**State of California**

**Health and Human Services Agency**

**Department of Rehabilitation (DOR)**

## Blind Advisory Committee (BAC) Meeting

## Thursday, February 13, 2025

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): Cheryl Thurston, Margaret Buchmann-Garcia

DOR staff (in-person): Sue Pelbath, Jay Harris, Maria Turrubiartes, Dayanire Villachica, Jennifer Wilbon

DOR staff (by Zoom): Eric Mazariegos, Kelly Snow, Carmen Ramirez, Anna Christina Mendonsa Garaventa, Joe Stansil, Craig Rubenstein

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

Members of the public (by Zoom): Stella Woodall, Andrea Schulze, Chris Fendrick, Callie Frye, Edward Crespin, Aaron Espinoza, Rebecca Deerr

## 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 The chair and committee members approved the minutes from past meetings.

## Motion: Guillermo Robles moved a motion to approve the BAC meeting minutes from February 2024, May 2024, August 2024, and November 2024. The motion was seconded by Margaret Buchmann-Garcia.

## Vote: Margaret, yes. Guillermo, yes. Sarah, yes. Sandy, yes. The motion passed.

**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

* Merced County has a disability hiring fair 03/11/25 at the Merced fairgrounds, COVE will be participating in the fair
* COVE is getting ready for their June high school summer program
* 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

Department comments and questions

* Asked if there were reports/data of consumers getting jobs after attending the Merced hiring event

**Item 5: Elections**

Election discussion for vice-chair position.

Sandy Balani nominated Guillermo Robles for the vice-chair position for the BAC committee. There were no other nominations. Guillermo accepted.

**Motion:** Margaret Buchmann-Garcia moved a motion to elect Guillermo Robles for the vice-chair position for the BAC committee. The motion was seconded by Sandy Balani.

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

**Item 6: Braille in the 21st Century**

BAC members continued the discussion from the November 2024 meeting about the use of Braille in the 21st Century.

Committee members comments and questions

* Members shared thoughts, concerns, opinions, and experiences regarding braille
* Braille teacher starts in March at OCB
* Would like to know if braille is required at OCB
* Shared a consumer success story
* Braille is required as part of the OCB program, but the program is a person-centered approach, so if braille does not work for an individual, they will pivot to something else
* What happens if individuals refuse to use braille
* Shared that braille is an important literacy building skill
* Electronic devices are useful as long as they operable
* Would like to know how counselors make braille appealing to consumers
* COVE is going to be a part of a study at UC Merced (for an app for smart phones, how to use braille)
* Discussion regarding jumbo braille took place
* Do students need to sign any documents stating they refuse to learn braille

Department comments and questions

* Participated in open discussion about braille and jumbo braille
* Discussed braille from a counselor and manager perspective
* The department can authorize service if a consumer is interested in braille or provide resources, but consumers do not typically request braille services
* Shared experience using braille
* When the department conducts intakes, they try to motivate consumers to use braille

Public comments and questions

* Explained how some braille systems work
* Discussed jumbo braille
* Participated in braille discussion
* Offered opinion about braille, feels there is a deemphasis using braille in schools since students use phones
* Shared ideas of how to market braille
* Suggested counselors focus on 4 core trainings of technology: orientation, mobility, braille, and independent living, during the initial interview

**Item 7: BFS Open position updates**

Department comments and questions

* Reviewed available job positions within Blind Field Services.

**Item 8: Cancellation Policy**

The BAC and the public continued the previous discussion from the November 2024 meeting regarding the need for cancellation policies to protect service providers.

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 to know how to make clients accountable when they cancel
* Discussion took place about direct services before clients are seen
* 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 is not present
* Discussed outreach provided to consumers to remind them of their appointments
* Can clients be indirectly served and vendors still be compensated

Department comments and questions

* Cancellations are a problem and accountability is important
* Counselors need to remind consumers about their appointments
* Discussed interpreter contracts

Committee members comments and questions

* Suggested coming up with a home service fee such as a flat rate when a consumer cancels their appointment
* Cancellations are a continuous rising problem; need to figure out the completion side of it then figure out ideas
* There needs to be disciplinary action when a consumer cancels

**Motion**: Guillermo Robles moved a motion to have the department’s policy, administrative, and contract departments review the current policy for Community Rehabilitation Programs, Vendors, and other Service Providers to be compensated for costs that occur due to consumer cancelations. The motion was seconded by Sandy Balani.

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

**Item 9: BFS Success Stories**

Ray Metz was introduced by his counselor, Mark Gould. Ray shared his experiences and struggles.

**Item 10: Directorate Report**

Kim Rutledge, DOR Director

Federal level updates

* Department of education updates
* CSAVR updates
* Provided updates for federal funding freezes
* State departments remain in a strong fiscal position
* Monitoring actions related to DEIA
* No concerns that will affect Department of Rehabilitation Programs
* Monitoring immigration status, department programs do not have any kind of eligibility requirements

State level updates

* Ongoing disaster response updates
* Department of Rehabilitation did not lose any offices because of the Los Angeles fires
* Individuals with disabilities were disproportionately impacted by the fires
* State budget released January 10, 2025, before the fires, but with the fires, natural disasters will negatively impact the state budget moving forward
* Governor will release May revise of the state budget
* The department will participate in budget hearings
* Last summer all state departments were asked to permanently eliminate a number of vacant positions, DOR eliminated 60 vacant positions throughout the department

Department level updates

* Sharing executive responsibilities with chief director
* Discussed vacant positions at the department

Public comments and questions

* Asked for thoughts on moving the Rehabilitation Service Administration from Education to Labor
* Questions about order of selection, costs, and funding

Committee members comments and questions

* Would like to know if there will there be a town hall to give the community direction

Department comments and questions

* Questions regarding the OIB program

## Item 11: DOR Specialized Services Division (SSD) Report, some highlights include

Department comments and questions

* BFS updates: reviewed BFS reports, highlights, and statistics, staff updates
* OIB updates: welcomes feedback on OIB report, visited Wayfinder for program review
* BEP update: filled an OT position, discussed vacant positions and interviews, discussed federal workers returning to work and how that may affect vendors in the BEP program
* OCB updates: hired a braille teacher, almost fully staffed, gave building updates, OCB works with the self-defense group, Full Power, and Full Power is being recognized for their work in the community

Committee members comments and questions

* Reports are very detailed
* Does OCB provide a consumer satisfaction survey
* Question regarding federal employees returning to work

Public members comments and questions

* Question for BFS regarding closures

**Item 12: Artificial Intelligence, (AI): Opening Doors and Expanding Opportunity.**

Open discussion about how AI is opening doors and opportunities for the blind and low vision community.

Committee members comments and questions

* Discussion took place about meta-glasses
* Shared how meta-glasses have helped with employment and how AI is used to help access information
* Demonstrated how to use meta-glasses

Department comments and questions

* Discussed person centered services for consumers, if meta-glasses are an appropriate device for consumers and justifiable, the department can purchase
* Participated in AI and meta glasses discussion

Public members comments and questions

* One device is not a solution for everything
* Would like to know if the department supports purchasing meta-glasses for consumers

**Item 13: Identify future agenda items**

* UC Merced/phone application with braille
* Cancellation policy, update from department
* Sterling Adaptives to give update on the latest technology
* Creating awareness to the community about low vision

**Motion:** Guillermo Robles moved a motion to adjourn the meeting early. The motion was seconded by Sandy Balani.

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

**Adjournment (3:51 p.m.)**