

**DIVISION OF SERVICES FOR THE BLIND
BOARD MEETING MINUTES
FRIDAY, MARCH 8, 2024**

DSB BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

David Henry, NFB, Board Chair
Theresa Petrey, ACB
Erika Evans, At-Large
Keith Clark, At-Large
Tyrone Williams, ASBVI

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS PRESENT

Pamela Armstrong, VFP
Eric Yarberry, WSB
Terry Sheeler, OIB

DSB BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT

Tiffany Moore, AER

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS ABSENT

Larry Wayland, FAIRS
Kara Aaron, BVA

Attorney General's Office Representative: None

Governor's Office Representative: None

Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) Board Meeting Support Staff: Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes, Theresa Bertram, Amber Neal, DiAnnette Finks, Gustavo Manzanales, Amy Jackson, Sherlyn Harris, Deon Harris, LaTasha Mays, LaToya Baker, LaTasha Age, Tina Shores, Megan Lamb, Brandy Bryant, and Jeffrey Seay.

Others Present: Dr. Charisse Childers, DWS Director; Wednesday Cramer, DRA; Attorney Jim Goodwin, DRA

Meeting Agenda Approval-

Chairman David Henry asked for a motion to approve the meeting agenda. Theresa Petrey made a motion to approve the agenda. Terry Sheeler seconded, and the motion carried.

Board Meeting Minutes Approval-

Chairman David Henry asked for approval of the December 8, 2023 minutes. Erika Evans made a motion to approve the minutes. Theresa Petrey seconded, and the motion carried.

Director's Report – Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes:

Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes began the Director's report by thanking the Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) staff, and the DSB Board for their support. Dr. Williams-Stokes acknowledged Dr. Charisse Childers for being in attendance and extended the floor for Dr. Childers to speak. Dr. Childers responded by thanking Dr. Stokes for the opportunity to address the board members. Dr. Childers stated that she had a conflicting meeting today, so she would have to leave the meeting

soon to start her other meeting. Dr. Childers stated that she would be glad to answer questions regarding the new business item for the Department of Commerce realignment and would provide any input needed to support Dr. Williams-Stokes. Dr. Childers closed her statement by thanking the board and all other participants in attendance.

National Updates:

New RSA Commissioner- Dante Allen:

Commissioner Allen served as the Executive Director for CalABLE, California's qualified federal ABLER Act savings and investment program for people with disabilities. This program gives those individuals the ability to save and invest their resources. Dr. Stokes stated that she has met with Commissioner Allen a few times recently. Commissioner Allen is aware of some of the issues within the blind agencies across the nation. His platform and main priority are to start networking with all rehabilitation organizations. Dr. Stokes stated Mr. Allen has had a great start and has met with the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind, Council of State Agencies Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR), and Older Individuals who are Blind program (OIB) and is making a great effort to ensure that the challenges impacting the rehabilitation programs are addressed.

National Council of State Agencies for the Blind submitted a letter to the Senate Committee on Labor and Health and Human Services. Highlights of the letter are as follows:

- Resources in the Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB) program to help seniors experiencing vision loss maintain their independence. OIB has been funded at \$33.3 million for 10 years. Arkansas has received an average of \$285K-300K for those years. As the number of older blind individuals increases, the OIB dollars help seniors remain in their homes, and reduce the need for family or institutional caregiving and its associated expense.
- The number of older individuals with severe vision loss is rising rapidly due to the increasing prevalence of age-related macular degeneration, glaucoma, and diabetic retinopathy. With support, many seniors who have experienced recent vision loss can gain the skills and confidence needed to age in place, avoiding or delaying entry into assisted living facilities or nursing homes. Through OIB, seniors can receive training and devices that enable them to move about their homes safely, navigate public transportation, manage medications, shop for groceries, do laundry, and carry out other activities of daily living with minimal or no assistance.
- For many states, OIB is the only source of funding for independent living services to individuals who are 55 and older and who are blind or have severe vision loss. Vocational rehabilitation grants, for example, are restricted to serve only individuals who can obtain competitive integrated employment, an option that is not available to many seniors with vision loss.

- The training facilitated by OIB helps to avoid costs in multiple other areas of the federal and state budgets. In-home assessments mitigate fall hazards. Assisted living and nursing home costs are avoided or delayed. Spouses or children who might otherwise have to become full-time caregivers are able to continue their own employment. With independence training, seniors served by the OIB Program are even 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.
- Dr. Stokes mentioned that she attended the OIB Managers meeting and Randolph Sheppard meeting this quarter.
- **Randolph Sheppard Updates:** NCSAB will sponsor training for the Randolph Sheppard vending managers and administrative staff at the Spring 2024 meeting in April. Conversations with RSA continue to ensure blind agencies have a voice in the policy and decision-making process. The RSA Listening Sessions is one outcome from the meetings.

