

**Governor's Council on Blindness and Visual Impairment (GCBVI)**  
**Full Council Meeting Minutes**  
February 18, 2022

**Members Present**

Bob Kresmer  
Ted Chittenden  
Bea Shapiro  
Brian Dulude  
Mike Gordon  
John McCann  
Andrew Cohen  
Jonathan Pringle  
Amy Porterfield  
Donald Porterfield  
Nathan Pullen  
Janet Fisher  
Annette Reichman

**Members Absent**

Allan Curry  
David Steinmetz  
Steve Tepper

**Staff Present**

Lindsey Powers

**Guests Present**

Kristen Mackey  
Sue Kay Kneifel  
Eve Sanchez  
Mike Feeney  
Erin Pawlus  
Lisa Yencarelli  
Frank Vance  
Jennifer Key  
Jennifer Breaman

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## **Call to Order and Introductions**

Bob Kresmer, Chair, called the meeting to order at 12:36 p.m. Introductions were made, a quorum was present, and the procedural meeting rules were explained.

## **Approval of November 12, 2021 Meeting Minutes**

Ted Chittenden moved to approve the minutes of the November 12, 2021 GCBVI Full Council meeting as written. John McCann seconded the motion. The meeting minutes were approved by majority voice vote.

## **GCBVI Chairperson's Report**

Bob Kresmer stated the Executive Committee had drafted a letter to be shared with the Senior Policy Advisor to the Governor, Christina Corieri, regarding SB 1487, which would request an additional \$500,000 for the Older Individuals Who Are Blind (OIB) program. Mr. Kresmer stated he was sharing information regarding Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA)'s Summer Youth Transition Program with parents and noted that many families wanted to participate in the program. Bob Kresmer stated he was also trying to recruit individuals to participate on the GCBVI, although no one had applied for membership yet.

## **Council Membership Discussion**

This item was tabled.

## **RSA Administrator's Report**

Kristen Mackey stated there was no timeline for staff to return to the office, although staff could meet individuals in the community or the office if necessary. Mrs. Mackey noted the State was not pursuing any mask or vaccine mandates, although staff and clients were asked to wear masks when in the office and would be provided PPE if needed. Kristen Mackey stated the Department of Economic Security (DES) continued to reduce office space although staff members could go to the office to send or receive mail, use the printer, or to meet with clients in an interview room. Kristen Mackey stated all state employees had transitioned to Google mail and calendar and would be transitioning to Google docs and spreadsheets. She noted that Google did have some accessibility issues, and there may need to be some exceptions when communicating with individuals outside of the state.

Kristen Mackey stated there were no negative impacts regarding the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) budget, and RSA anticipated receiving the full grant, or a slightly increased budget. Kristen Mackey stated that RSA was struggling to spend all the VR/OIB funds due to a decrease in VR clients and that \$177,00 million in VR funds had been returned nationally. She noted that RSA had pursued a waiver for a no cost extension, although RSA had not received that waiver. Kristen Mackey stated the Department of Education had been successful in offering competitive grant awards, although the grant award application requirements were quite arduous. Kristen Mackey stated RSA was in the second year of the four-year Workforce and Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) State Plan, which would update the current VR numbers, but would not include any significant changes. Kristen Mackey stated the Enterprise Program (BEP) and OIB programs were still trying to fill staff positions and had requested salary increases for some positions. Kristen Mackey noted that some RSA staff members had received 5% raises, although RSA did not have a lot of input regarding that process. Ms. Mackey stated that counselors did receive salary increases, although the supervisors did not, and RSA would continue to request salary increases for supervisors also.

Kristen Mackey stated RSA was starting to see an increase in VR referrals, although that number had decreased with the recent increase in COVID numbers. Ms. Mackey stated that Individualized Plans for Employment (IPE)s were being written consistently, and the number of job placements had exceeded the placements from the previous year. Bob Kresmer inquired whether staff would be allowed to participate in some of the in-person conferences that were coming up. Kristen Mackey stated that state employees were permitted to attend state conventions in person, although two state employees would be permitted to attend out of state activities per conference. Mike Gordon the Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) was able to offer supplemental rate increases to vendors to accommodate the decrease in referrals and inquired whether RSA could consider that also. Kristen Mackey stated at the beginning of the pandemic, the VR Department of Education prohibited additional funds in that manner similar to DDD.

### **SBVID Program Manager Report**

Brian Dulude stated SBVID held three virtual sessions for the Youth Summer Transition Program with the Foundation for Blind Children (FBC), the Colorado Center for the Blind and Blind Inc. Brian Dulude stated that if any council member knew of a student or family interested in the Youth Summer Transition Program, to contact him, and he would share more information.

