories**

Brianneth Rocha was invited to share her story and experiences. Brianneth discussed her diagnosis, how she was referred to the department, and talked about the help she received from DOR.

**Item 10: Directorate Report**

Joe Xavier, DOR Director

Federal Level Updates

* No additional news on the RSA Commissioner appointment.
* California approaches were recognized.
* The assistant secretary of the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation services emphasized the importance of the DOR program and how the work of DOR impacts individuals with disabilities and their families.
* 11 out of 78 VR agencies have an order of selection. 29 agencies received corrective action plans.
* RSA’s continued desire is to partner with the state and help find ways to move forward.

State level updates

* In the past there were 7 states that did not spend any of their grant money in the first year, now there are 4 states that were not able to spend any of their grant money in the first year.
* Monitoring and technical assistance guide published by RSA California is not being monitored but may be monitored in 2025. It is important to look at how RSA is monitoring the program.
* Discussed the federal budget and the ending of funding.
* Discussed sustained engagement guidance.
* Began putting the California budget together in January; anticipating a budget deficit. The budget will be published in January 2024.
* Performance indicators are trending upward across the country.
* West Virginia has a 72 percent employment rate.
* Progress is being made with the money that has been allocated toward VR.
* At the end of August, the Governor issued an executive order to establish a master plan on career pathways and education.

Department updates

* There are no employment outcomes without jobs and hires; a team has been formed to address this.
* An article was published in the Sacramento Bee discussing holding departments accountable in hiring individuals with disabilities.
* Discussed the department’s mission.
* Discussed hybrid workplace.
* There is no requirement to have blind individuals in leadership roles for CRP certification.
* Explained when proposals are submitted as a state licensing agency.
* DOR does not have a list of legislative priorities.

Committee members comments and questions

* Regarding CRP certifications, are there any requirements stating that individuals in leadership or the Board of Directors have blind individuals in it? Should there be a certain number of blind people in leadership roles?

Public members comments and questions

## Asked why the department did not support vendors with the Camp Pendelton and Marine Corps situation and asked why did it go to ALJ?

* How can we learn more about legislative priorities?

## Item 11: DOR Specialized Services Division (SSD) Report

* Shared and recognized customer service awards.
* Discussed positions and new hires.
* Discussed BFS report. Continuing student outreach, looking at getting parents involved.
* January BFS management meeting.
* Randolph Sheppard clerk position is a vocational title/a consumer who works with a vendor.
* Discussed resources and agencies who can help with employment.
* Updates given about the BEP program.
* Talked about student related activities.
* Talked about AB 2480 legislation.

Committee members comments and questions

* Is OIB part of the IL network?
* Discussion of OIB reports.
* Would like to request more information about vendors and locations, would like more information to be included in future reports.
* Will vending machines become accessible to blind customers?
* What is the Randolph Sheppard position?

**Item 12: Outcomes of Success**

Laura Rasmussen discussed the IL program and how it affects employment.

Committee member comments and questions

* Discussion of the report took place.
* Discussed the Wayfinder and Hatland programs, student experiences, discussed encouraging students to live in more affordable areas.

Public members comments and questions

* Shared the importance of receiving feedback and knowing what is and what is not working for individuals.

**Item 13: Identify future Agenda items**

* Revisit OCR.
* BEP training.
* Have someone from the deaf advisory board speak at the next BAC meeting.
* Would like to receive an overview of the January manager training.
* Would like to further discuss Blind centers having someone in upper management that is blind.
* Discuss out of state residential centers and training.

Sandy Balani moved a motion to adjourn the meeting at 3:46 p.m. The motion was seconded by Guillermo Robles.

**Vote:** Sandy, yes. Julie, yes. Sarah, yes. Guillermo, yes. Margaret, yes. Joe, yes. Cheryl, yes. The motion passed.

**Adjournment (3:46 p.m.)**