South Carolina Commission for the Blind

1430 Confederate Avenue
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Meeting Minutes
May 23, 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 11:01 am. The meeting was conducted in person and via Zoom Meeting software.

# Present

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

Mathias Chaplin

Erica James
Darline Graham, Commissioner

# Adoption of Agenda

Vice Chairperson John noted that Michael Daniels would present the QA report instead of Nikki Green. Ronald Coleman made a motion to accept the May 23, 2023, Agenda. It was seconded by Mathias Chaplin. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

# Public Comment

None

# Approval of Minutes

Ronald Coleman made a motion to accept the March 28, 2023, minutes. It was seconded by Cathy Olker. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

# Commissioner’s Report

## Darline Graham reported:

Commissioner Graham introduced new Board Commissioners Erica James, representing Congressional District 4, and Mathias Chaplin, representing Congressional District 6. Both were confirmed by the Senate on May 11th. The agency is now in compliance with federal regulations that require the majority of Board Commissioners to have a significant visual impairment. The only vacancy is Congressional District 5.

Attorney Mathias Chaplin attended The Citadel, graduating with the rank of Cadet Major and a degree in chemistry. He was the highest ranked minority cadet to graduate from The Citadel as of 1981. Following this, he served in the US Air Force as an Air Traffic Controller. After his discharge, Mr. Chaplin received a Master’s Degree in Health Care Administration from the Medical University of South Carolina. He then had a successful career in the healthcare field, serving as the Director of Support Services at Stanford and UCSF Medical Center, Director of Support Services at Newton-Wellesley Medical Center in Massachusetts, and the Director of Environmental Services at Boston City Hospital.

Mr. Chaplin obtained a Law Degree in 2001 from Golden Gate University in California. He has practiced law for more than 20 years in South Carolina. Mr. Chaplin has also been a faculty member at Midlands Technical College for the past 20 years.

When Mr. Chaplin lost his sight four years ago, a social worker suggested that he go to a nursing home, but he refused and continues to practice law, teach, travel, and assist his father with the family business.

Erica James graduated from Clemson University in 2015 where she earned a bachelor’s degree in psychology. She was a scholarship student athlete on the Clemson cheerleading team. As a student athlete with a disability, Ms. James recognized she had the opportunity to advocate for disability pride. Ms. James was born with a rare cancer in the eyes and the retinas. She has been cancer free for many years, but as a result of cancer treatments, she had progressive vision loss since childhood.

Professionally, Ms. James is an entrepreneur who owns a female focused fitness studio in Greenville, SC, in addition to working as a real estate agent and motivational speaker. She also enjoys competing in adaptive sports and is the two-time CrossFit Games Champion in the Women’s Vision Division and is a competitive runner.

In April, several members of the leadership team attended the Spring Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation and the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (CSAVR/NCSAB) conference. Major topics at the conference included fiscal matters and process simplification. The Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) discussed ways to reduce restrictions that agencies have placed on themselves through outdated policies and procedures. The VR Program Lead and Impact Team began revising our VR program policies and procedures to make them clear, simple, and less restrictive.

Presenters also discussed the importance of analyzing case management systems to identify areas that cause slowdowns in service delivery. The agency is working with Alliance Enterprises to schedule an extensive evaluation of our case management system. This will help us make improvements that result in greater efficiency and improved service delivery.

Rapid engagement was discussed at the conference. Under federal regulations, a VR agency has 60 days to determine eligibility. Rapid engagement establishes an internal goal to determine eligibility before that 60-day requirement. A review of data has shown that most SCCB consumers are determined eligible before 60 days. The agency may implement rapid engagement for job retention service cases; the timeliness of Job Retention Services is often critical because people can be in jeopardy of losing their jobs.

The Randolph-Sheppard vending facility program was discussed, including the increased use of micro-markets and introduction of pico-markets. A micro market recently established in the Gressette Building at the State Capitol complex has received positive feedback.

Ryan Skinner and Bryan Green were recognized for their work managing the dining contract with the Army at Ft. Jackson. Army representatives at a Quarterly Performance Management Review made multiple comments that service has substantially improved. Palmetto Food Service was also recognized for their efforts.

The agency met with Daniel Prohaska of Lions Vision Services to establish a partnership to provide Prevention Services to a greater number of South Carolinians through increased referrals to SCCB.

