

New Mexico Commission for the Blind
MINUTES (Final)

Regular Meeting Held Virtually
August 23, 2022 – 9:00 AM

1. Call to Order

Chairman Schreiber called the meeting to order at 9:08 AM.

2. Roll Call

Chairman Schreiber took roll, and Art Schreiber and Urja Lansing were present. Robert Reidy was absent.

3. Introduction of Guests and Staff

Staff included Greg Trapp, Executive Director; Jim Salas, Deputy Director for Vocational Rehabilitation and Independent Living; Patricia Savage, Executive Secretary; Kelly Burma, Skills Center Coordinator and SRC Liaison; Kevin Romero, Deputy Director for Finance and Administration; Jedi Moerke, Acting Director of the Orientation and Training Center; Daphne Mitchell, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Manager; Audrey Trujillo, Information Technology Manager; and Lucy Mallahan, Special Projects Manager. Also present was John Kreienkamp, Assistant Attorney General and Counsel to the Commission. Guests present included former Commissioner and SRC member Jeff Blair, SRC member Jim Babb, Diana Marquez, and Steve Ranger.

4. Approval of Possible Changes to the Agenda Order and Deletion of Agenda Items

There were no changes to the agenda.

5. Approval of Minutes for the Meeting of April 22, 2022

Ms. Lansing motioned to approve the April 22, 2022 minutes, and Chairman Schreiber seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken, and the minutes were approved with Ms. Lansing and Chairman Schreiber both voting yes. Dr. Reidy was absent.

6. Chairman's Report, Arthur A. Schreiber

Chairman Schreiber said Mr. Trapp will receive the William S. Dixon First Amendment Freedom Award in the government category on October 6, and congratulated Mr. Trapp on the accomplishment.

Mr. Trapp added that the award is from the New Mexico Foundation for Open Government, and it recognizes his advocacy for compliance with the Open Meetings Act, and for his advocacy for the use of accessible meeting platforms. Mr. Trapp thanked Ms. Burma for helping him with meeting platforms, saying they have advocated strongly for accessible meeting platforms. He said he had also worked with Mr. Kreienkamp to develop language for the Open Meetings Act resolution on how to meet during times of emergency. Mr. Trapp said he serves on several different boards and advocates for Open Meetings Act compliance.

Mr. Kreienkamp congratulated Mr. Trapp on a great job, and on behalf of the Attorney General's Office staff.

7. Director's Report, Greg Trapp

a. Major Trends and Developments, Greg Trapp

Mr. Trapp thanked Mr. Salas for watching over the Commission during his absence due to hip surgery, and praised him for a job well done.

Mr. Trapp said one of the things that the Commission really strives to do is to help people who are blind or visually impaired to know that they can do and accomplish whatever they want to, and that they can lead lives that are productive and be active members in their communities. Mr. Trapp said he is the Historian for the New Mexico Council of the Navy League of the United States. He said he is leading the effort on behalf of the Navy League to bring the conning tower, or sail, of the nuclear submarine USS Albuquerque to the city of Albuquerque. Mr. Trapp said there was a great article in yesterday's Albuquerque Journal about the submarine, and said there are numerous pictures of the USS Albuquerque and her thirty-three-year career in the US Navy.

Mr. Trapp said a number of different national organizations are working to increase the amount of funding for the Older Individuals who are Blind program. He said the Older Blind Grant funds Independent Living services for individuals who are 55 and older. He said the Commission augments that with state funds and program income. But most states only use the money that the Federal Government provides, and that amount has not changed since 2014. Mr. Trapp asked Ms. Burma to read a portion of a letter which he helped draft for the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind, which was sent to Congress to educate on the importance of increasing funding for the Older Individuals who are Blind program, and Ms. Burma read the letter as follows:

"The number of older individuals with severe vision loss is increasing rapidly due to the aging of the population and the corresponding increase of seniors with conditions such as age-related macular degeneration, glaucoma, and diabetic retinopathy. According to the 2019 American Community Survey, 6% of Americans who are 65 and older have

serious vision loss (3.2 million Americans). For individuals who are 75 and older, the percentage is even greater, with 8.8% having serious vision loss (1.9 million Americans). These numbers will continue to increase as the population ages. Studies are also showing that COVID can cause diabetes, with one recent study finding persons with even mild COVID having a 28% increase in the risk of diabetes (European Association for the Study of Diabetes). Another recent study out of the United Kingdom found an 81% increased risk of diabetes in the first four weeks after infection, and 27% in the first 12 months after infection (PLOS Medicine). This increase in diabetes will also result in an increase in the number of individuals who become blind or visually impaired due to diabetic retinopathy. The OIB Program provided independent living services to 53,785 individuals in 2019, the last full year of data prior to the pandemic. Because of the flat funding of the OIB Program and increasing operational costs, the number of individuals served in 2019 was about 1,000 less than served in 2018, which was about 1,000 less than the number served in 2017. This decrease in the number of persons served is despite the fact that the number of older individuals who are blind or visually impaired is actually increasing. An increase in funding would reverse this trend and enable the OIB to serve more individuals who are blind or visually impaired.”

Chairman Schreiber suggested that a copy of the letter be shared with our partners, especially support groups. Mr. Trapp agreed, and said a copy of the letter would be attached to the minutes.

Mr. Trapp said the National Federation of the Blind, working with the New Mexico School for the Blind, has adopted a proposal to establish Braille standards in New Mexico. He said the Commission supports that proposal. He said it will be discussed during the National Federation of the Blind convention that is taking place in Albuquerque this weekend. Mr. Trapp said there is a critical need for Braille instruction and for additional Braille teachers.

Mr. Trapp said the workforce participation rate in New Mexico is low relative to other states. He said the workforce participation rate is often confused with the unemployment rate. He said people will say there is an unemployment rate of 70 percent for persons who are blind. Mr. Trapp said that statement is actually incorrect, and that the 70 percent figure actually reflects the part of the blind population who are not working, which is called the workforce participation rate. He said the unemployment rate for individuals who are blind is still way too high, being about three to four times that of the rest of the population. He said the unemployment rate is a measure of those individuals who are actively seeking to become employed. Mr. Trapp said people with disabilities make up a large segment of individuals who are not working, and the vocational rehabilitation program helps those individuals to become employed and helps our economy and employers.

Mr. Trapp thanked Ms. Lansing for participating in the Audit entrance interview. He said the audit is confidential until it is released by the Office of the State Auditor.

Mr. Trapp said the Legislative Finance Committee hearing is scheduled for October 18 in the afternoon.

b. Administration and Finance, Kevin Romero

Mr. Romero said the agency had a successful FY22 fiscal year. He said the Commission was able to provide more services than in 2021, and expended \$14,462,100, which was 97.62 percent of the appropriated budget for FY22. He said this number is a significant improvement over FY21, when the Commission expended \$12,250,900. He said this has increased services to consumers by a little over \$2.2 million or 18 percent. Mr. Romero said the Commission has so far for FY23 expended \$1,797,300 and has encumbered \$209,700. He said this is a 50 percent year, meaning the Commission cannot expend or encumber more than 50 percent of the budget prior to December 31, 2022. He said the agency is on track to meet that requirement.

Mr. Romero reported on human resources, saying the Commission currently has 24 vacant positions, with 11 being Exempt/Other and 13 being Classified. He said this gives the Commission a 26.76 percent vacancy rate. He said the Classified vacancy rate is 20.47 percent, and the Exempt/Other vacancy rate is 41.51 percent, giving the Commission an overall vacancy rate of about 20.5 percent. He said the Commission is actively recruiting for 11 positions, and when those are filled the vacancy rate will be closer to 14.4 percent.

Mr. Romero said the Roswell and Santa Fe office facilities are reaching their 20-year lease terms in 2023. He said the agency has begun the RFP process, but is hoping to stay in the current facilities.

Mr. Romero said the agency had the opening conference with the Office of the State Auditor, and is providing documentation and sampling documents. He said most of the audit will be done remotely, but there may be some instances in which the Office of the State Auditor will come to the office to view documents that cannot be provided electronically. He said the goal is to have the audit submitted by the statutory deadline of November 1.

