Minutes

SRC-DBVI Meeting

February 24, 2016

**1:00 - 2:00**

(Teleconference)

**SRC Members on Phone:** Kathy Despres, SRC-DBVI Chair/CAP advocate; Sue Fairfield, MPF Rep; Lynn Merrill, SRC Vice Chair/PTGDU rep; Carol Mackey,general member; Cheryl Peabody, ACB Maine; Annette Tillsley, DBVI VR counselor; Walter Woitasek, Deaf-Blind rep;Brad Strause, SILC/AlphOne; Bud Lewis, DBVI Interim Director; Scott Murray, SRC-DBVI Admin. Assistant;

**SRC Members Absent:** Kelly Osborn, SRC Treasurer/Executive Director Goodwill Workforce Services; Chris Boynton, Maine State Library; Michelle Mason, VA Healthcare System/Blinded Veterans Advocacy, Nancy Moulton, Education Services for Blind and Visually Impaired Children; Darcy Gentle, Native American VR

**Members of the Public on Phone:** Jenn Ardito, CAP advocate; Brenda Drummond, DBVI, Jim Phipps, Iris Network Director, Carson Wood; Pauline Lamontagne, DOE; Marlena Donovan

**1. Call to Order:** Meeting called to order at 1:04 by Kathy Despres, SRC-DBVI Chair. Quorum established, decision made to designate session as full council meeting.

**2. Director's Report:** Bud updated group about DBVI's status:

*Director recruitment:* Yesterday's director candidate interviews canceled--two candidates withdrew (one took another job, other one had salary concerns (top end is $67K, believed to be same as VR director's) Nation-wide recruiting resumed, have interested parties contact Bud directly. Administration is open to conversation about increasing salary.

Jim raised concern that the department reconsider last fall's statements that DVR/DBVI consolidation "not off the table" should not be left as a theoretical possibility, could be dampening applicant interest. Bud reports Commissioner's office is considering explicit withdrawal of statement, sees no evidence that consolidation being considered, offered to field any inquiries about it from potential candidates.

Recruitment efforts underway: National bulletin boards/databases including CSAVR, AER, open to suggestions of others. Jenn mentioned NCSRC.

Bud also working with HR to change how the job is posted, make it stand out.

Kathy thinks it's too generic. Carol asked about market, very competitive.

Carolyn followed up on Jim's comments re: consolidation and cited high confidence in Bud, but concern about consolidation remains; homemaker still up in the air, too. Brad favors positive spin, we're committed to supporting and maintaining specialized blindness services. Bud agrees, not productive just to ask them to eat their words. Carolyn agrees, DBVI in a different place now than in October. Carson commented on strength of response from blindness community was due how the situation was framed and handled, community reassured by Bud's commitment to preservation of DBVI. Bud closed topic expressing hope that DBVI response to SRC comments in state plan will be opportunity to be more clear about their intentions.

*Fiscal status update:* Continuing to strengthen, lot of work with accountants, good progress, continuing to carry a number of vacancies and capturing additional data on pre-employment transition service expenditures to capture all available funds, also planning new contracts/RFP's which should be completed by 3/1 so we can start conversations with contract partners, hoping for additional savings.

$240k hole in the budget remains for IL program for older blind. Pleased with department's budget initiative but not anticipating support of supplemental budget. Got a package together for the SRC, will be sent to group with updated remarks.

Kathy alarmed about IL shortfall, feels just as serious as last summer's crisis and yet no 'buzz" from blindness community. Carson responded with retrospective on blindness community responses, including LD564 in 2009, getting positions filled, lots of roadblocks, IL has been under-funded for decades, people are frustrated, feel they've done all the can, it's up to the government to fix it now. Brad agrees--people don't know what to do, Kathy just wants to be sure potential for groundswell is still there; will be needed again. Marlena added that while problem has been well articulated, there's no feedback to indicate anyone's listening. Bud feels "buzz" needs to be focused in a clear message pointed at somebody who can do something about it, i.e. someone on Appropriations. Need a bill and a leader in the Legislature to recommend action. State has surplus this year, money may be available. Brad hears general VR has gotten help from Appropriations for past shortfalls. How did they do it and why can't we? Bud clarified that it happened in a different time and climate, not comparable to today. Carson wants to hear clear-cut plan, directive.

Jim restated proposed thrust of message to be: find a vehicle to attach roughly $240K for IL. No bill currently, so the request is to ask them to find one to add IL funding to. Bud working for administration so his role necessarily limited, feels advocacy has to come from the community. Kathy wants people to know SRC will "march on Augusta" again and ask for money--need to be organized when we to that.

Bud also aware of unevenness of instructional capacity across the state. Both DBVI and contract staff are working on a review of service priorities and geographic assignments to smooth that out.

**3. Old Business:**

*Mid-term Elections:* needed in April. Right now CAP persons (Kathy and Jenn) chairing both councils, not comfortable with that. In April Jenn will become voting member of SRC-DBVI, Kathy will be present as non-voting member and will be looking for new chairperson--members need to starting thinking about who will take over. Nominating committee will follow usual process.

*Fiscal Agent:* Seeking new accounting service to replace Syntiro, RFP not needed, so just seeking 3 bidders. Combined total is about $50,000 for two SRC's. Brad has someone in mind, (Alpha One is SILC the fiscal agent), will make some calls to drum up bidders. Email Brenda (CC: Kathy) if you have interested parties.

[Brenda joined at 1:57].

Brad returned discussion to Carson's point, adding a sense of urgency. Legislature done soon, so we need more than just opening a conversation, Brad will take lead role as SILC rep, but cites need for coalition, involve consumer groups, and people like Rep. Mike McConnell. Kathy cited AFB, NFB, PTGDU, suggested phone meeting with interested parties. Walter available to help, requested list of appropriations committees. Kathy stressed need for unified action, move forward as group, in organized fashion, Cheryl, Walter, Lynn, Kathy, and Brad need to talk and bring information out to groups before starting to approach people to ensure uniform plan and consistent message. Session is supposed to be over 4/20 but may end 4/1. Carol asked to join committee. Bud available to answer questions, but can't do advocacy as state employee, willing to sit in on meetings.

**4. Miscellaneous:** Web site updated, please review it, now includes Director's report, today's handouts, draft minutes (post-approval). Carolyn commented that today's meeting wasn't posted on web site.

**5. Adjournment:** Walter made motion to adjourn. Cheryl seconded. All in favor. Meeting adjourned at 2:06. Next full council meeting March 16.