Karma Marshall presented at the Annual State Convention of the Carolina Regional Group of the Blinded Veterans’ Association. This informed Veterans about SCCB services.

The 2023 Summer Teen program begins on June 12. Three weeks of exciting and educational activities are planned for the teens. Thirty students will attend. A virtual option will be available for others who are unable to participate in person.

Staff who planned this year’s employee appreciation event were recognized. The event is scheduled for June 2nd at Segra Park to show appreciation to SCCB employees for their hard work and dedication.

New employees Lekisha Brown, Receptionist; Gerry Grant, General Maintenance Tech; Dathon Moore, General Maintenance Tech; Kevonte Ruff, General Maintenance Tech; Octavia Brown, Residential Facility Assistant, Amanda Vestal, Administrative Assistant; Catherine Ward, BEP Legal Intern; Naya Battle, VR Intern, and Kelli McAlhany, VR Intern; were welcomed to the agency.

# Finance Report

## Matt Daugherty reported:

State Budget – The agency is 83% through the physical year with spending at 77%. Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) has utilized 83% of the budget, the Training Center 73%, Transition Services 68%, the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) 87%, Prevention of Blindness 50%, Older Blind 90%, Children’s Services 76%, and Administration 82%.

Federal Grants – The 2020 and 2021 VR grants were closed out. VR has utilized 54% of the 2022 grant, Pre-ETS (pre-employment transition services) 47%, Older Blind 100%, and Supported Employment 17%. Criteria will be met to carry the 2023 grant forward to a second year of spending.

A new Grants/Budgets Accountant was hired. An offer was made to an Accounts Payable Accountant. With these hires, the fiscal department will be fully staffed.

Capital Improvement Projects – The conduit project for the new generator will not be completed until August. Discussions are ongoing concerning the renovation of building A. Landscaping of the center courtyard continues, but the outer areas will not be completed until August.

IT – Cameras are being installed. Networks bandwidth, copiers, and mail machines throughout the state are being updated to improve efficiency. A data analyst and a systems administrator has been hired.

# Human Resources Report

## Luis Mendoza reported:

As of April, thirteen FTE positions have been filled, double the number from last year. The agency has 102 employees, which includes FTE, part-time, and those hired through outside agencies. The turnover rate is currently 16.5%, compared to 40% last year. The agency will host several interns this summer. The HR recruiting team continues to attend hiring events at colleges and universities to ensure diversity in the applicant pool. Equal Opportunity data shows the agency’s workforce is the most diverse it has been in a decade. HR and management work together to ensure hiring practices are free from bias and focused on hiring the most qualified candidates.

SCCB was recognized for its improvement in employing and retaining a qualified and diversified workforce at the Equal Opportunity forum hosted by the South Carolina Human Affairs Commission.

A new performance management system implemented to assist with Employee Performance Reviews and Planning Documents has received positive feedback.

Employee Appreciation events were held May 8 through May 13 with a different event occurring each day. The final event will be held Friday, June 2, at Segra Park.

Ms. Olker asked about Orientation & Mobility certification efforts. Mr. Mendoza responded that the agency has one instructor scheduled to complete by April 2024. He added that another instructor will re-take the O&M certification test. Final plans for the O&M program at USC Upstate have not been completed and there is no confirmation the program will begin in the fall of 2023.

Mr. Coleman inquired about the percentage of SCCB staff who are blind or visually impaired and how the agency markets vacancies to individuals who are blind or visually impaired. Mr. Mendoza responded that 10% of the agency’s staff identifies as blind or visually impaired. He added that, in addition to standard job boards, the agency partners with the National Federation for the Blind and various non-profit organizations to encourage individuals who are blind or visually impaired to apply for SCCB positions.

# **Consumer Services Update**

## Karma Marshall reported:

The Training Center is serving 13 students with 19 students on the waiting list. The waiting list is down 50% from this time in 2022. Training programs are currently at capacity.

Thirty consumers are registered for the Summer Teen Program. Three consumers are registered for a virtual option planned for 2 days each week focusing on financial literacy and real-life budgeting. In week one of the in-person program, Dr. Tina Herzberg and Dr. Mary Robbins will present on interactive, multidisciplinary career exploration incorporating science and the arts. In week two, STRIVE4YOU, a company owned and operated by individuals who are blind or visually impaired, will cover self-advocacy and self-defense. Week three will offer career exploration in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), conducted by Dr. Thomas Madura. Consumers will create 3D printers. Evening programs and activities will be offered in collaboration with Successful Transitions.