Mr. Romero reported on the Capital Outlay hearing to be held on October 13. He said the Commission had submitted an FY24 Capital Outlay Request for renovations and repairs for agency facilities. He said the total request was \$835,257, which is over the course of four years. He said for FY24 the amount requested was \$300,705 to address identified needs such as air conditioning, ADA compliance, and safety requirements.

Mr. Trapp said the Commission is working to fill the Orientation Center director position and has begun the interview process. He said he hopes to be able to make a decision this week. Mr. Trapp thanked Mre. Moerke for their work as the Acting Director of the Orientation Center.

Chairman Schreiber asked if that position was part of the 11 positions that the agency is trying to fill, and Mr. Romero said it was.

c. Independent Living and Vocational Rehabilitation, Jim Salas

Mr. Salas said he has done interviews and is checking references for the vacant Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor position in Albuquerque. He said the vacant Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor position in Roswell is posted on the State Personnel website. He said he is working to post the vacant Assistive Technology position in Albuquerque.

Mr. Salas welcomed two new Independent Living Teachers, Jose Burciaga who started in June in Roswell and is now doing his staff training at the Orientation Center, and Eric Gordon who started in August at the Albuquerque office.

Mr. Salas said John McNabb, an Albuquerque Independent Living Teacher, will be retiring at the end of the year. He said Deon Dodson, the Farmington Independent Living Teacher, will also be retiring soon. Chairman Schreiber, Mr. Trapp, and Mr. Salas extended their gratitude to Mr. McNabb and Mr. Dodson for their hard work throughout their many years of service.

Mr. Salas reported on the Students in Transition to Employment Program, saying the STEP program finished the summer with 26 students. He said the students were paid the Santa Fe living wage of \$12.95 per hour, a bump up from the New Mexico minimum wage. He said along with some of the regular administrative positions, STEP positions included food preparation, real estate assistant, and greeting card designer.

Mr. Salas said 17 consumers were placed in competitive integrated settings and two were placed in self-employment for State Fiscal Year 22, for a total of 19. He said the average wage was \$23.19 per hour. Mr. Salas said for federal FY22 year to date, the total is 14 consumers placed in integrated settings and one consumer placed in self-employment, for a total of 15. He said the average wage was \$24.65 per hour. Mr. Salas said a total of 12 consumers were in employment status, and that he is expecting at least another seven by the end of the federal fiscal year.

Mr. Salas said the Commission had 19 closures in state FY22, with 7 at \$30.00 an hour or more. He said the highest was \$49.81 per hour. He said one was in the twenties, seven were in the teens, and four were at minimum wage. He said nine were at 40

hours per week or more, three were at 30 hours per week or more, four were at 20 hours per week or more, and three were at 10 hours per week or more. Reporting on job categories, he said the placements included one all other Agricultural, Forestry and Fishing workers; one all other Health Service workers; one all other Sales and Related workers; one Artists and Related workers; one Bookkeeping, Accounting and Auditing Clerks; one Tank, Care and Truck Loader; one Production Inspectors and Testers; one Customer Service position; two Office Clerks; two Teacher Aids and Education Assistants; one Teacher or Instructor; one Teaching Assistance in Special Education; two Social Workers; one Lawyer; one Chemical Engineer; and one Electrical/Electronics Engineer. He said employers included Walmart, a placement at a church, a placement with a Disability Advocacy Organization, some placements at Albuquerque Public Schools, a placement with the City of Albuquerque, a placement with the State government of New Mexico, a placement at Kirtland Air Force Base, and placements within the Commission for the Blind.

