South Carolina Commission for the Blind

1430 Confederate Avenue
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Meeting Minutes
October 25, 2022

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

# Call to Order

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

Chairperson Johnson announced that Peter Alan Smith passed away on Saturday, October 15. Commissioner Graham read a tribute to Mr. Smith.

# Present

Dr. Judy Johnson, Chairperson
Susan John, Vice Chairperson
Cathy Olker, Secretary
Darline Graham, Commissioner

# Adoption of Agenda

Accepted as written. No vote. No quorum.

# Public Comment

None.

# Approval of Minutes

No vote. No quorum.

# Commissioner’s Report

## Darline Graham reported:

Commissioner Graham noted that in addition to Mr. Peter Smith, an agency staff member had recently passed away, and a number of staff had lost family members; condolences were offered to all.

The agency was invited to attend a press conference held by the Governor and the Department of Employment and Workforce (DEW) announcing September as Workforce Development Month. Commissioner Graham attended the first State Workforce Development Board Meeting since being selected for the board. Commissioner Graham and Karma Marshall attended a Workforce Symposium offered by DEW and the Chamber of Commerce. The director of DEW discussed how the labor shortage was a long-term issue for the state, especially as baby boomers exit the workforce. DEW also shared results of a survey they conducted regarding what job candidates were looking for: better pay, work closer to home, flexible hours, and flexible job conditions (such as telework opportunities). SCCB has already focused on several of these, which will help fill vacancies.

The agency is discussing ways to partner and better serve transition students with Able SC. The agency held its AT Expo in collaboration with Able SC as part of their Employer Summit. This allowed the agency to reach a larger audience of employers and to establish new relationships.

The agency met with MUSC Storm Eye Institute, which will assist in identifying individuals who can benefit from the Prevention program.

Six members of the leadership team will attend the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) and National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB) Fall Conferences in Texas. This is an opportunity for the agency to connect with leaders from other states and learn from a diverse group of presenters, including the Rehabilitation Services Association (RSA).

The agency presented to the Executive Budget office on September 29, the first step in the budget process for Fiscal Year 2024. The agency had one recurring request (for the attorney salary).

Commissioner Graham thanked Ms. Olker for her visit to the Greenville office in September. Ms. Olker commented that she enjoyed the visit very much.

A potential new office location in Charleston (in the West Ashley area) was under consideration (staff in Charleston is teleworking due to flooding that occurred in the existing office).

Consumer feedback meetings continue allowing the agency to hear consumer concerns and comments that aid in making decisions regarding the training program. For example, peer support group meetings have been helpful, and the number offered will be increased.

Feedback on the new SCCB website is extremely positive. Many new referrals have been received through the easy-to-use contact form.

New Employees – New employees Valda Thomas, Licensed Practical Nurse, Shayla Ferguson, VR Counselor in Greenville, Cherri Boller, VR Counselor in Clemson, Denise Doktor, Employment Consultant in Conway, John Lark, Business Enterprise Program Consultant in Greenville, Kevin Jones, Procurement Manager, and Jennifer Taylor, Administrative Assistant in Rock Hill, were welcomed to the agency.

# Finance Report

## Matt Daugherty reported:

Susan John asked if there was a percentage of the budget that can be carried over from the previous year. Mr. Daugherty said that it was 10% for the State Budget.

Dr. Johnson asked if issues with funds listed in different categories had been addressed. Mr. Daugherty replied this was due to operating costs in one area needing to be distributed to other categories, and that had been addressed.

State Budget – Agency spending is 29%. Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) has utilized 23% of the budget, the Training Center 27%, Transition Services 11%, the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) 49%, Prevention of Blindness 10%, Older Blind 25%, Children’s Services 24%, and Administration 33%.

Ms. Olker commented that Case Services expenditures seemed low in all areas. Mr. Daugherty said this was partially due staff vacancies; as vacancies were filled, expenditures would increase. Ms. Marshall added that referrals were already increasing in several areas.

Federal Grants – The 2020 and 2021 VR grants were both closed out. The clean-up process for the 2021 grant would continue into December. Spending on the 2022 grant was beginning; the agency was 50% through the two-year period of performance for the 2022 grant (the first year of the grant was closed out and the requirements to carry over the grant were met). Ms. Olker commented that she was pleased that use of Supported Employment grant had increased to 17%.

Federal Contract – This grant is committed to the Fort Jackson BEP contract. Chairperson Johnson asked if the current amount expended was high. Mr. Daugherty replied that this contract follows a different yearly schedule and is utilized in a different manner than other contracts.Mr. Daugherty explained that a new spreadsheet with a single line item for the Fort Jackson contract was included to prevent this amount from making the rest of the Budget Report harder to understand.