1. RSA Listening Sessions to provide feedback on the following:

A. Technical Assistance Circular: Initial Stocks and Supplies Issuance timeline: Quarter 2 – FY 2024

1. If an existing site changes from one established Business Enterprise Program (BEP) operator to another, is there a new six-month window during which initial stocks and supplies can be purchased and/or initial operating costs paid for with State Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VR) funds?
2. If “initial” refers only to the first six months of the establishment period of the site, how should programs address when a new BEP operator (vendor) assumes operation of a facility that has insufficient starting inventory?
3. Are loans permissible with VR funds to assist new vendors of existing sites in obtaining operating inventory?
4. If an existing site is converted from one type of operation to another type of operation (e.g., vending to micro market), is there a new six-month window during which initial stocks and supplies can be purchased and/or initial operating costs paid for?
5. How does what is permissible change if initial stocks and supplies are purchased with VR BEP funds versus being provided as part of an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE).

B. Technical Assistance Circular: Acquisition and Operation of Facilities

Issuance timeline: Quarter 3 – FY 2024

1. In instances where the State Licensing Agency (SLA) incurs costs in preparing a site for operation, when does the clock start for the six-months of initial operating costs? Do initial expenditures related to readying the site start the clock on the initial establishment period and thereby shorten the available six months for initial stocks and supplies and initial operating costs once the site is operational?

2. Are the following types of SLA expenditures and supports allowable with VR BEP funds, either as an investment in a site that may be operated by multiple different vendors over time, or as an investment in a particular vendor?

- a. Purchasing an existing business outright?
- b. Purchasing a building?
- c. Constructing a building?
- d. Purchasing land?
- e. Paying lease payments?
- f. Paying for the costs to renovate a building?
- g. Paying for insurance?
- h. Paying for permits?
- i. Paying for taxes?
- j. Purchase a vehicle(s) or food/delivery truck(s)?
- k. Paying franchise fees?
- l. Paying utility fees?
- m. Paying labor costs?

3. Is there a monetary cap on initial inventory, supplies and/or equipment?

C. Technical Assistance Circular: Management services and Set-Aside

Issuance timeline: Quarter 4 – FY 2024

- 1. What types of ongoing support can BEP provide, under “management and supervision,” to vendors after the initial six-month period has ended?
- 2. Can a vendor have a vested interest in a stock that was purchased using set aside and/or Federal funds if State rules permit this?
- 3. Is there a discrepancy between VR program regulations at 34 C.F.R. Part 361 and RSVP regulations at 34 C.F.R. Part 395? Specifically, are SLAs able to use Federal funds and set aside for management services provided beyond the initial establishment period for a vending facility?
- 4. What legal services are permissible with Federal VR program funds under management and supervision?
- 5. Are renovations, maintenance, and repair of sites permissible under management and supervision after the space has been acquired?

State Updates:

Dr. Williams-Stokes stated that the most recent budget update was enclosed in the board packets and encouraged board members to contact her with any questions or concerns. DSB has moved forward with spending reallocation dollars to strengthen VR efforts that are already underway. Dr. Williams-Stokes thanked DSB staff that contributed to putting DSB in a position to qualify for Reallocation funds.

Corrective Action Plan for Arkansas Division of Services for the Blind (DSB)

Dr. Williams-Stokes stated that the Corrective Action Plan (CAP) issued by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) is still in process. DSB has discontinued the use of the manual PARS process. The work completed on the CAP has been a team effort and she thanked the staff

involved for going the extra mile to ensure DSB regains compliance in CAP areas of concern. Dr. Williams-Stokes also mentioned that there has not been an update from RSA on the report submitted in October 2023, however, Dr. Stokes has spoken with RSA and was provided with a summary of what will be included in the report. DSB will continue to work with the fiscal department to get a grants management system in place. The grants management system will include collaboration with Department of Commerce agencies to ensure shared services are utilized. A summary of updates include:

Finding 1 - Insufficient Policies-Draft policy revisions for fiscal and program are in the promulgation process. Resolved

Finding 2 - Insufficient Internal Controls- DSB is working to update internal controls in AWARE and within the AASIS financial accounting system process. The process to procure a new grants management system (WebGrants) is under development. **This has been delayed due to incompatibility with vendors and systems. DSB will share this cost with Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS) due to being in a shared services position.**