Mr. Blair said he had a background in healthcare technology and engineering, and asked if there was anything that the Commission does that helps engineers and scientists. Mr. Salas said the STEP program had presentations by Cary Supalo and his company Independence Science, which specializes in making STEM careers accessible. Ms. Burma said that on July 27, as part of the last week of the STEP program, the students did chemistry experiments, and learned about a device that Mr. Supalo showed them how to use called a Lab Quest. She said it was an off-the-shelf device that has a touch screen and probes that can be hooked up by USB. She said a blind person can use a screen reader that is customized specifically for this device. She said students focused on experiments using the temperature probe and how to manipulate the temperature of various chemicals. Mr. Trapp said Mr. Supalo also did a training in June that included a pre-test and post-test on the metric system.

d. Orientation Center, Jedi Moerke

Mrs. Moerke said the Orientation Center has had two students graduate since the last meeting. Mrs. Moerke said the Orientation Center was unable to have a STEP program this summer due to COVID-19. She said the Orientation Center used that time in June to do some team building with the assistance of Lisa Maria Martinez who is a blind woman who has a life coaching business out of the San Francisco area. They said the training gave the Orientation Center an opportunity to learn about ways to help students learn to deal with challenges. Mrs. Moerke said the Orientation Center also had an immersion training for the dorm staff.

Mrs. Moerke said students returned in July, and that the Orientation Center now has five virtual students, one in-person student and a series of staff trainees. Mrs. Moerke said they have been contacted by three counselors who have consumers who would like to come to the Orientation Center for training, and a couple of virtual students are

also eagerly waiting to come to the training center. Mre. Moerke said the hope is that this will be the beginning of a trend of students returning to in-person instruction.

Mr. Moerke said the apartments are coming along nicely, and that Ms. Mallahan will speak on the apartments as a part of her report.

Mr. Schreiber asked about the STEP program in Alamogordo, and Mr. Trapp explained that one of the reasons the STEP program was not held in Alamogordo is because there was a significant increase of the very transmissible Omicron variant of the virus, and he decided it was not appropriate to have minors present in case of an outbreak. He said he believes it was the correct call, but it impacted on the ability to spend Pre-ETS funds. He said the Commission has to be concerned about the safety and well-being of the students, and an outbreak with minors present would have been difficult to manage.

e. Skills Center, Kelly Burma

Ms. Burma said the STEP program ran daily with six students, and another student was added in July. She said STEP included regular classes such as assistive technology, Braille, combined home and personal management, cane travel, and seminars. She said the Business of Blindness Seminars were done over Zoom, so no matter where students were in the state they could participate. She said STEP also had hybrid classes, including an advanced Braille reading group with one student and a couple teachers participating in the Skills Center, along with three students from around the state who participated over Zoom. As Mr. Trapp mentioned previously, a virtual seminar in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics was conducted. She said it was presented by Ashley Neybert who is with Independence Science. Ms. Burma said she wanted to focus the training on the student's weaknesses.

Ms. Burma reported on the Technology for Children program, saying so far in this fiscal year she has served two Technology for Children participants.

Ms. Burma said she is working with Mr. Trapp on a contract with the National Blindness Professional Certification Board for the National Certification in Unified English Braille Exam. She said the NBPCB has been very generous in not acting upon expirations of certificates during the pandemic. She said she is also looking at conducting a preparation seminar for people who may have had trouble with the exam in the past. She said the seminar will be held on February 2, right before the New Mexico Association for the Education and Rehabilitation Conference.

Ms. Lansing said Ms. Burma and the Skills Center have clearly been extremely busy, and Ms. Burma responded that she is very much looking forward to planning for next summer.

Chairman Schreiber asked how students are reading their books, and Ms. Burma said the students used Bookshare and the BrailleNote Touch. She said not all Braille books are in UEB.

8. Unfinished Business

a. Report on Apartment Construction at the Orientation Center, Lucy Mallahan

Ms. Mallahan said the apartments are going very well. She said there have been some delays due to COVID and supply chain disruptions. She said the approximate date of completion looks to be about September 15, 2022.

