South Carolina Commission for the Blind

1430 Confederate Avenue
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Meeting Minutes
March 28, 2023

Notifications of all regular, called, or special meetings are compliant with FOIA requirements, Section 90-4-80.

# Call to Order

Vice Chairperson John called the meeting to order at 11:00 am. The meeting was conducted in person and via Zoom Meeting software.

# Present

Susan John, Vice Chairperson
Cathy Olker, Secretary
Ron Coleman
Dan Hanfland
Darline Graham, Commissioner

# Adoption of Agenda

Dan Hanfland made a motion to accept the March 28, 2023, Agenda. It was seconded by Ron Coleman. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

# Public Comment

Kevin Carney said that the first sentence of Chapter 18-17 - P reads, “The Agency has the ultimate responsibility for the administration of the State Vending Facility Program,” which he agreed with. He said the Vending Facility Program was “our program” because it exists solely for the benefit and the advancement of Blind Licensed Vendors. He then said the state licensing agency is subordinate in authority to the Department of Education and the Rehabilitation Services Administration and must, according to chapter 18 state law and 395 federal law, share authority with the agency Board and the Blind Licensed Vendor Committee. He then asked the following questions: Who is responsible for the fact that some of the vending machines that we need to do our jobs have been broken for the better part of a year or more? Who is responsible to procure the most lucrative locations where we have priority such as Parris Island marine base? Who is responsible for changing the way bid selection interviews were administered which resulted in an evidentiary hearing and a rebid that has put our program in limbo for over a year? Who is responsible for rounding what are intended to be final numbers up and down on interview score sheets so that someone was selected who got lower scores than someone else who was not selected? He expressed that he was upset at an insinuation that the law requiring active participation on the part of the Vendor committee was the cause of the Fort Jackson rebid and that this was an attempt to avoid responsibility.

Willie Wester identified himself as a consumer of fourteen-years. He expressed that he has been attempting to receive a PhD in Psychology and that in the past he was told this would not be possible. He challenged the decision and was successful. Since then, he states that anytime he has challenged a decision made by a counselor he was not treated appropriately. Today he is in a master’s program. He says that he is still having the same problem.

# Approval of Minutes

Accepted as written as Mr. Coleman and Mr. Hanfland were not members of the Board of Commissioners prior to the current month.

# Commissioner’s Report

## Darline Graham reported:

Condolences were extended to the family of Voncelia Hollis who passed away the previous week. Ms. Hollis was a member of the agency’s finance team since 2019 and served the state for eleven years.

Mr. Ronald Coleman, representing Congressional District 1, and Mr. Daniel Hanfland, representing Congressional District 2, were welcomed to the Board of Commissioners. Mr. Coleman is one of nine children, four of whom were blind. His sister received training from the Business Enterprise Program and operated a vending stand in the Capital Building for nearly a quarter of a century. A brother obtained training and secured a job with the Federal government answering questions for taxpayers over the phone. Mr. Coleman received tuition assistance which enabled him to attend Furman University, where he studied to become a social worker. After graduation, he moved to Maryland, where he was employed by the state for 30 years and specialized in the field of developmental disabilities. He operated a department of social workers in a 500-bed state facility for persons with developmental disabilities.

Mr. Daniel Hanfland retired in 2013 after serving as the Executive Director of Community Health Charities of South Carolina. From the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s, he had served in regional and national management positions within the wine components of the Joseph E. Seagram Limited Corporation, the Seagram Wine Company, and Vintners International Group. Since 1994, he worked in executive and sales management and product development and training roles for Yamaha Corporation of America and Roland Corporation US.

Appointees for Congressional Districts 4 and 6 have been forwarded to the Senate as the next part of their confirmation process.

Dr. Judy Johnson was thanked for her years of services and dedication to the agency and consumers. She served on the board for six years, and two terms as chair. Vice Chairperson John noted that Dr. Johnson was unable to attend the meeting.

On the date of previous board meeting in January, the board also participated in a strategic planning session with the agency’s Executive Leadership Team.