Finding 3 - Provision of Pre-Employment Transition Services to Potentially Eligible Students with Disabilities – DSB is currently able to track Potentially Eligible students in AWARE which allows counselors to provide, or arrange for the provision of, pre-employment transition services to students with disabilities who are potentially eligible for VR services. During the RSA monitoring review period 2017-2019, DSB did not have that in place. **Resolved.**

Finding 4 - Obligations and Expenditures Not Properly Assigned to Correct Period of Performance -DSB is working with Alliance to address the budget module to ensure the period of performance is captured in AWARE. DSB is working to identify a grants management system or some other system that allows DSB to address the period of performance on the administrative side to capture non-Federal and Federal obligations and ensure expenditures are paid from the correct Federal award for the VR award. **Part 1 related to AWARE is resolved. The administrative finding is not resolved.**

Finding 5 - Financial Management System and Internal Controls Fail to Ensure Supporting Documentation is Maintained - DSB has not exercised the requisite methods of administration, financial management, or internal controls necessary to ensure financial accountability and the proper expenditure of funds. DSB must employ methods of administration that ensure the proper and efficient administration of the VR program, including financial accountability. DSB must implement financial management and internal control procedures necessary to ensure the proper expenditure of program funds for allowable program costs. These procedures must include the retention of supporting documentation for the expenditures. **The process to procure a new grants management system is under development.**

Finding 6 - Internal Control Deficiencies – Rates of Payment, Financial Reporting, and Personnel Costs- DSB is working with the TAC to develop effective internal controls and rates

of payment fee schedule to address this item. The procedures or PARS or tool used to report and track the Personnel costs is under development. – **Resolved**

Finding 7 - Lack of Internal Controls for the Development, Implementation, and Monitoring of Contracts- DSB does not maintain effective internal controls over the Federal awards necessary to provide reasonable assurances that it is managing the Federal award in compliance with Federal statutes, regulations, and the terms and conditions of the award. Specifically, internal control deficiencies exist for developing contracts, monitoring contracts, reviewing, and approving invoices, and supporting documentation, which does not permit DSB to ensure all costs charged to the contracts are reasonable, necessary, allocable, and allowable under the VR program. DSB does not have mechanisms to monitor and reconcile contracts reimbursed with Federal funds, to ensure that expenditures reported are accurate, allocable, and allowable, or to track account, and report program and fiscal data for service provision accurately on the RSA-2 or RSA-911 reports. **The draft contract administration policy was submitted to RSA on March 30th. No updates are available.**

Finding 8 - Maintenance of Effort (MOE) Reporting- DSB has reconciled the MOE reporting to include the Vending Facility Program Set-aside funds. **Updated information was submitted to RSA on March 30th.**

Dr. Stokes stated that employee performance evaluations process will happen in the next few months. She stated that Chairman Henry will work with Dr. Childers to ensure the information is submitted in EASE.

Field Services Administrator’s Report – Dr. Megan Lamb’s Report:

Since December, staff have hired 1 new VR counselor, 2 OIB counselors, and an Education & Coordination Instructor. We continue to advertise additional staff vacancies.

Counselors attended follow-up training on Supported Employment in January and working to recruit Supported Employment vendors. DSB hosted a Lunch and Learn for potential vendors and working to develop an in-person training for vendors on the SE process with DSB.

DSB’s OIB unit is actively serving consumers. Northwest and South are handling all OIB cases in the region. The counselor in Northeast has been assigned cases and will soon handle all OIB services in that region. Progress has been made on the hire for an OIB counselor for Central Area. The OIB Unit is supervised by Amy Jackson.

The Pre-ETS Team is preparing for Jump Start and the upcoming Transition Fair.

The Leadership team will participate in Part 3 of the leadership training in Hot Springs next week. These sessions have been great to help bring the team together and work to move the agency forward.

The Vending Facilities Program Team was able to attend the Sagebrush Conference, and the NFB Blast Conferences in February. A lot of great opportunities for learning, networking, and seeing the new technology available for our vendors. Some of the information has already been implemented within the vending sites and updates will continue to improve the program.