9. New Business

a. Approval of State Fiscal Year 2024 Request Budget, Kevin Romero

Mr. Romero said DFA just sent him the latest GSD rates, so he is having to make minor adjustments for the FY24 appropriation request. He said the FY24 request is going to be flat and based on the budget appropriated for FY23. He said the current budget is \$16,807,700, and that he is requesting the same budget for 2024. He said there are two reasons for the flat request. He said the budget amount gives the agency flexibility to grow while still giving the Commission sufficient funding to address any unexpected needs during FY24. Mr. Romero said of the \$16,807,700 request, the general fund request is \$2,439,800. He said the other state funds revenue is expected to be \$8,152,400, with the bulk of that being due to contracts with Kirtland Air Force Base and FLETC. He said the transfer amount between DVR and the Commission is the same, so the Commission would receive \$200,000 and would transfer \$100,000 to DVR. He said there is an expected increase in the FY23 federal award, so federal revenues are increased to \$5,865,500, with the bulk of that being in the VR Basic Support Grant. Mr. Romero said the agency is also requesting \$150,000 from fund balance. He said personnel services for FY24 is currently projected at \$6,246,400. He said, even with the \$6.2 million, the Commission is looking at approximately a 10.72 vacancy rate, which he said he thought is an appropriate vacancy rate. Reporting on contractual services for FY24, Mr. Romero said the Commission is requesting \$136,500, which is a slight decrease from FY23 of \$22,800. Mr. Romero said the Other cost category is \$10,309,400, and that it captures everything that is not personnel and contracts, and that it is flat with the FY23 request. Mr. Romero said the last category in the budget are transfers between the Commission and DVR. He said the Commission gives DVR \$100,000 of general funds, and DVR gives the Commission \$200,000 of program income. Mr. Romero said the Commission transfers the IL part B match to receive the IL part B funds, saying the amount is \$107,100, which is flat with FY23. Mr. Romero said the entire request for FY24 is \$16,807,700. Mr. Romero said the Commission will

also be submitting new performance measures and is awaiting approval from DFA and LFC in regard to the performance measures.

Ms. Lansing motioned to approve the FY24 Appropriation Request Budget as presented with the allowance for minor changes to the budget. Chairman Schreiber seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken, and the FY24 Appropriation Request Budget was approved with Ms. Lansing and Chairman Schreiber both voting yes. Dr. Reidy was absent.

Mr. Romero said he will work with Executive Director Trapp to get the certification signed and submitted by September 1.

b. Report on Ability to Provide the Full Range of Vocational Rehabilitation Services to all Eligible Individuals, Greg Trapp, Jim Salas, and Kevin Romero

Mr. Trapp said that this particular agenda item is something that the agency is required to do each year. He said if the Commission cannot provide the full range of vocational rehabilitation services to all eligible individuals residing in the state, then the agency has to implement an Order of Selection. He said the Commission has to determine whether the agency is able to provide the full range of vocational rehabilitation services to all eligible individuals residing in the State of New Mexico. He said the agency has to implement a waiting list should it be unable to provide the full range of vocational rehabilitation services to all eligible individuals., Mr. Trapp said the factors that go into this consideration include the budget and staff resources.

Mr. Salas said that in SFY22, the agency served 329 vocational rehabilitation consumers, which was down from SFY21 when the agency served 350 individuals. Mr. Salas said the agency has some counselor and assistive technology specialist vacancies, but despite those vacancies has been able to serve all vocational rehabilitation consumers effectively. Mr. Salas said he believes the agency is able to serve all eligible consumers based on the current and projected staffing levels.

Mr. Romero said he believes the agency has sufficient budget authority to purchase necessary equipment for our consumers and to maintain normal operations.

Mr. Romero said he believes the agency has the needed budget authority as well as cash on hand and the ability to draw down against our federal grants.

Mr. Trapp agreed, saying he thinks the Commission has both sufficient staff resources and sufficient fiscal resources to provide vocational rehabilitation services to all eligible individuals residing in New Mexico. He said the agency does not need an Order of Selection.

c. Status of Pre-Employment Transition Services, Update and Forecast, Greg Trapp, Jim Salas, and Kevin Romero

Mr. Romero said in regard to Pre-Employment Transition Services, there is an anticipated increase in federal VR funds. He said FFY 22 rolls up now in September, the Commission received \$5,252,643 for vocational rehabilitation basic support, of which 15 percent has to be reserved and expended for Pre-Employment Transition Services. He said the Pre-ETS total was \$787,896.45. He said for FY23 vocational rehabilitation Grant is expected to increase 6.2 percent, meaning the Pre-ETS reserve will increase to \$814,158. Mr. Romero said he thinks the agency can provide the required Pre-ETS services. He said the Commission has had talks with DVR on how the agencies can work together to meet the 15 percent state requirement.

