**State of California**

**Health and Human Services Agency**

**Department of Rehabilitation (DOR)**

## Blind Advisory Committee (BAC) Meeting

## Thursday, November 14, 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, Joe Smith, Guillermo Robles

BAC members (by Zoom): Cheryl Thurston, Chris Fendrick, Margaret Buchmann-Garcia, Sandy Balani

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

DOR staff (by Zoom): Eric Mazariegos, Kelly Snow, Dayanire Villachica, Carmen Ramirez, Laurie Russi, Emily Alexander, Anita Aaron

Members of the public (in-person): Silvana Rainey, Steve Clark, Leslie Gibbons, John Taylor, Andrea Schulze

Members of the public (by Zoom): 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.

## 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

* Two members announced that their term was up, and this would be their last meeting
* Shared BEP program updates
* Various members discussed what was going on in their programs
* CCB will be planning their main convention. It will be a virtual convention 5/1/25 – 5/4/25
* Offered Cove in Merced as a public meeting space

**Item 5: Braille in the 21st century**

Open discussion about the use of braille in the 21st century.

Committee members comments and questions

* Members shared thoughts, concerns, opinions, and experiences regarding braille
* Shared that braille is an important literacy building skill
* Would like to know if technology has proven to make braille obsolete
* Discussed devices that have note taking capabilities

Department comments and questions

* If a student is blind, by law, the student must be offered braille
* Can learn braille at Hadley and The Lighthouse
* Participated in open discussion about braille

Public comments and questions

* Explained how some braille systems work
* Discussed braille notetaking devices
* Discussed employment statistics
* Discussed braille and technology
* Would like to know where individuals can learn how to use braille
* Shared experience being a braille reader
* Uptick in braille assessments and braille authorizations

**Item 6: SB 105 Conference Recap**

Recap of September’s SB 105 conference. All BFS staff attended conference. Reviewed/discussed SB 105 and reviewed training requirements.

**Item 7: Cancellation Policy**

Public comments and questions

* Shared concerns regarding the rise in appointment cancellations across various sectors and the costs and disruptions that businesses incur as a result
* 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
* Gave examples of how to charge for services, even if the consumer isn’t present
* Programs reviewed their cancellation process and gave examples
* Discussed outreach provided to consumers to remind them of their appointments

Department comments and questions

* The department will not pay for services that consumers have not received
* Acknowledged that cancellations are a problem and accountability is important
* A contract chief has not yet been hired
* Asked if consumer “no shows” were being tracked

Committee members comments and questions

* Discussed cancellation process at their program

**Item 8: BFS Success Stories**

Gabriel Noriega was introduced by his counselor, Georgeta Tanase. Gabriel has received services with the department since March 2021. He is currently employed as a workforce develop coordinator. Gabriel shared his experiences and employment struggles.

Department comments and questions

* Asked Gabriel if he planned on staying in his current position or if he was going to look for upward mobility
* Asked Gabriel what technology he was using

**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
* Talked about leadership transitions and the changes in federal administration
* Shared changes at the agency level
* California leading across the country
* 18 states to be monitored by RSA
* Discussed technology and artificial intelligence and the impact on competitive integrated employment
* No disability innovation funds

State level updates

* Changes with federal administration will come up in January
* Discussed state budget drill and how state departments are looking at how to eliminate vacant positions, will know more with the governor’s budget in January
* New tribal consultation training will be required for department directors and state council
* The department participated in the legislative listening session

Department level updates

* Announced retirements
* AB 3193 updates: bill signed by Governor in September; will exempt the department from having to follow procurement rules
* Discussed SB 1249 continuation of partnerships
* 2025 starts the next two-year legislative cycle
* Provided update on the department’s new name and rebranding
* Discussion of artificial intelligence and training
* DOR continues to seek candidates that represent the community
* Discussed what impacts the money the OIB program receives
* Discussion took place about the order of selection and what it means for California
* Order of selection means that the department is required to periodically evaluate their resources

Committee members comments and questions

* Questions about funding brought into the OIB program
* Would like to know the meaning for “order of selection”

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

Department comments and questions

* Staff updates for BFS, including introducing new team manager
* New AGPA in the OIB program
* Close to 4,000 served in OIB program
* Discussed OIB grants and funding
* BEP updates include: discussion of equipment expenditures, BEP education conference in December, Blast Convention, purchases under $1,000
* Each program discussed staffing updates and what was going on in their program
* About 1/3 to 1/2 of BFS counselors are blind or have low vision
* Self-defense class and kayaking trip at OCB

Committee members comments and questions

* Questions about staffing for the various programs and asked how to get qualified staff
* Would like to know how many BFS counselors are blind or low vision

Public members comments and questions

* Would like to encourage the department to hire and recruit people with visual impairments

**Item 11: BFS Successful Outcomes Report**

The BAC received a report on successful outcomes of consumers in both residential and day program settings.

Department comments and questions

* Discussed barriers to employment for blind/low vision
* Discussed wage report, statewide averages
* Shared where individuals are being placed
* Discussed staff training

Committee members comments and questions

* Feels that employer attitudes have not changed much

**Item 12: Identify future agenda items**

* Continue the braille discussion
* Continue policy cancellation discussion
* Discuss BAC member expectations and responsibilities
* Discuss performance targets, how we measure performance with our new younger OIB program

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