South Carolina Commission for the Blind

1430 Confederate Avenue  
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Meeting Minutes   
September 26, 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 11:05 am. The meeting was conducted in person and via Zoom Meeting software.

# Present

Susan John, Vice Chairperson  
Cathy Olker, Secretary  
Dan Hanfland

Erica James

Mathias Chaplin  
Darline Graham, Commissioner

# Absent

Ron Coleman

# Adoption of Agenda

Cathy Olker made a motion to accept the September 26, 2023, Agenda. It was seconded by Mathias Chaplin. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

# Public Comment

None

# Approval of Minutes

Dan Hanfland made a motion to accept the July 18, 2023, minutes and the August 16, 2023, minutes. It was seconded by Erica James. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

# Commissioner’s Report

## Darline Graham reported:

Commissioner Graham thanked the Board Commissioners for the time they dedicated over the past several months to participating in multiple trainings and a special meeting. In addition, the HR team and hiring managers were thanked for their hard work in filling vacancies. Vacancies are lower than they have been in a decade.

The agency is moving forward with the refactoring process for the case management system. The agreement with Alliance Enterprise, developers of the case management system AWARE, was reviewed, signed and a start date will be forthcoming.

On September 15, the Accountability Report was submitted. Items highlighted included the hiring of a Business Services Coordinator, piloting an Intake Specialist position, and hosting a 3-week summer teen program consisting of two new workshops, and two additional weeks of camp at the University of South Carolina focusing on post-secondary opportunities.

The Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, led by San Diego State University, was received. The final version will be sent to the Board of Commissioners.

As a part of Workforce Development month, Commissioner Graham and Carol Anderson attended the SC State Workforce Symposium. The new Business Services Coordinator is joining the Department of Employment and Workforce and other partners for several job seeker events. The events are designed to reach individuals in rural areas that may have barriers to employment such as transportation issues.

Commissioner Graham attended the first Task Force on Eliminating Subminimum Wage. The task force is made up of several State Agency partners and was established as a result of Governor McMaster signing a new law ending subminimum wage in South Carolina. Several sub committees will continue to meet as subminimum wage is phased out.

Several staff attended the annual South Carolina State National Federation for the Blind Convention on August 18, and 19. SCCB displayed informational and recruitment literature.

Following a meeting with the Department of Administration and several contractors to discuss the HVAC project, the executive team met with Training Center staff to develop a plan with minimal disruption to operations and consumer training. The Summer Teen 2024 program will move to July instead of June to allow for completion of the project. The Training Center manager is working with instructors to provide virtual training options as needed during the construction.

The Executive Budget Hearing is scheduled for September 27, 2023. The agency will request funds for Older Blind Services, and match funds to meet the agency’s federal obligation for the VR grant that requires the state to match at a rate of 21.3%. The federal grant award has increased while the state match amount has not increased at the same rate. A request was also made for administrative support. It has been ten years since an increase in administrative support funds was received.

Several staff will attend the Fall Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation and the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind conferences held October 28 through November 3, in Savannah, Georgia. Attendees will hear updates from Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) and best practices from other State VR and Blind agencies.

A new Senior Management team has been developed that includes Regional Directors, Program Leads, and other management level positions. This will allow the agency to better gather input from staff and ensure effective communication. The first project that will be worked on is a customer service initiative.

Work is continuing with the Department of Transportation to build out the sidewalk from the bus stop to the entrance of the Charleston office parking lot and is expected to be completed by the end of the year.

New employees Andrea Sinkler-Slaughter, Quality Assurance Coordinator; Angela Thomas, Quality Assurance Assistant; Leonard Moore, VR Counselor; Andrew Spires, Procurement Manager; Stephanie Cook, Prevention of Blindness Coordinator; Gerry Grant, General Maintenance Technician; Patrick Mack, Braille Instructor; and Laura Dreher, Administrative Coordinator were welcomed.

Ms. Olker asked for more information about the Business Services Coordinator. Commissioner Graham responded that this person will provide guidance to employment consultants on connecting and building relationships with businesses around the state and ensuring they understand the agency and the services it offers.

# Finance Report

## Matt Daugherty reported:

State Budget – Beginning July 1, 2023, agency spending was at 20%. Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) has utilized 22% of the budget, the Training Center 16%, Transition Services 19%, the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) 37%, Prevention of Blindness 12%, Older Blind 17%, Children’s Services 18%, and Administration 20%.

Federal Grants – VR has utilized 97% of the 2022 grant, pre-ETS (pre-employment transition services) 31%, Older Blind 100%, and Supported Employment 17%. Criteria will be met to carry the 2023 grant forward to a second year of spending.