Mr. Trapp said each year the agency must determine whether the Commission has the ability to provide all five of the required Pre-ETS services. He said that is the forecast part of this agenda item, and if the agency forecasts that it has the ability to provide the required Pre-ETS services, then the agency can provide the nine authorized Pre-Employment Transition Services. Mr. Trapp said the agency has difficulty spending all of the Pre-ETS funds. He said one of the reasons is that the Commission gets a little higher than average percent for the amount of the state share of funds that blind agencies receive. He said New Mexico also gets a higher relative portion of the vocational rehabilitation grant because the state is a relatively poor and very rural state. Mr. Trapp said, he forecasts that the Commission has the financial ability to provide all of the required Pre-ETS services. He said part of the analysis is also staffing, and he asked Mr. Salas to address the staffing issue.

Mr. Salas said the agency is able to serve all of the consumers that apply. Reporting on consumers who are age 14 to 21, three are in application status; one is in eligibility status and just determining eligibility for Commission services; and 56 are in service status with four of those not coded as students for Pre-Employment Transition Service purposes. Speaking of the remaining 52 in service status that were coded as students, Mr. Salas said 33 of those are in secondary education programs or high schoolers; 14 are post-secondary education; three are in the category of special education; one is in a career technical training track; and one is in the category of elementary. Mr. Salas said it is easy to fund and support the funding for those students, and the agency is able to attend to their needs very well.

Mr. Trapp said, given the number of students, given the budget, and given staffing, he forecasts that the agency is able to provide all five of the required Pre-Employment Transition Services to students residing in the state of New Mexico.

Chairman Schreiber said he knows NCSAB is working to get this requirement changed and asked if there is any hope that the Pre-ETS requirement might be changed. Mr.

Trapp said he has very little optimism that change will happen. He said the 15 Percent Pre-ETS reserve is really a miscalculation on the part of Congress, but that they really want to force VR agencies to have more of a paradigm shift and spend more resources on transition age students. He said it is a huge challenge, but he does not think Congress is going to do anything. He said a technical fix would be great, but he does not see that happening.

d. Report of Property Disposition Committee, Kevin Romero

Mr. Romero said the Property Disposition Committee met on August 18. He said the Property Disposition Committee received a request from the Business Enterprise Program to dispose of 31 items that were determined to be obsolete, unrepairable, and of no further use to the Commission. He said these are items that are used by blind managers such as cold drink machines, bill changers, cash registers, freezers, and ice makers for operations under the BEP program. He said the agency reached out to State Surplus, which refuse to accept the items. He said the Committee then reviewed the items, and that none of the items are on the Capital Asset List, and that none have a current resale value of \$5,000 or greater. He said the Committee's finding is that the tangible personal properties can be disposed of in the required manner of public auction through a third-party auctioneer. He said the notification letter is going to be signed by the Committee members today and will be provided to the Office of the State Auditor, at which point the thirty-day clock starts. He said thirty days from today the BEP Program will be notified that the items can be disposed of at that time. Mr. Romero added that a copy of the notification letter to the Office of the State Auditor will be provided for the minutes as documentation of the Committee report.

e. Report of Submission of the Combined State Plan, Process and Timelines, Jim Salas

Mr. Salas said he is reporting on the State Plan that will be effective for Program year 2024, which begins on July 1, 2024. He said the partners meeting was held earlier this month, and a timetable was identified that will be followed. He said the partners will start work on the State Plan in March of 2023. He said a facilitator will be hired to help the partners through the process. He said the expectation was that each of the partners will have their draft State Plans submitted to the Department of Workforce Solutions in October of 2023. He said it will then go to the State Workforce Board for their approval in December of 2023 and will be submitted to the Federal Government, through the portals in March of 2024. He said there will then be an approval process, which for the Commission will be with RSA. He said the new State Plan will be effective on July 1, 2024.

f. Approval of Open Meetings Act Resolution, Art Schreiber

Mr. Trapp said the Open Meetings Act Resolution needs to be reviewed annually. Chairman Schreiber, Mr. Trapp and Mr. Kreienkamp all agreed that the Open Meetings Act Resolution language was in good order, including the language on meeting during times of emergencies.