In partnership with the SC School for the Deaf and Blind, the annual Braille Challenge was held on February 9 at the Columbia Campus. Fifteen students participated, competing in five categories.

The agency presented at its Senate Budget Hearing on March 1. This year’s request was for one full time equivalent position. This same request was previously approved by the House Ways and Means Committee.

Governor McMaster requested that the Department of Administration remove all access to the social media platform TikTok from all state government devices. SCCB’s Information Technology department was thanked for their time and energy in completing this task quickly, effectively, and accurately.

SCCB met with Sight Savers America, which provides vision screenings and other services to children, to explore options for working together in the future.

Staff toured the Lighthouse for the Blind in Summerville, which specializes in product assembly and light machining. Partnerships such as these are critical in providing services to consumers.

SCCB’s new Charleston location opened March 6. Mr. Coleman also toured the office. The location is more spacious and better located than the previous office.

New employees Donald Harrell, Training Center Manager; Heather Lee, Prevention of Blindness Coordinator; Douglas Wilson, Maintenance Technician; Brian Rogers, Maintenance Technician; Matt Burns, Transition Counselor; Sneha Veluri, IT Business Analyst; Stephen Butler, Custodian; Kim Anderson, Counselor Intern; and Myiesha Barr, Human Resources Intern; were welcomed to the agency.

# Finance Report

## Matt Daugherty reported:

State Budget – Spending is noted as two percentages: before commitments (e.g., before POs are paid)/after commitments (e.g., after POs are paid). Agency spending is 55%/62%. Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) has utilized 54%/58% of the budget, the Training Center 50%/54%, Transition Services 44%/58%, the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) 67%/86%% (a large number of commitments rolled over to this year due to equipment shortages), Prevention of Blindness 26%/28%, Older Blind 61%/68%, Children’s Services 54%/58%, and Administration 68%/72%.

Vice Chairperson John asked why the Prevention of Blindness numbers were low compared to other services. Mr. Daugherty replied this was primarily due to vacancies and how that impacts the amount of case services funds that can be expended. Commissioner Graham added that due to an expansion of that program, there are also additional funds available for use.

Federal Grants – The 2020 and 2021 VR grants were both closed out. Work is proceeding on finishing the 2022 grant. Spending of the 2023 grant is proceeding.

VR utilized 39% of the 2022 grant, Pre-ETS (pre-employment transition services) 40%, Older Blind 100%, and Supported Employment 17%.

Capital Improvement Projects – The Generator project is advancing as is the Landscaping and Site Improvements project. Several of the challenges faced by these projects were conveyed, such as the difficulty running new conduit for the new generator. Vice Chairperson John also noted the effects of the pandemic and supply chain issues on the various projects.

The Building A Renovation project is in phase two design and adjustments will be made due to increasing costs. Following that will be replacing the HVAC, boiler room, chillers and related duct work. The Dennis Canteen and Wade Hampton Canteen are in the design phase.

Commissioner Graham added that the Gressette Building micro market was complete and that members of the senate had commented on how much they appreciated it and how nice it appears.

# Human Resources Report

## Luis Mendoza reported:

From January through March, ten individuals have been hired into fulltime positions, compared to five last year. Across the agency, 94 out of 122 fulltime positions are filled. Including temporary part time positions, the total count is 105 positions filled. The turnover rate dropped from 38% last year to 15% this year.

The recruiting team continues to attend hiring events and colleges and universities statewide to diversify the applicant pool.

The agency’s workforce is the most diverse it has been in nearly a decade.

A performance management system has been acquired to assist managers in tracking and maintaining employee performance and communication with leadership. Data is currently being migrated into the system.

A Learning Management System (LMS) will be implemented to maintain and track training throughout the agency using one centralized tool.

The Executive Leadership Team recently participated in Team Building training, which resulted in significant positive feedback. Similar training will be provided to other staff across the agency.

Employee Appreciation Week will be the first week of May. This will include a virtual spirit week, prizes, and a luncheon. Due to construction on the campus, the luncheon will be held offsite (tentatively at Segra Park) on June 2.

Management positions – Of 16 positions, the only vacancy is the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) Program Lead position.