Capital Improvement Projects – The agency is attempting to prepare as much as possible for the new generator by early 2023. Chairperson Johnson asked if the workers on site were a part of that project. Mr. Daugherty replied they were repairing an issue with the boiler. Following the generator project would be Building A renovations and landscaping, then the HVAC. Mr. Daugherty noted the biggest delays were due items requiring computer chips (such as the chiller).

Ms. John asked about progress on the Dennis Canteen. Mr. Daugherty said that quotes for equipment were being obtained and that some equipment would be purchased on state contract. Ms. John asked if this would be a self-serve kiosk and Mr. Daugherty replied yes.

Chairperson Johnson asked for clarification about the last line item in the Capital Improvement Projects. Mr. Daugherty replied this project was in the idea phase and involved undeveloped property adjacent to Building A. The agency was evaluating if it could be used for supplemental storage and/or parking. The property could need to be rezoned.

# Human Resources Report

## Luis Mendoza reported:

Seven fulltime employees were hired last quarter, compared to five during the same time last year. There are six hires for November, compared to three last year. Chairperson Johnson asked about separations and Mr. Mendoza said there were six in the last quarter, compared to five last year. Separations included retirees and staff who moved to other agencies, but no counselors.

Ms. John asked if the data indicated the trend was based on salary adjustments and policy changes implemented. Mr. Mendoza said yes. Commissioner Graham said many state agencies had vacancies and many people were changing jobs and agencies.

Mr. Mendoza said from 10-2020 to 9-2021 there were 13 hires and/or internal promotions. From 10-2021 to 9-2022 there were 36 hires and/or internal promotions; twenty-eight were new hires to SCCB. Twenty-five of those remain employed with SCCB.

Counselor positions – All counselor and administrative assistant positions in Region I are filled. HR and hiring managers in other regions are conducting interviews each week.

In September, HR attended the Midlands SC Works Job Fair and job fairs in Louisiana, at the University of South Carolina, at Clemson, and at USC Upstate. In November, HR will attend a veteran’s job fair and a job fair hosted by the National Federation of the Blind.

For the month of October, HR has hosted several health and wellness events.

Telecommuting – HR continues to work with State HR to expand the telecommuting pilot and to work with departments to identify measures to track productivity. Since implementing the pilot, the agency has retained two employees who were about to leave for other agencies that allow telecommuting. This saved the agency about $32,000 in training and other administrative costs.

State HR is reviewing the counselor track.

Chairperson Johnson asked if all employees had received the 3% raise and the $1,500 bonus approved the General Assembly. Mr. Mendoza said the bonus would be paid on November 1 for fulltime staff with continuous state service from January 1 through June 30. Ms. John asked if the moral of those who would not receive the bonus would be affected. Mr. Mendoza said the employees who would not receive the bonus had been hired within the past two months or they had a break in state service.

Affirmative action information (number hires and promotions, broken down by gender and race) is reported to Human Affairs in October. Historically, the agency has underutilized the white female (counselors, HR, financial) and black male (in general) categories. Since 2020, the agency has increased its retention of employees in these categories. Ms. Olker asked if there was a category for blind and visually impaired employees. Mr. Mendoza said no, but the agency had increased the number of employees with visual impairments each year.

Mr. Mendoza, Cathy Duncan, and other Charleston staff attended the SC Works Public Sector Career Fair.

# **Consumer Services Update**

## Karma Marshall reported:

Residential Program – Nineteen consumers were receiving training at the Training Center. The Training Center Consumer Handbook was in the process of being revised. A separate handbook for the Summer Teen program would also be developed. Absences were being monitored to help consumers understand the importance of attendance, especially work attendance. Chairperson Johnson asked if the Training Center Manager position had been filled and Ms. Marshall replied “no”. Commissioner Graham added that they were in the process of making a decision about a candidate.

Ms. Marshall and Donna Earley toured the Louisiana Center for the Blind in Ruston, Louisiana. They received a lot of information which may be incorporated into the SCCB Training Center (such as expanding the intake process prior to admittance to ensure consumers are stable and understand expectations).

Prevention of Blindness – The policy has been revised to address the expansion of the program to cover more procedures for individuals who are uninsured or under insured.

Ms. Marshall and Commissioner Graham will be meeting with Jolene Maddison, president of the SC School for the Deaf and Blind, to discuss a possible collaborative Summer Teen program for both deaf and blind students.

The SCCB Deafblind Coordinator attended the Southeastern Regional Institute on Deafness (SERID). A SCCB consumer participated in a panel at SERID in which she discussed her successful employment.

Transition and Children’s Services counselors will attend the Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER) Conference in November. They will be able to meet and network with many Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVI) from around the state.

At the AT Expo (part of Able SC’s Employer Summit), vendors Vispero and Eschenbach Optik demonstrated assistive devices used individuals with visual impairments to employers. Several SCCB staff were present to answer questions from employers.