Ms. Lansing motioned to approve the Open Meetings Act Resolution to include the date of August 23, 2022, Chairman Schreiber seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken, and the Open Meetings Act Resolution was approved with Ms. Lansing and Chairman Schreiber both voting yes. Dr. Reidy was absent.

10. Commission Open Discussion

Ms. Lansing congratulated Mr. Trapp on his receiving this incredibly well-deserved award, Mr. Trapp responded with gratitude and said he has worked hard to make sure that agencies were in compliance with the Open Meetings Act.

11. Comments from the Audience

Mr. Steve Ranger asked about remote services. Ms. Burma said the Skills Center can provide virtual training as appropriate. Mr. Trapp said Zoom has opened new doors to teach remotely. He said he sees virtual training as a way to expand services statewide. Ms. Burma added that the State Rehabilitation Council has the teaching of virtual skills as a Goal and Priority. Mr. Trapp said it is also in the Strategic Plan as well.

Mr. Ranger asked Mr. Trapp if closed cases can be reopened. Mr. Trapp said the Rehabilitation Services Administration recently issued a new guidance statement about post-employment services. He said post-employment services must now be provided after a consumer gets a job, but before the case is closed. Mr. Trapp said if a consumer comes to the agency after the case is closed and needs additional services to remain employed or to advance in employment, then the agency will as quickly as possible open up a new case to provide services. Ms. Mitchell asked Mr. Trapp if a consumer closes their case before they achieve their employment goal, can they reapply for services. Mr. Trapp said anyone can reapply for services.

Ms. Marquez asked Mr. Trapp if he will still be director if Mark Ronchetti wins the gubernatorial election, and Mr. Trapp said historically new Governors have never changed the Commission for the Blind Directors.

12. Date and Location of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be either hybrid or virtual in Albuquerque, depending on the pandemic, and will be held starting at 9:00 AM on November 17, 2022.

13. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 11:41 AM.

Approved and Electronically Signed this 17th Day of November 2022

Arthur Schreiber, Chairman
New Mexico Commission for the Blind



Attachment: NCSAB OIB Letter

Dr. Bernice Davis

President,

National Council of State

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**Dr. Bernice Davis, President ▪ Carlos Servan, President-Elect ▪ Tracy
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August 17, 2022

The Honorable Rosa L. DeLauro
United States House of Representatives
Chair, Committee on Appropriations
2413 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger
United States House of Representatives
Ranking Member, Committee on Appropriations
1026 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Subject: The Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB) Program

Dear Chair DeLauro and Ranking Member Granger:

On behalf of the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB), I am writing to thank you for your support of the Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB) Program. The President's FFY 23 budget proposes to continue to fund the OIB Program in the amount of \$33,317,000, an amount that has not increased since 2014. However, during that time the number of individuals who are older blind has increased significantly due to the aging of the population.

The mission of the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB) is to promote through advocacy, coordination, and education the delivery of specialized services that enable individuals who are blind and visually impaired to achieve personal and vocational independence. NCSAB represents state vocational rehabilitation agencies that provide services to people who are blind and visually impaired. The OIB Program is administered through the vocational rehabilitation program in partnership with the U.S. Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration.