OIB Services and Outcomes Update – Amy Jackson:

DSB is currently serving 499 individuals in the OIB program. For Federal Fiscal Year 2023, which covered October 01, 2022, until September 30, 2023, DSB received 479 referrals to the OIB program and closed 110 cases successfully. For Federal Fiscal Year 2024, which began October 01, 2023, DSB received 206 OIB referrals and closed 67 cases successfully. Since the last OIB Advisory Council Meeting, DSB has added two new OIB counselors and is currently advertising for a third. Our current counselors 100% dedicated to OIB cover South, NE, and NW Arkansas regions and our VR counselors continue to provide services to the Older Individuals who are Blind in the Central region until another OIB counselor hired, onboarded, and trained. DSB continues to provide assessments, assistive technology devices and training on the devices, surgical and therapeutic treatment related to visual disabilities, orientation and mobility training, daily living skills, and transportation as needed to DSB consumers. The largest service request for FFY 2024 so far was surgical and therapeutic treatment related to visual disabilities followed by assistive technology devices and training on the use of the items. DSB continues to utilize funds provided from SSA Cost Reimbursement for OIB consumers.

OIB Manager recently attended the 2024 OIB Program Manager's Conference held in Albuquerque, NM. The theme was Continual Improvement. There were representatives from 37 states present. The speakers were Kendra Farrow (OIB-TAC Director), Lindsey Speights (OIB-TAC Program Coordinator), Jennifer Ottowitz, and Polly Abbott (OIB-TAC Older Blind Specialist) and participants engaged in group discussions and breakout sessions over various topics sharing information and practices as well as outcomes. As a group, we discussed Small Changes-Big Results, Hiring New Staff- identifying the right person for your team, The Art of Human Guide, and many other valuable topics. During our last breakout session, I learned about an online Low Vision Support Group opportunity: Well Connected covia.org connections@frontporch.net. The site has a wealth of opportunities to include one-on-one phone calls and group sessions. Well Connected is accessible to low-vision and blind participants. Materials are available in large print, Braille, and audio. Other states spoke positively about the support group for older individuals to help find common ground, fight loneliness, and help keep people engaged and active. Mrs. Jackson stated that she appreciated the opportunity to participate and make connections with peers across the nation. She stated that her goal is to help the OIB program continue to grow and provide the best possible services to the blind and visually impaired individuals in Arkansas.

PRE-ETS – LaTasha Mays:

Ms. Mays stated she was excited to discuss the upcoming Transition Fair and thrilled to announce that the event is being hosted by the DSB PRE-ETS team. Ms. Mays cordially invited staff to come out and attend this invaluable event to support the blind and visually impaired students and their transition to adulthood. Last year was a tremendous success and DSB's PRE-ETS team anticipates making this event even larger and better this year. There are currently 33 vendors confirmed, including organizations such as the National Federation of the Blind (NFB), American Council of the Blind (ACB), Pulaski Tech, UALR, WSB, Little Rock Eye Clinic, Goodwill, Wal-Mart, Little Rock Zoo, Pulaski County Sheriff's Office, and many more. Attendees can expect a wealth of resources and opportunities during the event. The Transition

Fair will be held on March 27, 2024, at 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at the Hilton Garden Inn located at 10914 Kanis Road, Little Rock. Lunch will be provided. Vendors are encouraged to set up at 9:00 a.m. Ms. Mays thanked the PRE-ETS team for assisting and getting things together, as well as Dr. Stokes and Dr. Lamb for always supporting the field staff and making sure DSB can host rewarding events such as this one. She indicated that Jump Start applications will be going out soon.

DSB Technology Lab Update – Gustavo

Manzanales:

Mr. Gustavo Manzanales stated that he had three sections to cover today. The vending facility program has received several requests and interests from potential new manager trainees. By following the policies and procedures rendered by RSA, the initiatives implemented are listed below:

VFP Section:

- Procuring new machines, RSA request being finalized.
- New trainees will start hands-on training in the next few weeks.
- RSA Compliance: Extra locations have been designated for some vendors.
- Blast/Sagebrush conferences (micro markets, coffee machines, networking).
- Attorney General's potential location with micro-market/smart machines.
- VFP staff will visit the Fayetteville and Fort Smith sites next week.
- Digital Payment options: Increase income, people are used to spending more.

Braille Section:

- Staff will attend the Braille transcriber's conference in CA.
- Networking, updates on braille code, and new rules.
- Reminder for alternative formats like large print, braille, or audio.
- Braille request form available for public, and internal use.

The DSB Tech Lab is working to hire a new DSB Technology Director. The client attendance remains consistent, and staff has made online training options available. The tech policies are currently being reviewed to ensure that DSB remains in compliance with federal Randolph Sheppard regulations. DSB strives to always do the best job for staff and counselors and bring satisfactory services to all consumers.

AIRS Update – Theresa Bertram:

Theresa Bertram updated the Board on the Arkansas Information Reading Services (AIRS) program. Ms. Bertram stated that AIRS staff will be attending the Leadership retreat that following week and the National Association of Broadcasters Show in Las Vegas in April.