Five consumers are registered for the Student Internship Program (SIP). Orientation will begin the week of May 15.

Transition and Children’s Services counselors presented at the National Federation of the Blind’s Parents of Blind Children on April 13. The VR Lead met with ABLE SC to learn more about their transportation services and to discuss new opportunities to partner.

Due to the national shortage of qualified Orientation and Mobility instructors, SCCB is exploring options for providing this service, such as including out of state training for consumers.

SCCB is partnering with Lions World Services to increase the number of consumers receiving sight saving procedures through the Prevention of Blindness program.

SCCB drivers are currently based in Columbia. The agency is exploring the possibility of establishing some locally based “as needed” drivers to increase efficiency in serving consumers.

Follow-up had occurred with all consumers who spoke during the March board meeting. It was noted that all consumers are provided with information about how to contact the Client Assistance Program (CAP), a federally funded and mandated program that provides third party advocacy to individuals with disabilities and helps them understand their rights and the services provided by SCCB and other agencies/organizations. In South Carolina CAP is managed by Disability Rights SC. Consumers are also provided the contact information for SCCB’s ombudsman office.

Mr. Coleman asked how SCCB assist consumers with finding quality employment opportunities. Ms. Marshall gave a quick overview of the VR program, including Pre-ETs. She emphasized the goal of VR is to assist with finding employment in a competitive integrated environment that meets an individual’s specific needs and vocational objective. SCCB partners and works with numerous businesses in many different career fields to achieve this. Commissioner Graham added that to achieve this SCCB Employment Consultants work with consumers and businesses to ensure the needs of both are met.

**Quality Assurance Update**

Michael Daniels reported:

In Quarter 2, targeted training opportunities were identified by counselors and by region. The percentage of eye reports in AWARE for Older Blind (OB) and Prevention of Blindness (POB) increased. The percentage of signed eligibility letters in POB increased. Due to limited responses, the Children’s Services report was not included. The importance of anonymity was noted with regard to a new survey of active consumers in development and that they may be apprehensive to provide their honest assessment of services provided.

Consumers are informed of their rights to appeal any decision made by their counselor when they apply for services and that they can contact the agency’s Ombudsman or contact Disability Rights South Carolina to seek resolution.

In Quarter 3, consumers entering Competitive Integrated Employment increased from 30 to 34. In addition, hourly wage and average hours worked increased.

**BUSINESS ENTERPRISE PROGRAM UPDATE**

Ryan Skinner reported:

Ms. Olker asked where BEP vending facilities were located. Mr. Skinner responded that vending facilities were in State and Federal facilities, interstate rest areas, and other locations. Vice Chairperson John asked who was responsible for equipment repairs. Mr. Skinner said that SCCB is mandated by law to maintain equipment, excluding beverage machines. Beverage machines are the responsibility of the vendor (i.e., Pepsi, Coke) that owns them.

Mr. Skinner and two Business Consultants attended the National Automatic Merchandising Association (NAMA) Convention in Atlanta. New merchandise and machines were on display. There was discussion about micro markets that are replacing smaller canteens, allowing BLVs to have less overhead, better sales tracking, and to operate more effectively. Pico-markets, scaled down version of the micro market, were also discussed.

A conflict resolution meeting occurred with RSA and the Committee representing the BLVs. A decision was made to update the seniority scoring process, which is part of the bid interview process. Subsequently, the elected blind committee made a request that Ft Jackson go back on the bid-line to be fair to BLVs who may not have previously applied due to the former weight of seniority. Mr. Skinner noted that the BLVs currently operating Fort Jackson have been working hard to ensure the needs and demands at Fort Jackson are met.

Ms. Olker asked about re-opening the SCCB cafeteria in Columbia. Mr. Skinner responded that because of Fort Jackson, it was not possible to put the cafeteria on the bid line. He added that the cafeteria would have a new look and be used as a training facility for consumers participating in BEP. A micro market may be incorporated in it as well.

# Old Business

None.

# New Business

None.

# Public Comment

None

# Future Board Meeting Schedule

June 27, 2023 – Canceled

July 25, 2023

# Adjournment

There being no further business, Vice Chairperson John called for a motion to adjourn at 12:44 pm. A motion was made by Mathias Chaplin and seconded by Erica James. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.