The number of older individuals with severe vision loss is increasing rapidly due to the aging of the population and the corresponding increase of seniors with conditions such as age-related macular degeneration, glaucoma, and diabetic retinopathy. According to the 2019 American Community Survey, 6% of Americans who are 65 and older have serious vision loss (3.2 million Americans). For individuals who are 75 and older, the percentage is even greater, with 8.8% having serious vision loss (1.9 million Americans). These numbers will continue to increase as the population ages. Studies are also showing that COVID can cause diabetes, with one recent study finding persons with even mild COVID having a 28% increase in the risk of diabetes (European Association for the Study of Diabetes). Another recent study out of the United Kingdom found an 81% increased risk of diabetes in the first four weeks after infection, and 27% in the first 12 months after infection (PLOS Medicine). This increase in diabetes will also result in an increase in the number of individuals who become blind or visually impaired due to diabetic retinopathy.

The OIB Program provided independent living services to 53,785 individuals in 2019, the last full year of data prior to the pandemic. Because of the flat funding of the OIB Program and increasing operational costs, the number of individuals served in 2019 was about 1,000 less than served in 2018, which was about 1,000 less than the number served in 2017. This decrease in the number of persons served is despite the fact that the number of older individuals who are blind or visually impaired is actually increasing. An increase in funding would reverse this trend, and enable the OIB to serve more individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

The OIB Program provides independent living services to individuals who are 55 and older and who are blind or have severe vision loss. The independent living services that are provided enable seniors who are blind or visually impaired to continue to live in their own homes and communities and avoid or delay transitioning into assisted living facilities or nursing homes. Without appropriate independent living services, seniors who are blind or visually impaired can also become dependent and isolated.

Many of the persons served by the OIB Program are also able to provide care to disabled spouses or provide childcare to grandchildren, helping to support the family. This support can enable a family member to remain employed, attend college, or avoid the need to enter a nursing home. One out of every four Americans is a caregiver for an older individual. In 2015, the typical working caregiver lost \$200 per day in wages and benefits (Stucki and Mulvey). According to the RAND Corporation, the contribution of America's caregivers to our health care system is valued at \$522 billion annually. Costs

associated with age-related vision loss are substantial. For example, the Alliance on Aging Research reports that visual impairments are one of the top four reasons why seniors lose their independence, contributing to medical and long-term care costs in excess of \$100.3 billion annually.

It is common for older individuals with blindness or vision loss to lack proficiency in the basic skills of cooking, traveling and digital communications. These individuals are also often unable to successfully use a computer, and lack the skills to complete online tasks which are increasingly essential for everyday life, such as using the internet to shop or pay bills.

The Rehabilitation Services Administration currently distributes the OIB funds, which require a 10% state match. The state vocational rehabilitation agencies that receive the OIB funds already have the infrastructure in place to provide training to older individuals who are blind. If the OIB funding is significantly increased, each state will be able to substantially increase the independent living services to individuals who are blind or visually impaired. Such an investment will have the benefit of reducing Medicaid and Medicare costs as fewer individuals who are older blind will need the services of nursing home or skilled nursing facilities.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any concerns or questions, or require additional information.

Respectfully,

Dr. Bernice Davis
President, NCSAB

cc: NCSAB Executive Committee

Attachment: Notification Letter to the Office of the State Auditor

Property_Disposal_Notification_CFB_08.23.22.pdf

August 23, 2022

Mr. Brian S Colón, Esq., State Auditor

Office of the State Auditor

2540 Camino Edward Ortiz, Suite A

Santa Fe, NM 87507

State Auditor Colón:

Pursuant to 13-6-1 (B) NMSA 1978, on August 18, 2022 the New Mexico Commission for the Blind property disposal committee reviewed and determined the attached listing of tangible personal property has a current resale value of \$5,000 or less, and that the tangible personal property is worn out, unusable or obsolete and is no longer economical or safe for continued use. The committee's finding is that the tangible personal property can be disposed and the proposed disposition of the tangible personal property is by public auction through a third party auctioneer.

The findings have been duly sworn and subscribed under oath by each member of the committee present.

8/23/2022

Signature - Laci Reynolds-Harmon

Laci Reynolds Date

Accountant & Auditor-A

Signature - Janelle Gonzales

8/24/2022

Janelle Gonzales Date

Finance Manager

8/29/2022

Signature - Kevin Romero

Kevin C. Romero Date

Deputy Director for Finance and Administration

CFO/CPO