Ms. Bertram expressed her delight and appreciation for everyone who worked to get the AIRS Plus machine up and working. This service continues to be a popular way for listeners to hear their favorite programs.

Ms. Bertram let the board know that since the weather was getting better, AIRS Radio is getting busier in covering events all over Arkansas to inform our listeners and keep them up to date.

Ms. Bertram has received feedback from people interested in AIRS services, and because of that listenership numbers have increased according to ARPBS analytics at <http://airs.aetn.org>. AIRS averaged approximately 1,400 listeners for the month. AETN-4 Audio is accessible on television with local channels, and the platform has about 100 listeners weekly. AIRS Plus, which can be reached at (844)-888-0981, has approximately 2,500 listeners. Newsline has approximately 300 listeners signed up with 100 loyal users. Information to join Newsline is on nfb.org. AIRS Radio has 300 active followers on Facebook. AIRS is now on Alexa. The command is “Open AIRS Radio.” Ms. Bertram is working to get audio descriptions for theater shows for consumers and reported that steps have been made in this area. AIRS also relies on DSB counselors to make consumers knowledgeable about AIRS services. Ms. Bertram thanked DSB staff and the Board for getting the word out about AIRS services.

Quality Assurance (QA) Unit Update – Jeffrey Seay:

The QA Unit is proud to announce that the Customer Satisfaction Surveys will soon be generated using a new platform, Qualtrics. The onboarding team will conduct an eight-week training to familiarize staff with the system. There will be a total of five users. Sherlyn Harris and Jeffrey Seay will serve as the administrators and the other three users are DiAnnette Finks (Staff Development Coordinator), Latoya Baker (Administrative Analyst, HR), and Gustavo Manzanales (Rehab Program Manager, VFP). The Qualtrics platform will allow us to modernize our satisfaction surveys. We will have the ability to text the surveys to our consumers with a 2-way texting method that was suggested by the DSB Business and Technology Director. Qualtrics also allow staff to create dashboards for overall responses and for each region (Northwest, South, Central, and Northeast) in addition to individual surveys for OIB and Pre-ETS. Staff will also be able to use this platform for consumer and staff training.

The QA Section is in the process of hiring an Administrative Analyst (DSB Auditor). The process should be completed by the end of June. The QA Manager and Auditor are participating in the 2024 Lead VR National Training Academy. QA Section is committed to reviewing cases and providing feedback to ensure DSB is successfully serving our consumers.

Mr. Gustavo Manzanales interjected to elaborate on the tech team’s part of the survey. Mr. Manzanales stated that a text will be received, and it will provide the surveys via audio or braille. Siri specifically provides a way for consumers to access the client survey as well.

Dr. Stokes chimed in and stated the plan is before DSB releases anything new, the goal is to get with consumer groups to find a way to communicate this information and provide training to ensure a response. Dr. Stokes stated the old way was no longer working, so DSB developed a new strategy to accommodate DSB consumers to obtain feedback about how well the

organization is doing, as far as, providing the services and programs that DSB has available. Mr. Jeffrey Seay followed up by stating, that the dashboard setup in the client survey is completely anonymous with hopes that consumers will give their honest feedback.

Business Engagement Update – Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes:

Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes stated that DSB is working to ensure agency objectives are aligned with the Department of Commerce and how it operates with its business engagement practices. This alignment includes all WIOA partners to ensure business partnerships to promote job opportunities for consumers. More information will be provided as progress is made in this area.

Old Business Section:

Corrective Action Update – Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes:

Dr. Williams-Stokes updated the board regarding the RSA findings (2) and (5) primarily dealing with financial management in the system DSB is using. DSB is looking at alternative options for a grants management system. Under the new realignment with the Department of Commerce, DSB is hoping to find a solution to resolve those findings. There is no update currently, but Dr. Stokes wanted to document on record that the board has been notified concerning the reviewed RSA findings. On March 30, 2024, a draft was submitted on finding (7) dealing with a lack of internal control in reference to contract monitoring. Dr. Stokes stated that hopefully, the draft is a finished and completed contract monitoring document that will be officially accepted by RSA.

DSB Board Appointments Update – Mr. David Henry:

Chairman Henry stated that the Governor's office was contacted to find out where DSB stands on board appointments. The Governor's office responded that no new appointments have been considered. Chairman Henry indicated that he would continue to reach out to the Governor's office regarding new appointments. Chairman Henry stated that despite the vacancies, DSB would like to remain a strong board. Chairman Henry asked members to contact him if there was an interest in a nomination for the board's Secretary position.