Capital Improvement Projects

* The generator replacement and parking lot lighting projects were completed and are awaiting final inspections.
* The site improvements project is nearing completion, with resurfacing of the parking lot the last step.
* Bids have been accepted and pre-construction has begun on the HVAC project, which is scheduled to begin at the end of this year and extend through most of 2024.
* Renovation of Wade Hampton canteen is awaiting final design.
* Renovation of the Rembert Dennis canteen is awaiting budget approval from the Joint Bond Review Committee (JBRC).
* Building A renovation is awaiting final design.
* Initial planning for the campus cafeteria, residential facility plumbing projects, and the utilization of the property located at 1425 Victoria Street has begun.

# Human Resources Report

## Luis Mendoza reported:

The agency has filled 100 full-time positions and has 22 vacancies, not including part-time or contract employees. In comparison, last year there were 84 filled positions and 38 vacancies. This is the highest filled FTEs for more than a decade. In the last two fiscal years, turnover decreased from 40% to 22%. This was possible because of the agency’s compensation philosophy which attracts and retains a diverse group of high-performing employees at all levels. Achieving this goal was also possible because the agency is competitively aligned with the external market and working to ensure fair and consistent delivery of pay internally.

Human Resources (HR) recruiters are visiting colleges and universities across the state. Additionally, with assistance from the Staff Advisory Council, which consists of blind and visually impaired employees, recruiters will attend the National Federation for the Blind (NFB) events in an effort to attract qualified blind and visually impaired applicants.

The agency’s performance management system ensures that employees receive timely evaluations and encourages employees and supervisors to engage in meaningful conversations about performance. In the last month, 41 One-on-one sessions have been conducted. This has had a positive impact on retention.

HR will invest in a Learning Management Systems (LMS) to manage training across the agency and identify areas where training can assist with employees retention.

# **Consumer Services Update**

## Carol Anderson reported:

Progress is being made in completing policy revisions. The new Transition Lead will provide additional pre-ETS services to transition students and potentially eligible transition students.

Employment Consultants are meeting every other week through Zoom to discuss job seekers, employers, and any needs or leads. On August 30, 2023, a celebration was held via Zoom for the Student Internship Program. Students who interned at Anderson County Disabilities and Special Needs Board, Greenville Memorial Hospital, Hilton Garden Inn/Homewood Suites by Hilton and Low Country Center in Summerville, and Palmetto Goodwill in Carolina Forest were recognized.

September is Workforce Development Month and Employment Consultants will participate in events at SC Works, Department of Employment and Workforce (DEW), and other community partners throughout the state.

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM), which celebrates the contributions of America’s workers with disabilities and inclusive employment policies and practices that benefit employers and employees. Posters were placed in each regional office displaying this year’s theme, “Advancing Access and Equity.” Employment Consultants in each region will plan, attend, and host events throughout the month to educate job seekers, employers and community members about SCCB services.

Prevention of Blindness Services is currently assisting 81 consumers with sight-saving procedures. This past year, the program has grown from one to four coordinators (one in each regional office). The agency is currently hiring for Region II; all other coordinator positions are filled.

The Independent Services Program Lead presented at the Teachers of the Visually Impaired Protégé Orientation on August 25, 2023, providing information on SCCB’s Childrens Services and Transition Programs. This led to an in-depth discussion with teachers about SCCB services with a goal to increase referrals for all programs.

Older Blind counselors continue providing outreach services in their communities. Each of the four regions in the state has at least one Older Blind Counselor to serve this growing population.

The Training Center currently serves seven residential students and three-day students. The Center Manager will bring in nine additional consumers within the next two weeks, ensuring classes are at capacity.

A Braille Instructor and an Administrative Coordinator joined the Training Center staff on September 5.

**BUSINESS ENTERPRISE PROGRAM UPDATE**

Ryan Skinner reported:

The Agency is waiting for a response from the Marines and Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) regarding the arbitration decision.

Fort Jackson was re-bid with ten vendors through active participation; multiple litigation actions have been filled as a result. The agency is waiting for the filings to be scheduled before interviews are conducted. In the meantime, other stands will go on the bid line.

The Columbia Campus is no longer a Business Enterprise Program (BEP) stand. Based on a criteria checklist and through active participation, it was acknowledged that the campus stand was not a satisfactory site for a Blind Licensed Vendor. Instead, the Columbia campus will become a training location for BEP trainees and consumers while providing meals for residents of the Training Center.

The final round interviews are being conducted for the BEP Lead position.

Ms. Olker asked if there was a report disclosing profits to blind licensed vendors to which Mr. Skinner replied yes.

# Old Business

None.

# New Business

The nominating committee made the following recommendation for officers for the Board of Commissioners:

Susan John, Chairperson

Ron Coleman, Vice Chairperson

Cathy Olker, Secretary

A motion was made by Mathias Chaplin to accept the recommendation and nominate those individuals for the specified offices. It was seconded by Dan Hanfland. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

# Public Comment

None

# Future Board Meeting Schedule

November 28, 2023

# Adjournment

There being no further business, Vice Chairperson John called for a motion to adjourn at 12:31 pm. A motion was made by Dan Hanfland and seconded by Mathias Chaplin. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.