Quality Assurance Update

Mike Daniels reported:

Vocational Rehabilitation – 210 cases were reviewed in Quarter 1 for State Fiscal Year 2023. Only two cases were not in compliance for eligibility. A training need was identified with regard to eligibility determination within 60 days. Three cases were not in compliance for plan completion within 90 days of eligibility. It was noted that five counselors were each covering two caseloads, and several new counselors were hired during this time.

Older Blind – 136 cases were reviewed with 90% in compliance. Ms. John asked how the number of cases to review was determined. Mr. Daniels replied that all cases that were opened or closed during the quarter were reviewed.

Children’s Services – 24 cases were reviewed. Application for services was at 83% with all other metrics at 100%.

Prevention of Blindness – 10 cases were reviewed. Application for services was at 89%, eye report at 80%, and eligibility letter at 100%. The low score for the signed eligibility letter reflected an issue that will be addressed in training. Chairperson Johnson asked if only 10 cases were reviewed, how could the scanned letter metric be 29%? Mr. Daniels said that the number depends on what status a consumer was in (such as application, eligibility, plan or closed). Chairperson Johnson asked why only 10 cases were opened in the quarter. Ms. Marshall responded that additional focus had been placed on Older Blind due to multiple vacancies in that program. Also, with new funding for Prevention, there would be a prevention coordinator for each of the four regions (currently one person covers the entire state). Commissioner Graham added that the partnership with Storm Eye Institute and other ophthalmologists would result in increased referrals. Ms. John asked if the policy change to be discussed in Executive Session would affect the referrals and Ms. Marshall said referrals would increase because additional procedures would be covered. Ms. Olker asked about the time between a referral to an application being completed. Ms. Marshall said the goal is to respond to the referral within 48 hours. The next step is to determine if this is the appropriate agency and program for the referral and proceed from there.

VR Consumer Satisfaction Survey – 87 consumers in closed status in Quarter 4 of State Fiscal Year 2022 were surveyed and 12 responded. Chairperson Johnson asked if phone surveys were used. Mr. Daniels said that moving forward different options would be used such as Survey Monkey, phone calls, and mail. Susan John asked if consumers could conduct the surveys and Mr. Daniels said there were confidentiality issues with that.

Older Blind Consumer Satisfaction Survey – 9 consumers were surveyed with an overall satisfaction rate of 100%.

Prevention of Blindness Consumer Satisfaction Survey – 20 consumers were surveyed, 10 responded, with an overall satisfaction rate of 100%.

Children’s Services Consumer Satisfaction Survey – The overall satisfaction rate was 100%.

Consumer Wages – Average wages and hours worked had increased compared to the previous quarter. Commissioner Graham added that this information showed consumers were in quality employment with good wages, a goal of the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

Business Enterprise Program Update

Ryan Skinner reported:

Business Enterprise Program - The new BEP Consultant in Greenville came to the agency with experience as a QA inspector in food service. The remaining BEP Consultant positions in Columbia had been filled. Mr. Skinner recognized the efforts of Elaine Robertson and Jaqueline Stubbs in maintaining the districts while the consultant positions were being filled.

A Scope of Work for an agency vending contract was being created. This would improve the process of equipment purchases.

With the participation of the Blind Committee, planning would begin for the next Annual Meeting. Ms. John asked where it would be held. Mr. Skinner said it was typically held at the agency, but due to facility issues the last Annual Meeting was held at Embassy Suites.

Ms. John asked if the two referrals to the BEP program were consumers wanting to become a Blind Licensed Vendor (BLVs) or businesses that wanted vending services. Mr. Skinner said they were VR consumers. Ms. John asked if future reports could the number BLVs waiting on a stand and Mr. Skinner said this would be added.

Business Services – Mr. Skinner spoke with representatives of several companies at the Employer Summit/AT Expo, including Dominion Energy and BlueCross BlueShield; they would explore options to collaborate on training that would benefit consumers.

An Integrated Business Service Team in each region of the state which together SC Works, DEW, and VR. The SCCB Employment Consultants will become more involved with these teams which will lead to increased networking with businesses and services that will benefit consumers.

# Old Business

None.

# New Business

None.

# Public Comment

None.

# Executive Session

Chairperson Johnson stated the Board would go into Executive Session to discuss a Contract Update.

Chairperson Johnson stated that the members were out of Executive Session. No votes were taken during Executive Session. No quorum.

# Future Board Meeting Schedule

November 22, 2022 – Canceled

December 8, 2022 – Last hour of Strategic Planning Retreat

The meeting will be held in-person and via Zoom Meeting Software at 3:00 pm in the Fleet Mortgage Room at Saluda Shoals Park, 5605 Bush River Road, Columbia, SC 29212.

# Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 12:55 pm. No vote was taken. No quorum.

# Signatures

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Dr. Judy Johnson, Chairperson

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Cathy Olker, Secretary

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