Brian Dulude provided the SBVID report for the end of December 2021:

The total number of individuals in VR was 802  
The total number of veterans in the VR program were 24  
The total number of applicants for the VR Program was 33  
The average number of days from application to eligibility was 50  
The eligibility compliance was 79%  
The number of new plans written was 255  
The average hourly wage for successful employment outcomes was \$23.03  
The number of clients placed in employment was 30  
The number of clients closed successfully in employment was 27

Brian Dulude provided the report for DeafBlind services for the end of December 2021:

The total number of individuals in VR and was 47  
The total number of applicants for the VR Program was 5  
The average number of days from application to eligibility was 25  
The eligibility compliance was 100%  
The number of new plans written was 15  
The average number of days from eligibility to IPE implementation was 208  
The IPE implementation compliance within 90 days was 60%  
The number of clients placed in employment was 3  
The number of clients closed successfully was 0

Bob Kresmer inquired whether the DeafBlind statistics included the youth in the Transition program. Brian Dulude stated that he did not have the statistics according to age. Sue Kay Kneifel stated she did not have that information either, although she could request and share that with the council. Ted Chittenden inquired whether the statistics could be shared with the council prior to the meeting to allow council members to review the information. Amy Porterfield inquired regarding the number of closures for the year. Brian Dulude stated the goal was to place over 100 blind or visually impaired individuals in employment. Sue Kay Kneifel stated that SBVID aimed for 10-12 closures per counselor statewide. Bob Kresmer inquired regarding the number of closures per quarter. Kristen Mackey stated that RSA developed the scorecard, which had a weighted goal closure, that considered that each office would have a different number of counselors. Sue Kay Kneifel stated there were 14 Rehabilitation Counselors for the Blind (RCB)s, with 12 placements, or 168 placements per year, which would be 42 per quarter. Amy Porterfield inquired regarding the geographical breakdown of those placements. Sue Kay Kneifel stated for the last quarter in 2021, there were 0 placements in Northern Arizona, 6 in Southern Arizona and 12 in Phoenix for October. In November, there were 2 in Northern Arizona, 2 Southern Arizona and 3 in Phoenix. In December,

there was 1 in Northern Arizona, 1 in Southern Arizona and 6 in Phoenix. For January, there was 1 in Northern Arizona, 7 in Southern Arizona and 13 in Phoenix. Amy Porterfield stated the Orientation to Blindness Workshops were well attended in Phoenix and inquired whether they could be offered in Southern Arizona also. Brian Dulude stated the workshops were offered virtually, and most individuals that attended were from Maricopa, although all counselors were aware of those workshops. Sue Kay Kneifel confirmed that all new clients were invited to attend the workshops. Bob Kresmer inquired whether the workshops could be mandatory for all new clients. Brian Dulude stated the workshops were not mandatory, although counselors did provide all the information so that clients could make an informed choice regarding their services.

Eve Sanchez stated that in the last quarter for the OIB program, 57 individuals had been assigned instruction, compared to 37 the previous quarter, and 90% had been referred to in house instructors. Ms. Sanchez stated there were 239 individuals on the wait list currently. Eve Sanchez stated the OIB had experienced bottlenecks due to a reduction in staff and challenges related to the pandemic. Eve Sanchez stated that OIB was able to offer low vision evaluations virtually, which had been successful. Eve Sanchez stated that she had posted several rehabilitation instructor positions, and a rehabilitation technician, which she hoped to fill soon. Eve Sanchez stated OIB was able to offer some group trainings with 10-15 students, and the program continued to make progress on reducing the wait list. Bob Kresmer inquired whether OIB would be hiring an Orientation and Mobility (O&M) instructor. Eve Sanchez stated that she planned to fill the rehabilitation instructor positions and then the Assistive Technology (AT) instructor position, while utilizing the O&M instructors through vendors such as SAAVI Services for the Blind in the meantime.