Dr. Williams Stokes stated that voting Board members are appointed by the Governor. As of today, 2 members Keith Clark and Erica Evans are term-limited as of June 30, 2023, Tyrone Williams is awaiting reappointment and William "Bill" Heaston's position is vacant due to his being deceased. Dr. Williams-Stokes stated that the Governor's office has been notified of the vacancies. Board members should plan to serve until they are officially replaced. Requests have been submitted by individuals who are interested, however, DSB is still waiting for the Governor's office to make a final decision.

New Business:

Board Committee Assignments – Mr. David Henry:

Mr. Henry assigned the board members to the perspective committees. Those committees and names are listed below:

DSB Board Appointed Committees as of 03/2024

Legislative Committee:

Erika Evans

Theresa Petrey

David Henry

Budget Committee:

Tyrone Williams

Tiffany Moore

Eric Yarberry

By-Laws Committee:

David Henry

Terry Sheeler

Tiffany Moore

Employee of the Year:

Keith Clark

Terry Sheeler

Theresa Petrey

Consumer of the year:

Keith Clark

Eric Yarberry

Erika Evans

OIB Committee:

Eric Yarberry Theresa Petrey

Terry Sheeler

David Henry

Mr. Henry asked the board members if they had any questions or concerns regarding the new appointments. Theresa Petrey asked Mr. Henry to get with her regarding duties and activities for committees. Dr. Stokes followed up by saying over the years, the committees are assembled “as needed”.

Department of Commerce Realignment – Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes:

Dr. Stokes stated that the Department of Commerce is undergoing realignment however it is not a transformation like the one administered in 2019. Some department heads and their focus have shifted, and DSB is impacted. Dr. Childers will oversee a new area called Workforce Policy and Innovation section. This involves the state workforce board and the policy and program development for DWS and compliance, all still under the Department of Workforce Services. The Arkansas Economic Development Commission (AEDC) deals with business and outreach for entrepreneurship, military affairs, marketing, community engagement, and other areas. With the realignment, there will be a shared services area, in which Secretary McDonald has named a new chief fiscal officer for the Department of Commerce. With that being the case, DSB has been working with those individuals to ensure DSB will remain in compliance. Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) has been informed about the changes to ensure compliance with Vocational Rehabilitation requirements. Based on RSA’s recommendation, questions were drafted with the help of DSB’s assigned attorney. The questions were developed to obtain a response from Commerce about DSB employees’ participation in shared services.

State Plan Update – Dr. Megan Lamb:

The State Plan for Arkansas has completed the public comment phase. Comments have been reviewed and responded to in the draft submitted to RSA for review and feedback.

Report on RSA WIOA Dash Boards/WIOA Update – Dr. Megan Lamb, Asst Director:

WIOA Update – Megan Lamb:

Dr. Megan Lamb stated that the RSA II is compiled by using the Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) from October 1, 2023, to March 1, 2024. The report categorizes expenditures by service category. For the same period of October 1, 2023, to March 1, 2024, the expenses by service category were as follows: assessment was \$6,148.20; diagnosis and treatment \$264,642.92; training \$612,457.69; job services \$38,100.00; transportation \$53,364.64; maintenance \$82,879.08; rehabilitation technology \$207,527.70; supported employment \$0.00; reader services \$0; personal attendant services \$0.00; interpreter \$458,980.94; other services \$165,142.94; technical assistance \$0.00; customized employment \$7,000.00. Training category as follows: graduate college was \$76,337.47; four-year college \$150,543.03; junior college \$2,709.91; vocational \$103,625.42; on-the-job \$300.00; apprenticeship \$4,515.23; disability skills training \$157,696.60; and, miscellaneous (costs that were more specific to the consumer’s individual needs) \$278,354.24; job readiness \$116,730.00. Job services are as follows: job search assistance \$0.00; job placement \$38,100.00; on-the-job support time-limited \$0.00.

Dr. Lamb explained that the RSA II not only outlines expenditures but identifies the number of actual participants who received each service. The services provided from October 1, 2023, to the present are listed in the following categories: assessment 30; diagnosis and treatment 164; graduate

college 10; four-year college 37; junior college 4; vocational training 8; on-the-job training 1; apprenticeship training 1; disability skills training 24; miscellaneous training 26; job search assistance 0; job placement assistance 19; on-the-job supports time-limited 0; transportation 38; maintenance 18; rehabilitation technology 71; reader services 0; personal attendant services 0; other services 61; customized employment 1; job readiness training 12; and technical assistance 0.