Counselor positions – Six out of twenty-four positions are vacant. As an anticipated result of implementing the new counselor series, VR counselor positions have or will soon be filled, but this has left several Older Blind positions vacant. The remaining VR position to be filled is in Aiken.

Vice Chairperson John asked for an update regarding Orientation and Mobility Instructor positions. Mr. Mendoza replied that these are challenging roles to fill due to the limited number of schools across the country that graduate certified O&M specialists, which means numerous agencies are competing for a small talent pool. The agency is recruiting from out of state and assisting current staff who want to become an O&M specialist to achieve that role; USC Upstate will begin offering an O&M program in the fall which will help with recruiting; and pay has increased for outside O&M specialists who contract with the agency.

Administrative Assistant positions – There is one vacancy due to the creation of an administrative assistant position.

Training Center positions – The Home Management Instructor position was filled internally.

# **Consumer Services Update**

## Karma Marshall reported:

Residential Program – As of March 17, eleven consumers are receiving training at the Training Center. Six consumers are scheduled to begin training in April. Four additional consumers will begin later in April as others complete their training. Twenty-two consumers are waiting on training for classes that are currently at capacity.

Summer programs – Planning continues for the Summer Internship Program (SIP) and Summer Teen 2023. The Summer Teen Handbook has been updated and application packets are being sent to consumers. The VR program lead, regional directors, employment consultants and counselors are finalizing programming, and developing work-based learning opportunities and internships for consumers. Summer Teen will begin with a STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) week that will utilize 3D Printers. Week two will focus on self-advocacy and include a self-defense program developed for and provided by individuals who are blind or visually impaired. The final week, presented by Dr. Tina Herzberg and Dr. Mary Robbins with the USC Upstate Vision Education Program, will be an interactive, multidisciplinary career exploration that incorporates science and the arts.

VR Counselors, Employment Consultants and Regional Directors participated in training on assistive technology provided by the VR Technical Assistance Center for Quality Employment (VRTAC-QE). Staff learned about accessible apps and devices that can assist consumers in employment and independent living.

As a member of the South Carolina Vision Education Partnership, SCCB presented at the 2023 Vision Summit. Transition and Children’s Services counselors attended and interacted with Teachers of the Visually Impaired and other services providers from across the state.

Ms. Olker asked if there would be virtual options available for Summer Teen. Ms. Marshall said there would be virtual components to the program.

# Old Business

None.

# New Business

None.

# Public Comment

Lori Ann Coley stated she was a consumer who would be attending the Training Center in April. She also said she recently received a job offer from a company at Shaw Air Force Base but had to decline it due to transportation issues (a 30-mile commute). She asked if the Commission was able to provide any assistance.

Commissioner Graham responded that transportation is a challenging issue across the state and that the Commission would follow-up with her.

# Executive Session

Vice Chairperson John called for a motion to go into Executive Session to discuss a personnel matter and contract update. A motion was made by Dan Hanfland and seconded by Cathy Olker. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

Willie Wester interrupted and asked for clarification about the Public Comment process. Vice Chairperson John stated it was a portion of the meeting during which the public could voice comments, within a set time limit, and that, as appropriate, staff would respond after the meeting to issues or concerns presented. Mr. Wester then stated that he did not trust staff to do anything for him, that no one asked for his number, and that they probably did not want him here. He restated that he continued to challenge decisions he did not believe were true. Vice Chairperson John noted that she responded to Mr. Wester’s question about the Public Comment process. Commissioner Graham added that the agency had Mr. Wester’s contact information.

Vice Chairperson John stated that the Commissioners would enter Executive Session.

Vice Chairperson John stated that the members were out of Executive Session. No actions or votes were taken during Executive Session.

# Future Board Meeting Schedule

April 25, 2023 – Canceled

May 23, 2023

# Adjournment

There being no further business, Vice Chairperson John called for a motion to adjourn at 1:03 pm. A motion was made by Dan Hanfland and seconded by Cathy Olker. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

# Signatures

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Susan John, Vice Chairperson

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Cathy Olker, Secretary

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