## **BEP Program Update**

Nathan Pullen stated the RSA 15 report was not finalized and was in the process of being updated. Nathan Pullen stated the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) was down to about 21 operators, although some facilities were open for bid. Mr. Pullen stated the BEP Trainer position had been posted and would be filled soon. Nathan Pullen stated the Swift cafeteria and Yavapai, and Lake Havasu vending routes would be open for bid. Nathan Pullen stated that he anticipated holding BEP training in May, and there were several candidates for that training. Nathan Pullen stated the Starbucks in the State Capital would tentatively reopen in March, in which the cafeteria in the DES building would likely reopen after that. Nathan Pullen stated BEP was also considering changing the scope of some of the cafeterias to a grab-and-go option for sites with smaller building occupancies. Nathan Pullen

stated the rest area food trucks were back, although BEP had not received further information regarding that. Nathan Pullen stated BEP continued with the Marana Military Base contract, which had been cancelled. He noted that BEP requested additional information and a protest to the cancellation of the contract. Nathan Pullen stated BEP was waiting on the BEP Rules revision, which had been submitted in 2017, and was working through the Legislation.

Mike Feeney stated that BEP put a cap on the set-aside fund, so when that cap was reached, the funds would be distributed to BEP vendors. Mike Feeney stated the set-aside funds helped a lot of operators during the pandemic, as well as the Federal disperse of funds. Nathan Pullen stated that RSA was also able to locate discretionary funds, which helped to free up some of the set-aside funds. Bob Kresmer stated that Arizona was a leading example of how the set-aside funds benefitted the BEP operators.

### **ASDB Report**

Lisa Yencarelli stated the enrollment had increased by 35 students, in which 3 were in the Birth-3 years old program and 7 were in the itinerant program. Lisa Yencarelli stated that in November, the Pima County Health Department closed the campus in Tucson due to an outbreak in the Transportation Department. Ms. Yencarelli stated students did not miss any instructional time, as the time would be added to the school calendar. Lisa Yencarelli stated ASDB continued to require that students and staff wear masks, social distance, and refrain from any field trips. Bob Kresmer inquired regarding remote learning for students located on the reservations. Lisa Yencarelli stated ASDB provided remote learning for 1-2 school districts and continued to provide remote learning for those districts. Ms. Yencarelli stated ASDB did have a bus driver shortage and would be holding a Job Fair. Ted Chittenden stated his understanding that a potential cut to the Education budget would not affect ASDB but inquired whether that would affect outreach for the schools. Lisa Yencarelli stated that ASDB would not have a reduction in staff, although it could affect partnering districts, in which some provided transportation for ASDB students. Lisa Yencarelli stated there would be a Job Fair on February 21<sup>st</sup> from 9:00-2:00 at the PDSO campus, and on February 24<sup>th</sup> from 9:00-2:00 at the Tucson campus. Bob Kresmer inquired how ASDB was recruiting staff and filling open positions. Lisa Yencarelli stated ASDB was in the process of reviewing and offering contracts, although the campuses did always need teachers.

### **GCBVI Committee Reports**

#### ***Legislative and Public Policy Committee***

Amy Porterfield stated the committee would meet to discuss the drafted letter that would recommend SB 1487, and whether the council would be permitted to advocate for that bill. Amy Porterfield stated the committee was also following the bill regarding accessible voting, and how the language could create barriers to blind and visually impaired individuals. Amy Porterfield stated the language from the bill was distributed to all council members and inquired regarding the next steps. Bob Kresmer stated that the alternate bill language could be submitted to all council members and the Executive Committee could determine the next steps.

### ***AT Committee***

Bea Shapiro stated the AT Committee was able to provide a comprehensive with Dr. Carlos Grandela and Karla Rivas-Parker through the Arizona Technology Access Program (AzTAP) on February 3<sup>rd</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, which were well attended. Ms. Shapiro stated the committee would offer the same training on February 28<sup>th</sup> on how to read eye reports. Bea Shapiro stated that she had distributed the flyer regarding the presentations, and that individuals would be eligible for CRC credits. Brian Dulude stated that he had distributed the presentation information and had encouraged staff to attend, while still having appropriate coverage. Sue Kay Kneifel stated that several supervisors had strongly encouraged new staff members to attend the presentations. Bea Shapiro stated the presentations would include information about new technology and would be beneficial for all staff attending. Bea Shapiro stated the committee's podcast, *AT in the Desert*, would be aired on Sun Sounds on February 26<sup>th</sup> and March 26<sup>th</sup> and the committee would begin working on the next podcasts.

### ***Independent Living Committee***

Ted Chittenden stated the IL Committee had not been able to meet recently, and he would reschedule the meeting for a date when all committee members could attend. Bob Kresmer stated that he would be interested in attending that meeting also.

