

**ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR THE BLIND OF PENNSYLVANIA  
1521 North Sixth Street  
Harrisburg, PA 17102**

**Meeting Minutes (Draft)  
February 24, 2015**

**Board Members in Attendance:** Joseph Drenth (Chair), Carlton Walker, Secretary, Rod Alcidonis, Dr. Marianne Boltz, and David De Notaris

**OVR Staff Members in Attendance:** Introduced themselves

**Guests Present:** Lee Lippi, Elaine Welch, and Bonnie Frey. By Conference Call: Kathleen Kappel,

**Welcome & Opening Remarks**

Chair Drenth welcomed and thanked everyone for coming. The Board members and guests introduced themselves.

**BBVS Director's Report – David DeNotaris**

In Altoona office, there are 3 O&M openings. Working on getting these filled.

Erie office is currently at full complement.

In Harrisburg office, DA opening, Ruth Lotz is acting District Administrator. Also, one VR counselor and 2 O&M instructor positions currently open.

Overall, 18 O&M positions, only 9 are filled.

In Philadelphia office, Assistant DA position is open

## Pittsburgh

- O&M and \_\_\_\_ position open
- Have a new District Administrator, who happens to be blind
- Assistant DA is now out on maternity leave – she had the baby yesterday!

Wilkes-Barre: O&M position is open

Very close to getting a paid O&M internship

Continue to infuse technology throughout all programs. Gus Laffey discussed a new product for BBVS. First, Chair Drenth explained QR Codes. Have been using “prescription” pads in doctor’s offices to give doctors a simple way to get patients in touch with BBVS (Prescription pads are produced at the Hiram G. Andrews Center). At the November meeting, Committee advised the inclusion of a QR code onto the prescription pads. Mr. Laffey showed the use of the QR code on the prescription pad to go the BBVS website and we all heard it via VoiceOver.

June 4 is the Blindness Awareness Expo at the State Capitol. Mr. DeNotaris has directed a QR code on the flyer. As more information is updated, the website can be updated, and the QR code will still take people to the website when it is updated. There was discussion about the availability of QR codes on different platforms, for people to obtain them, and for inclusiveness (deaf-blind, non-English speakers).

BBVS Staff have iPhones to use in the field. Also, Mr. Laffey has prepared how-to videos to help staff learn to use the device – both visually and non-visually. Note: BBVS is one of the first to delve into iOS technology. Have a catalog of around 40 apps that are available for state-issued iPhones, including the kNFB reader, which Mr. DeNotaris showed to the group.

Also, recently purchased a Square register system (to be connected with an iPad) for individuals coming out of the BEP

system for an accessible cash register system. This may be able to help with inventory management as well.

Question from audience member Marsha Drenth about having a BBVS-specific Facebook page (rather than only the OVR Facebook page). Mr. DeNotaris indicated that social media must go through layers of administration before it can be posted. More may come in the future, but we need to be sensitive to concerns about who is posting information and what they are posting.

## **OVR Executive Director's Report**

OVR Acting Executive Director Michael Vovakes gave this report.

- Sharing OVR issues
- Continue working through the reauthorization of the Workforce . . . Act (the Rehabilitation Act)
- There have been renewed efforts for increased state funding to allowed for full draw down of federal funds.
  - S. Bill 200 and H. 400 – We prefer S. 200 because the House bill tends to focus almost exclusively on Transition. IF this passed, it would be difficult to serve anyone else. On Thursday morning at 9 a.m., there will be a committee meeting to vote it out of committee. We are focused on trying to get amendments once it is voted out of Committee. (Have not yet been asked to contribute to the bill, but plan to do so soon.)
  - Ryan Hyde continues to help us maximize SSA monies to maximize federal drawdown.
  - It's budget season – would like the Committee to help.
  - Mr. Alcidonis asked why OVR has not yet been contacted about this matter.
    - Mr. Vovakes does not know why. Right now, it's too late to work with the Committee. Will concentrate on amendments once it is voted out of Committee.
    - Mr. DeNotaris – it may just be some well-meaning people trying to help get additional dollars for match – need \$6 million to do it. Unfortunately, requires

OVR to serve EVERY transition-age student with IEPs (this would be an additional 70,000 students).

- Mr. Alcidonis would like the Committee to have an opportunity to advocate as well.
- Rep. Gingrich is the bill's sponsor.
- Mr. Vovakes: part of the issue is that we have a new legislative session, and we may have lost some institutional knowledge.

## **Client Assistance Program Presentation**

Stephen Pennington, Executive Director, PA Client Assistance Program

PAB Executive Director Elaine Welsh was unable to attend.

The discussion about budget, etc. is, perhaps, the most important matter before us.

