
Report to the Governor of Arizona

TO: The Honorable Governor Douglas A. Ducey

FROM: Daniel Martinez, Chair
Governor's Council on Blindness and Visual
Impairment (GCBVI)

SUBJECT: GCBVI – STATE FISCAL YEAR - 2016 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The Governor's Council on Blindness and Visual Impairment (GCBVI) continues to make progress towards improving the lives of visually impaired, blind, and deaf-blind Arizonans. This progress is advanced and supported by our strong working partnership with the Department of Economic Security (DES) Division of Employment and Rehabilitation Services (DERS) Arizona Rehabilitation Services Administration (ARSA).

Council Purpose

The GCBVI was created in 1986 by Executive order No. 86-15 and revised in 1992 by Executive order No. 92-15 to ensure that the specialized needs of blind and visually impaired Arizonans are addressed effectively. The following summarizes the council's accomplishments for the period of July 1, 2015-June 30, 2016.

GCBVI Community Participation

GCBVI members and staff participated in the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) Statewide Conference. GCBVI member Donald Porterfield received the Client Recognition award at this conference.

The Arizona State Independent Living Council (SILC) requested that a GCBVI representative serve on their State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL) Committee. GCBVI member Nikki Jeffords agreed to serve on this committee.

Three GCBVI representatives served on the Arizona School for the Deaf and Blind (ASDB) superintendent candidates review committee. They were Amy Porterfield, Ed Gervasoni, and Mary Hartle-Smith.

The Phoenix Mayor's Commission on Disability Issues (MCDI) asked for and received GCBVI assistance in distributing their brochure "Service Animal in Public Accommodations". GCBVI member organizations circulated hundreds of brochures.

The GCBVI participated at the Arizona Technology Access Program (AzTAP) conference in Scottsdale on July 13 and 14, 2015. Members Ted Chittenden and Maureen Kane represented the council at this event.

GCBVI members continued to be active participants on RSA Strategic Planning Committees. These committees are responsible for developing a plan for improving the overall quality of the services RSA provides.

The GCBVI participated in the NFB-sponsored and Tempe-sponsored White Cane Day celebrations on October 15, 2015 and the Veterans Hospital White Cane Day celebration on October 28, 2015. Ted Chittenden represented the council at the Tempe celebration, while both Mr. Chittenden and Nikki Jeffords represented the council at the Veterans Hospital White Cane Day celebration.

The Vision Rehabilitation and Assistive Technology Expo (VRATE) was co-sponsored by the GCBVI. Additionally, the GCBVI presented three break-out presentations at the event on December 12, 2015.

GCBVI members attended the launch of Arizona@Work, a DES initiative, rebranding the statewide workforce development network on February 17, 2016. The network helps employers recruit, develop and retain the best employees for their needs and provides services and resources that help job seekers pursue employment opportunities.

Significant Events

The Arizona Attorney General's Office (AG) new interpretation of Business Enterprise Program (BEP) law disallowed the State Licensing Agency, RSA, from receiving fees from unassigned locations, a Business Enterprise Merchandising Operation to which no BEP operator is assigned. Management of such a location (usually through contracts) is the responsibility of BEP staff. The BEP would now only receive the operator's set-aside rather than the private vendor's profits. This could affect 2017 most as there were no carry-forward funds.

“Set Aside” means the income received from licensed operators through monthly assessments and income accruing from unassigned locations which are set aside to pay for: (1) maintenance and replacement of equipment; (2) purchase of new equipment; (3) management services; (4) guaranteed fair minimum of return; and (5) operator benefits.

The Business Enterprise Program (BEP) contract for Mohave County was renewed for five years. The Mohave County Board of Supervisors was initially critical of the BEP and considered alternatives for their food vending needs. DES Director, Tim Jeffries, and BEP management with the support of the Council interacted with the Board and resolved their concerns.

The City of Phoenix approved a new contract with BEP that included a coffee kiosk in the main entry of City Hall. The coffee kiosk was previously operated by Starbucks.

While there was no resolution to the question of whether it was appropriate for contractors to provide donations or “match” to RSA, RSA announced new comprehensive services contracts would be issued.

SB1411, transitioning Arizona Industries for the Blind (AIB) from a state entity to a private nonprofit, was passed in the second session of the Fifty-Second Legislature and signed by the governor. Additionally, on the Governor's recommendation, and with council support, the legislature allocated an additional \$2 million for RSA in the department's annual budget for 2017.

In May of 2016, it was announced that Annette Reichman had been hired as the new superintendent for the Arizona School for the Deaf and Blind. After receiving a bachelor's degree in psychology from Gallaudet University (an American university for the deaf and hard-of-hearing) and subsequently a master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling with the Deaf from the University of Arizona, Ms. Reichman dedicated her career to helping individuals who are deaf, blind or deaf-blind.

GCBVI Actions

GCBVI adopted a position supporting BEP and enforcement of ARS 23-504, the Mini Randolph-Shepherd Act. That statement reads as follows:

Support statement for the BEP:

The Governor's Council on Blindness and Visual Impairment (GCBVI) fervently supports Arizona's Business Enterprise Program (BEP). BEP is authorized by ARS 23-504, otherwise known as the mini Randolph-Shepherd Act. It gives priority to qualified blind and visually impaired vendors as does the Randolph-Shepherd Act at the federal level. This law gives blind and visually impaired people precedence to operate cafeteria and vending businesses inside of state and municipal facilities. It has provided countless blind and visually impaired persons who have the know-how and drive to be entrepreneurial the opportunity to utilize their skills.

It is the Governor's Council on Blindness and Visual Impairment's position that ARS 23-504 is an appropriate implementation of social policy to properly address the employment inequities experienced by people who are blind or visually impaired. Approximately seventy percent of blind and visually impaired people are not employed. The historical exclusion of people who are blind from the workforce will continue unabated without statutes like the mini Randolph-Shepherd Act. For this reason, the GCBVI strongly opposes any efforts to weaken or remove the blind vendor priority in ARS-23-504.

In partnership with the Secretary of State's office, the GCBVI Public Information Committee began development of a web-based blindness, low vision and combined vision and hearing loss searchable information and referral database. This database, which is expected to be completed during the calendar year of 2016, will represent the achievement of one of the GCBVI's long term strategic planning goals that was set forth in 2011.

The GCBVI Employment Committee sponsored the first E75 Diversity Builder awards event on January 29, 2016, at the Foundation for Blind Children (FBC). E75 helped to

create greater employment options for people who are blind and visually impaired by developing employer relationships and creating networking opportunities for job seekers who are blind.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) Full funding of the Independent Living (IL) programs for persons blind and visually impaired under fifty-four years of age not seeking employment should be restored. Whether or not these individuals are seeking employment, they need to be taught the skills necessary to function as a blind person in a sighted world.
- 2) Funding needs to be identified and made available to reopen both Categories 2 and 3 of the state's vocational rehabilitation order of selection list. As of this writing, it has been 5 (five) years since individuals who fall into either of these categories have been served by the Arizona Vocational Rehabilitation program and services need to be restored.
- 3) Efforts must be made to insure that blind, visually impaired, and deaf-blind children receive the same education as their sighted peers.