Dr. Lamb stated that the program year 2023 contains one-quarter of the data. The program year runs from July 1, 2023- June 30, 2024. For the PY 2023, there were 28 Measurable Skill Gains, 28 secondary report cards, or post-secondary transcripts, a rate of 28/170 is 16.5%. The target rate is 55.6%. The Measurable Skill Gains (MSG) Program Year 2022 there were 50 Measurable Skill Gains, 42 secondary report cards or post-secondary transcripts, and 5 skill progressions, 2 training milestones, 1 education functional level increase. The rate of 24/145 is 27.9%. The target rate is 25.0%. A program year (PY) is divided from July 1 – June 30. The period used for reported performance measures is July 1, 2023 – December 31, 2023.

Performance Measures PY2023 (July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024)

- ▶ Measurable Skill Gains
 - ▶ Target Rate of 57.6%
- ▶ Credential Attainment
 - ▶ Cohort of exits from Jan – Dec 2022
 - ▶ Target Rate of 30.90%
- ▶ Employment Rate 2nd Quarter
 - ▶ Cohort of exits from PY2022.
 - ▶ Target Rate of 61.5%

- ▶ Employment Rate 4th Quarter
 - ▶ Cohort of exits from Jan – Dec 2022
 - ▶ Target Rate 57.9%
- ▶ Retention with the Same Employer
 - ▶ Cohort of exits from Jan - Dec 2022.
- ▶ Median Wages 2nd Quarter After Exit
 - ▶ Cohort of exits from PY2022.
 - ▶ Target Rate \$5,787.00

2023 Credentials Earned

- ▶ Credentials Earned During PY
- ▶ 1 Associates Degree
- ▶ 3 Bachelor's Degree
- ▶ Reported Credential Rate is 2/9 22.22% %

2022 Credentials Comparison

- ▶ 2 Master's Degree

- ▶ 1 Vocational/Technical Certificate
- ▶ Reported Credential Rate is 4/10 40%
- ▶ DSB recognized as the most improved state agency by RSA.

Employment Rate PY2023

- ▶ 2nd Quarter After Exit – 103 Participants
- ▶ Employment Rate (103/198) is 52.0%
- ▶ Target Rate is 61.5%
- ▶ 4th Quarter After Exit – 78 Participants
- ▶ Employment Rate (78/169) is 46.2%
- ▶ Target Rate is 57.9%
- ▶ Retention PY2022 (57/94) is 60.6%

Employment Rate PY 2022

- ▶ 2nd Quarter After Exit – 94 Participants
- ▶ Employment Rate (94/211) is 44.5%
- ▶ Target Rate is 60.5%
- ▶ 4th Quarter After Exit – 65 Participants
- ▶ Employment Rate (87/251) is 34.6%
- ▶ Target Rate is 57.3%
- ▶ Retention PY2022 (71/128) is 55.5%

Employment Rate/Median Wages PY 2023

- ▶ At Exit - \$15.72 per hour
- ▶ 2nd Quarter After Exit - \$8,551.45
- ▶ Target Rate is \$5,787.00

2022 Employment Rate Comparison/Median Wages PY2022

- ▶ At Exit - \$16.00 per hour
- ▶ 2nd Quarter After Exit - \$7,948.79
- ▶ Target is \$5,697.00

Program Outcomes

- ▶ VR Program Year 2022 Closures (July 1, 2022 – June 2023)
 - 149 Closed - Rehabilitated
- ▶ VR Program Year 2023 Closures (July 1, 2023 – December 2023)
 - 28 Closed – Rehabilitated
- ▶ OIB Federal Fiscal Year 2023 (October 2022 - September 2023)
 - 115 Closed - Goals Met
- ▶ OIB Federal Fiscal Year 2024 Closures (October 2023 – December 2023)
 - 27 Closed - Goals Met

FAIRS Update – Theresa Bertram on behalf of Larry Wayland:

Theresa Bertram stated there is no change regarding FAIRS and that there has not been any recent money spent. However, representatives will be attending the upcoming DSB Transition Fair and are looking forward to it.

Report on Quarterly Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB) Advisory Committee Activities-Terry Sheeler or designee.

OIB Report- Terry Sheeler:

Terry Sheeler provided a recap of the OIB Meeting held this morning prior to the DSB Board Meeting. Ms. Sheeler stated that Dr. Stokes provided an agency update and Dr. Lamb provided a field services report. Ms. Sheeler highlighted the transportation committee update which will remain on the OIB agenda since follow-up information is still needed. Other topics discussed included the Advisory Council member roster and getting all the partners to the table. The OIB staff has been helpful and greatly working to fill vacancies. Also, for members who have not been attending meetings, the OIB Committee has been working with those individuals to get them to attend or possibly replace them if they cannot participate effectively. Dr. Megan Lamb introduced the new OIB Manager, Amy Jackson who provided the committee with an OIB update which has been included in this report above. There was also shared information from other agency representatives, and this concludes Ms. Sheeler's report.