March 26: OVR State Board meeting

Became the CAP director in 1985

In 1999, BBVS left the Department of Welfare and joined OVR under the Department of Labor and Industry

Believes that the OVR Board needs to hear more from the Blind/Visually Impaired community

- But, Judy Jobes is on the State Board

Invited all present who may be interested in joining the OVR State Board to send their interest and a resume to him at: [spenningtonlaw@aol.com](mailto:spenningtonlaw@aol.com)

H. 400 came out of an Employment First Conference – 21 and Able

- CAP is independent of state government – receive funding from the Federal government

- Mr. Pennington describes his view of these bills as an effort to shift these responsibilities from the Department of Welfare to OVR.
- This will slow the receipt of pre-vocational services (due to the move from an entitlement program to an eligibility program and the additional time required to make an eligibility determination)
- Match is important – PA has sent back \$60 million so far
- With the match, we will get \$10 million more
- Check out WIOA – section 458
  - Makes sheltered work/sub-minimum wage payments more difficult
- There are 114 14(c) licensed entities in PA – several serve individuals with blindness
- Mr. Pennington will bring to the OVR Board that sheltered workshops are not something that OVR is involved in.
- Mr. Pennington stressed the importance of BBVS and OVR – and their advisory committees.
  - What BBVS and OVR need now is a strong Secretary of L&I
  - At OVR, need someone who understands more than just management and who can be creative
- Mr. DeNotaris: What is CAP, and what does it do?
  - In 1973, the VR act was substantially changed away from a paternalistic model to an approach where the VR counselor and customer were partners – a relationship that exists today
  - Congress believed that there needed to be an advocate to help in that relationship – CAP is required for receipt of federal funds
  - CAP provides information about supports and services under the VR Act
  - Let individuals know about their rights and responsibilities
  - Help people navigate through the process
  - Purpose of OVR is not to just find the person a job – it is to find that person’s vocational potential

- Advocates work with customers who have concerns surrounding the VR process
- See ourselves as systems advocates
- Can represent customers at hearings
- Deal with systemic issues – extended employment, IEPs, OVR and BBVS work groups, dealing with federal legislative and policy issues
- Chair Drenth: How many customers? Appeals vs. information?
  - Appeals? Don't handle more than 3 or 4 appeals
    - Most of the total 75 for OVR and BBVS were resolved
  - Full complement is Mr. Pennington plus 4 – right now have only 2 plus Mr. Pennington
  - Average about 200 cases per year
    - These cases tend to be difficult ones
    - Often not getting the “cheerful” people
- Mr. DeNotaris noted Board member Arnold Bowser's absence due to ill health as a complication. Get well cards in print and braille available.
- For October Disability Awareness month, working in conjunction with Carnegie Mellon in Pittsburgh to host a STEM event.

BREAK until 10: 50 a.m.

## **ACBP BUSINESS**

- Working on the June 2 Blindness Awareness Event
  - Have a potential Keynote speaker
- Nomination Committee
  - Rod – Chair, plus
- May meeting
  - Salus will host
  - Tuesday, May 19
  - Elkins Park, right outside Philadelphia
- Erie

- Second week
- CACW cannot make the second week – would prefer the 3<sup>rd</sup> week
- Prefer Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays
- Second or third week of August
- Erie BBVS personnel will check their conference room availability and confirm
- Other BBVS business
  - Compose a thank you note to special assistant for attending this meeting
  - Eileen Cipriani, special assistant to the Secretary
    - Thanks
      - How many positions and how many need to be filled
      - Send names of potential additions, along with resumes

## **BUREAU REPORTS**

### Children's Program – Shelly Faust-Jones

- Efforts to get O&M and RT positions filled include attempting to get positions filled
  - Communication with three universities in PA
  - Also, have been approached by Hunter College in New York
  - Have already accepted non-paid interns in Philly and W-B and summer ones in Pittsburgh and Erie, and maybe, Altoona
    - Pitt will include Summer Academy work
  - Working on developing a proposal to L&I secretary for developing people with in-house personnel
    - Working with Salus to configure programs in different parts of the state
    - Working with the Secretary to try to extend current 20 day educational leave max
  - Regarding paid internships, waiting to get approval

