

DRAFT

BUREAU OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES AND
BUREAU OF BLINDNESS AND VISUAL SERVICES
CITIZEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING
Tuesday, September 15, 2020

Abbreviations used in these minutes:

ACB: American Council of the Blind

BBVS: Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services

BVRS: Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation Services

CAC: Citizens Advisory Committee

D.A.: District Administrator

FFY: Federal Fiscal Year

ILOB: Independent Living Older Blind Program

NDEAM: National Disability Employment Awareness Month

O&M: Orientation & Mobility

PCB: Pennsylvania Council of the Blind

SILC: Statewide Independent Living Council

SS-A: Specialized Services-Adults

SS-C: Specialized Services-Children Program

SSP: Support Services Provider

VR: Vocational Rehabilitation

VRC: Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor

VRT: Vision Rehabilitation Therapist

The following individuals were present:

Frank Abror, consumer, retired BBVS employee

Chris Ament, Vision Corps

Jessica Hanula, Supervisor, BBVS

John Horst, Assistant Chair, CAC, retired BBVS employee

Patrick Kane, Supervisor, BVRS

Cathy Long, CAC Secretary, retired BBVS employee

Bobbi Simmons, former consumer, and

Rodger Simmons, Chair, CAC

Bobbi Simmons made a motion to approve the June, 2020 minutes of this CAC as distributed. John Horst seconded. No discussion. Note: when Cathy e-mails these minutes to Jessica Hanula and Patrick Kane, they are in draft and the Commonwealth employees may make changes as they see fit before BVRS and BBVS send them out to their mailing lists. After minutes of a previous meeting are approved, those minutes are made final by the Commonwealth and eventually put on a website for anyone to review.

BVRS Report: Pat Kane. The new State fiscal year began on July 1, 2020. The goal this year is 223 successful closures. At the time of this meeting, BVRS is at 28, a good start to their goal. Considering COVID-19 and Commonwealth employees working remotely, this progress is commendable! At the time of this meeting it is anticipated that Commonwealth employees will work remotely until the end of 2020.

BVRS has a new Director: Stephanie Perry. She was the Acting Director and a few weeks ago assumed this responsibility as Director. Stephanie initially began work in a District Office as an Early Reach Coordinator prior to other promotions.

BVRS lost one counselor, who relocated to Hawaii. Those cases are being worked on as overtime. No new employees.

BVRS has taken many customers off the Order of Selection waiting list and those individuals are being served now. The Federal Fiscal Year ends September 30, 2020. Counselors and staff are making sure all paperwork for FFY is completed and approved before September 30, 2020.

NDEAM occurs in October. Some people in Western Pennsylvania have pulled together remotely a virtual job fair. This is a statewide event and will occur October 19, 2020. Flyer will be shared when ready. An online organization, Labor Connect, is running the event.

BBVS Report: Jessica Hanula. VRC goals for BBVS are 43 and 4 closures. Caseload has 269 customers for VR. The ILOB Program has one Social Worker. Social work Supervisor work in referrals, the intakes and the Social Worker is doing plans. The case load has 111, with 7 closures year to date. SS-C program has a caseload of 231. There are no goals for closures in the SS-C Program. As they reach age 14, they are referred to the VR Program and closed out of SS-C. SS-C does not close until the VR case is ready to serve the customer. I believe the SS-C case remains open if the child is over the age of 14 if he/she must be on the Order of Selection list. This provides continuity of services for the family. SS-A Program has a goal of 32 and year to date 8 closures. O&M goal of 73 closures. Year to date no closures because O&M's cannot visit customers to provide direct instruction. Just like O&M, VRT is doing partial assessments and when they can visit, will instruct customers and start working on closure goals. VRT goal is 50 closures. Total number in the program is 51 or 61. Not clear on my recording.

BBVS also has a new Director: Rod Alcidonis. He came on board in June, 2020. He's an attorney, very knowledgeable about disability issues, had litigated for people with disabilities for at least ten years, is an advocate, and is someone who is blind. He served on the Advisory Committee for the Blind since 2013 and recently chaired that Committee until he was appointed as BBVS Director. He served on the Governor's Advisory Committee. On another note, Stan Swaintec retired and Anne Strollo, formerly D.A. of Altoona D.O. has taken his position. Her title is Acting Field Manager.

John Horst asked how many are on the BBVS Order of Selection waiting list. Jessica does not know. Note: when people are put on the Order of Selection waiting list, they have already been determined eligible for services. As soon as their names are chosen to be served, their services can begin. The date of service is determined by when the customer signed their Rights and Responsibilities form. There is another way to receive services quickly. It is known as job retention cases. It is a waiver from the Order of Selection list, which means if someone believes his disability may prevent him from keeping the job where he is currently working, and services will help the individual to keep that job, confirmed by the employer that the individual is in jeopardy of losing the job, that individual goes to the head of the line for services and is not put on the Order of Selection waiting list. This new exception for the Order of Selection list began on July 1, 2020. This exception allows for only one service from VR which will enable that individual to maintain that job. BVRs has two cases in that category but BBVS has none. Most likely BBVS customers in this situation would require more than just that one easy service to fix things up for the employee in jeopardy, so to speak, and that probably is why BBVS has zero customers presently in this category. This service exception is commendable, as studies throughout time have proven that people with disabilities who work are more loyal to the employer and generally maintain longevity.