Disability Rights Arkansas (DRA) – Mollie Hernandez:

Mollie Hernandez stated that she was also joined by other advocates Wednesday Cramer and Attorney Jim Goodwin, comprised of the employment team for Disability Rights Arkansas. Currently, DRA is assisting two DSB consumers through their client assistance program. DRA representatives will be present at the DSB Transition Fair in the coming weeks. It was a fantastic event last year, and DRA is excited to be participating again this year. DRA representatives will also be attending the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) State Convention in April. Ms. Hernandez finished by saying she looks forward to seeing other organizations and participants who may be attending any of these events in the upcoming weeks.

Report on Quarterly AR State Independent Living Council (AR-SILC) Activities-. Dr. Sha' Anderson or the designee

Dr. Fran Sha' Anderson was not present. A written report was provided to Board Members prior to the meeting.

Consumer Input:

American Council of the Blind (ACB) - Theresa Petrey:

Mrs. Petrey stated that the American Council of the Blind (ACB) has started back to meeting in person since February. The January meeting was on a conference call, but the February meeting was held at a local pizza establishment. However, ACB has decided to alternate between in-

person and virtual meetings going forward. Preferably in-person meetings will be held on the even numbered months during the calendar year. ACB is still deciding on a date for its state convention, however, the month of August is desired since right now multiple venues in the Fayetteville area are currently booked between now and May. The ACB National Convention will be held in Jacksonville, FL, beginning July 5 – 12, 2024. There will be virtual components to the national meeting during the week of June 24 – 29, 2024. The event will be preceded by an online auction on June 22, 2024, and individuals are welcome to join the auction and bid and/or spend money. The auction will consist of food and technology products, among other very interesting items. This concludes the ACB report.

National Federation of the Blind (NFB) – David Henry:

Currently, the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) is in the process of getting ready for the state convention which will be held April 12 - 13, 2024, in Jonesboro, AR at the Hilton Garden Inn Hotel. There will be auctions along with many speakers, including DSB and DRA with many others. There will also be a virtual component to attend this meeting by Zoom. If anyone is interested in any information about attending, please contact Nena Chadwick, the NFB affiliate president, or you may go to NFBAr.org to retrieve further information about the organization and the upcoming conference in addition to what NFB has going on within the state. Also, in July the national convention will be held in Orlando, FL on July 3 – 8, 2024. Further information regarding the national convention may also be found online at NFBAr.org and this concludes the NFB report.

World Services for the Blind (WSB) – Eric Yarberry:

Eric Yarberry reported on a couple of upcoming events that will include blind and visually impaired individuals. One of them will be happen in Morrilton involving Deena Lambert who is a blind representative from NASA. As a native of Arkansas, Ms. Lambert is going to discuss “inclusivity” and be a part of the eclipse activities, hosted by the Arkansas Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER). WSB, at UALR, is also doing an inclusive solar eclipse experience, this event is providing some hardware that allows blind and visually impaired individuals to experience the solar eclipse audibly. On the World Services for the Blind (WSB) front, on April 25, 2024, in Northwest Arkansas there is going to be a Dining in the Dark” event. Tickets are \$100 each and if you are interested in attending you can find information on the Eventbrite website by simply searching “WSB - Dining in the Dark.” Regarding the facilities here, WSB is continually striving to make upgrades. Right now, WSB is working on replacing new windows throughout the campus facility, and a new front porch on the Fair Park Blvd facing side of the building, in July. Mr. Yarberry stated that it is important for WSB to update its facilities and welcome the community. WSB is now taking applications for its summer program, which takes place from July 7 – 26, 2024, capping out at 15 students this year. On that account, if there are students interested, please send Mr. Yarberry an email, so that way WSB can get their information. Students will be staying at UALR for those three (3) weeks, and of course, students will be attended by staff. The summer program was awesome last year, and it brought in support from community business leaders. Thanks, to DSB and DRA for their

contribution to the WSB summer program. The program really gave the students access to the resources that they will need transitioning into adulthood.

Schedule of Next Meeting:

Chairman David Henry stated the next DSB Quarterly Board Meeting is scheduled for Friday, June 14, 2024, at 1:00 p.m. at the Department of Commerce building.

Motion to Adjourn:

Chairman David Henry asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Terry Sheeler made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Theresa Petrey seconded. The motion carried.

ADJOURNED at 2:41 p.m.