- In the past, have found that folks end up staying after their internships
- Summer Programs
  - Transitional program at Overbrook, headed by Dael Cohen
    - Learning Independent living skills and shadowing employers
    - This year, will expand to 3 weeks and include actual work experience
  - Summer Academy (July 12-July 31)
    - Counselors hired, include some individuals with B/VI
    - Will include low vision component with Salus interns
      - Will be setting up kits to assess students when they arrive
      - Will attend class with the student and be there with the student to provide low vision devices
        - Will be in addition to non-visual skills, not instead of
    - All are invited to come and see the program in State College
    - Will provide the Salus students an opportunity to use these devices and to non-visual techniques
    - Still have room for 5 more referrals
    - Dr. Marianne Boltz gives a presentation to the students about an eye doctor visit
    - Will be looking for Mr. Drenth and Mr. Alcidonis to come to speak with the students on Career Awareness Day (July 30)
  - Two past students contacted a friend in Illinois
    - Ms. Faust-Jones got a call from a parent of a college student in Illinois who wants her child to attend
      - Mom wanted this program on a college campus
      - Mom willing to pay for it out-of-pocket
      - Mr. DeNotaris got it approved through legal
      - Will be coming up with an accurate cost per student
      - Mr. Alcidonis commended BBVS on this effort

- Mr. DeNotaris and Mr. Swaintek will be presenting about this opportunity at the Virginia AER Conference
- SSP training – headed by the Center for Independent Living
  - Was held in Pittsburgh – 19 in attendance
    - Waiting list of 4
  - Philly has 20 lined up for upcoming trainings
    - Waiting list of 28
  - Camp Hill has 20 lined up for upcoming trainings
    - Waiting list of 6
  - Already looking into trying to get permanent funding
  - Marsha Drenth highlighted for her work on this initiative
- Children’s Services
  - Continue Outreach efforts
    - At each PA optometric association conference (thanks to help from Dr. Boltz)

Mr. DeNotaris asked Marsha Drenth to speak about SSP

- Marsha shared great information
- Unfortunately, cannot use VR dollars for it, because it is not outcome-based
- Working to weave this into an existing waiver program so that it is sustainable
- [www.cilcp.org](http://www.cilcp.org) – Website to sign up for services if a Pennsylvania resident with dual sensory loss

## BEP Report

On January 12, restructured the BEP program into something more like a District Office – after interviewing more than 30 people, hired Ali Hillibrant – from DEP with a strong background in procurement and in management

- Kelly Boylan-Luchau – have several in training, including an individual with some hearing loss as well
- Stands are not set up for blind people, working on that
- Have a few more to interview
- Success in finding new sites

- Lost 5 last year – to retirement and to abandonment of sites
- As training has changed, more experienced vendors are finding computers a bit challenging
- There is an on-line course now through Hadley
  - One module is up, will be testing it – both a vendor and BEP staff
- Working with the Committee to fine tune to HGAC training – not leaving out too much
- Complete inventory taken in December
  - Over 4,600 items worth more than \$250
- Also, working with legal to update regulations and keep them updated every three years
- Meeting with the Committee to train vendors how to fix small items themselves
- BEP has also set up a resource account for complaints for snack bar customers
- Down to 2 agents right now – nobody on the list
  - Have one annuitant helping out right now
- Getting new site forms completed
- Getting a phone line to help keep vendors updated
- Some changes coming up
- Quite a few waivers out there right now
  - Would like to get more candidates into the program
- CACW question about priority of stands
  - Attorney Stram working on the regulation
  - Will need to present to the Elected Committee
  - Must be approved by RSA and by the state process
  - Will also send to the Blind Vendors group as a whole
    - Send to this Committee? Unanimous YES!
- Mr. DeNotaris, on a national level, used to be 3,000 operators, now are 2,200 operators

VR – Stan Swaintek

- For 1Q, at 26% of goal
  - Regarding lower-performing offices, have seen improvement with change in leadership

- For offices not at 25%, some issues have to do with low staffing levels
  - If one leaves, a real problem
- At 27% with homemakers

## ILOB – Susan Neff

- Update to Annual report
- Ranked 5<sup>th</sup> among all states
- Total served: 3,348
  - Largest group served is 85-89
  - Next highest is 80-85
  - Served 17 individuals 100 or above
  - 70+% of customers were female
  - Macular Degeneration is number reason for blindness/visual impairment
  - Major source of referrals: Eye care providers
  - Shared satisfaction survey results – positive
- Things we need to work on:
  - Transportation
  - Staffing issues
  - Requesting more funding for AT training

Regional District Administrators reported on the challenges they are facing and overcoming in their offices.

- Harrisburg
- Erie
- Wilkes-Barre

Mr. DeNotaris – looking at ILOB costs rising, despite high number of older individuals in Pennsylvania.

- Have not received a rise in funding since 1999
- Need to be more strategic about this
- CACW: Question about PA Lottery money
  - Mr. DeNotaris and others have gone to the Department of Aging to get information out to Area Agencies on Aging
  - Met with David Gingrich

- Inquiries and encouragement from many individuals could only help

Chair Drenth: Thank you to everyone for sharing today.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Chair Drenth welcomed Public Comment, none was forthcoming.

- Motion to adjourn by Carlton Walker
- Seconded by Marianne Boltz
- Unanimous approval

The meeting adjourned at 11:23 AM