### **Ex-Oficio Member and Blindness Community Organization Updates**

#### ***Arizona Talking Book Library***

Janet Fisher stated the Braille e-reader pilot project had ended, and the individuals that participated in the pilot project were able to keep the e-readers. Ms. Fisher stated the library would need to identify the number of Braille readers and library patrons that would need the new e-readers. Bob Kresmer inquired whether the library would distribute surveys to obtain the

number of individuals that would need the e-readers. Janet Fisher stated the National Library Service (NLS) had requested a quick turnaround for the number of individuals, although the library may have more time to send in that information. Ted Chittenden suggested the library send out the surveys through email for younger individuals, large print and Braille to reach the largest number of individuals. Janet Fisher stated there was a supply chain issue currently, which created a paper shortage, and the library would not be able to distribute the large print library catalogue. She noted that NLS had audio versions on cartridge, html, PDF, and BARD mobile abilities, although she hoped the Talking Book Topics could begin being distributed again soon. Janet Fisher stated that Newsline did have the Talking Book Topics also for anyone interested in listening. Janet Fisher stated that she would be retiring at the end of February, and this would be her last meeting. Ms. Fisher stated that she enjoyed participating on the council and that Erin Pawlus would be filling in as the Interim position. Erin Pawlus stated that she had been with the Talking Book Library for over 10 years, and had enjoyed working with Janet Fisher, who would be missed. Bob Kresmer thanked Janet Fisher for all her contributions and participation on the council and wished the best for her.

### ***Arizona Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired***

Frank Vance stated the pandemic hit ACBVI hard and the agency had to enact tight protocols in December and January while still providing services. Frank Vance stated that ACBVI would begin to offer the social recreation program virtually or in-person for small group classes. Mr. Vance noted the center would offer ski classes for 8 consumers in northern Arizona. He stated ACBVI accepted 5 employees into the leadership sessions, in which each session was led by a subject matter expert.

### ***SAAVI Services for the Blind***

Mike Gordon stated SAAVI had to close several times due to COVID outbreaks and/or staff had to quarantine and provide services virtually. Mike Gordon stated that many staff had resigned recently although many staff members had received cross training previously and were able to fill in some of those vacant positions, such as O&M services. Mr. Gordon stated SAAVI was in the process doing improvements on 2 buildings, which would be done in the summer. He noted the Tucson campus would be moving to different sites. Mike Gordon stated that Ed House had recently joined the SAAVI Board of Directors.



### ***National Federation of the Blind of Arizona***

Donald Porterfield stated the NFBA met with Senator Hamilton regarding SB 1487, which would authorize an increase to the OIB budget. Mr. Porterfield stated the NFBA was also interested in advocating for accessible voting that was similar to the language under the Uniformed And Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA). Donald Porterfield stated that UOCAVA allowed military members to vote electronically while overseas. Donald Porterfield stated the NFBA was also advocating for a Braille certification to mandate that Unified English Braille (UEB) be used and certified from different entities. Donald Porterfield stated the NFBA participated in an email campaign with the Legislation and was planning to meet with Legislative members in Washington D.C. in February. Donald Porterfield stated the NFBA would be advocating for a tax credit that would allow individuals to purchase affordable accessible technology and accessible medical equipment. Donald Porterfield stated the NFBA would be holding their State Convention in November and the NFB National Conference would be in July in New Orleans.

### ***Arizona Council of the Blind***

John McCann stated the AzCB 2022 Annual Convention would be held the weekend before Memorial Day and would be virtual. He noted that all council members were welcome to attend.

### **Agenda Items and Date for Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the GCBVI Full Council will be on May 27, 2022 from 12:30 pm to 3:00 pm.

### **Announcements**

There were no announcements.

### **Call to the Public**

A call to the public was made with no response's forthcoming.

### **Adjournment of Meeting**

Bob Kresmer moved to adjourn the meeting. Ted Chittenden seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 3:10.

As of December 31, 2021, the statistics are:

The total number of individuals in VR was 802

The total number of veterans in the VR program were 24

The total number of applicants for the VR Program was 33

The average number of days from application to eligibility was 50

The eligibility compliance was 79%

The number of new plans written was 255

The average hourly wage for successful employment outcomes was \$23.03

The number of clients placed in employment was 30

The number of clients closed successfully in employment was 27

As of December 31, 2021, the Deaf Blind Population statistics:

The total number of individuals in VR and was 47

The total number of applicants for the VR Program was 5

The average number of days from application to eligibility was 25

The eligibility compliance was 100%

The number of new plans written was 15

The average number of days from eligibility to IPE implementation was 208

The IPE implementation compliance within 90 days was 60%

The number of clients placed in employment was 3

The number of clients closed successfully was 0