John Horst asked about vacancies. BBVS has one VRC vacancy. Currently they have three working VRC's. All territory is being covered and it is anticipated that the fourth VRC position will not be filled. There is one Social Worker. Certainly could use more than one but not allowed to hire. Fully staffed with O&M and VRT's. New VRT was hired in February but has not gone out into the field yet because of COVID-19. There are two RT's. A VRC serving Lancaster County was hired in February.

Other business. John Horst asked Cathy Long and Bobbi Simmons, members of the PCB Conference Program Planning Team, to discuss the up-coming virtual PCB Conference and Convention, to be held Wednesday, October 21 through Sunday, October, 25, 2020. This team is meeting biweekly with members of ACB Radio. The conference will be streamed on ACB Radio Live Event, it is a Zoom meeting, and there is a phone number people can call in to get on Zoom or also can call in to just listen to the radio stream. Amazon devices can also be enabled to listen to any ACB Radio stream. The streams are Cafe, community, live event, mainstream east, mainstream west, Special event, and treasure trove. So for those five days PCB has programming solely on ACB Live Event. There will be virtual exhibitors when PCB is not in session, and there will be some described tours, and three audio described movies. All this concludes with a virtual auction on Sunday afternoon, October 25th. You can listen without registering, but without registering you would not receive Zoom meeting information so could not ask questions or actively participate as it is occurring. Registration is \$20 this year. Mr. Alcidonis will be presenting on one evening. PCB will have its business meeting and plans to vote for four board positions. There will be entertainment and participation after the evening general sessions. With regard to the movies, even though on Zoom, we are not allowed to broadcast video, but they will have the audio feed. Cathy said the Federation is going to have a convention as well, and it will be on Zoom but also people can attend in person if they choose. It is happening in Pittsburgh. Not sure when, but by the time of the next CAC meeting, it will have already occurred.

John spoke about the Deaf-blind Services. At the time of our meeting, the program was to end on September 30, 2020 due to the lack of funding. John expressed the need for this program and Senator Casey is interested in helping people with deafness. Deaf-blind would be related on a federal level. Daniel Miller, Pittsburgh is helping. What can this CAC do? It is hoped that eventually deaf-blind services can be a line budget item. The Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) cannot fund this program anymore because in the town hall meetings conducted in various parts of the Commonwealth to ask what people wanted the SILC to work on, and put as priority in their next SILC five-year plan, that service was never mentioned. CAC should contact appropriate legislators. Cathy volunteered to draft a letter and send it to Rodger for approval. John Horst and Frank Abror will receive this. We are wondering how the SILC advertised these town hall meetings. Did deaf-blind people even get invited to such a town hall opportunity, or did the SSP's get a notice of this event to notify customers? Frank says the SSP's did get letters warning that the program may end by the end of this month.

Checking on the availability of Rod Alcidonis for the December, 2020 CAC meeting and Pat will check to see if the BVRS Director, Stephanie Perry, can come to be with us at our March 19, 2021 meeting. Next meeting we should discuss if we want to continue CAC meetings on the third Tuesday of March, June, September, and December, 2021.

Frank is concerned about our membership. He fondly recalls the massive amount of people we had when David DeNotaris, BVRS Director, and Joe Strechay, the BBVS Director, addressed us in 2016. Since

that time we have seriously declined in the number of people willing to come to these CAC meetings. Pat and Jessica have aggressively sent out masse e-mails to customers.

When we meet in December, 2020, the first thing to address at the meeting will be the keypad way to mute oneself on Skype. Please be courteous enough to mute if you are having a background conversation with someone else not related to this meeting. Pat will disseminate the Skype pin number for December's meeting prior to the up-coming meeting.

District Administrators not attending CAC meetings. Somewhere the bylaws require it.

John commended Jeff Iseman from SILC for his presentation last month, his knowledge of various programs, organizations, and individuals. We asked that Jeff update this CAC at least once per year. He will be invited to do so.

We had a brief discussion about how serving customers remotely negatively impacts what the VRC and other direct service staff knows about them. Example: interaction with families and in particular parents of customer receiving services. Counselors have heard from parents of customers who are preparing for employment that "my child is blind. They cannot possibly hold down a job." Fortunately, many individuals who are blind can and do refute that fact. Sadly, most adults with blind children do not know any adults who are blind and successfully living and working as any other adult would.

Bobbi Simmons and John Horst moved and seconded to adjourn the meeting.

Next meeting will be on Tuesday, December 15, 2020. Following meetings will be on Tuesday, March 16, 2021, Tuesday, June 15, 2021, Tuesday, September 21, 2021, and Tuesday, December 21, 2021.

Respectfully Submitted,

Cathy Long, Secretary