

**DIVISION OF SERVICES FOR THE BLIND
BOARD MEETING MINUTES
FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2024**

DSB BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

David Henry, NFB, Board Chair
Theresa Petrey, ACB
Erika Evans, At-Large
Chris Barnes, ASBVI

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS PRESENT

Eric Yarberry, WSB
Terry Sheeler, OIB
Larry Wayland, FAIRS
Pamela Armstrong, VFP

DSB BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT

Vacant, Lions Representative
Keith Clark, At-Large
Tiffany Moore, AER

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS ABSENT

Vacant, ASBVI
Kara Aaron, BVA

Attorney General's Office Representative: Aaron Lowery

Governor's Office Representative: None

Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) Board Meeting Support Staff: Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes, Theresa Bertram, DiAnnette Finks, Gustavo Manzanales, Amy Jackson, Sherlyn Harris, Deon Harris, LaTasha Mays, Kyle Jones, Gwendolyn Johnson, Megan Lamb, and Brandy Bryant.

Others Present: Cody Waits, DWS Director; Nicole Walsh, ASD

Meeting Agenda Approval-

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

Board Meeting Minutes Approval-

Chairman Henry asked for approval of the June 14, 2024, minutes. Erika Evans made a motion to approve the minutes. Terry Sheeler 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.

State Updates:

RSA Reallotment Announcement:

Congratulations to the DSB Team and DSB Board for their leadership. Listed below are the RSA Reallotment Funds awarded to the Division of Services for the Blind. DSB received \$11,544 in Older Individuals Who Are Blind and \$1,276,353 in Vocational Rehabilitation reallotment dollars! Dr. Stokes indicated that the VR award amount on the Rehabilitations Services Administration was published incorrectly and should read “AR Blind” as the recipient of the VR dollars. A request has been made to RSA to make the correction. Dr. Stokes thanked DSB staff for their dedication to individuals who are blind or visually impaired in the State of Arkansas.

Table 2: Reallotment Funds Requested and Amounts Awarded

FAIN	State	Agency Type	Additional VR AMT Requested	AMT Awarded Per Statutory Formula with ID Preference	PCT Request Received
H126A240005	CA	Combined	60,000,000	29,326,633	48.9%
H126A240007	CT	General	8,750,000	2,175,289	24.9%
H126A240008	CT	Blind	325,000	80,796	24.9%
H126A240011	DC	Combined	1,500,000	1,500,000	100.0%
H126A240016	ID	General	10,000,000	10,000,000	100.0%
H126A240017	ID	Blind	200,000	200,000	100.0%
H126A240018	IL	Combined	30,000,000	12,118,120	40.4%
H126A240026	ME	General	1,000,000	1,000,000	100.0%
H126A240027	MD	Combined	6,000,000	4,952,176	82.5%
H126A240028	MA	General	33,747,146	4,833,183	14.3%
H126A240029	MA	Blind	700,000	100,252	14.3%
H126A240032	MN	General	5,407,078	5,407,078	100.0%
H126A240039	NE	General	785,672	785,672	100.0%
H126A240040	NE	Blind	500,000	500,000	100.0%
H126A240044	NJ	Blind	2,100,000	2,100,000	100.0%
H126A240047	NY	General	10,000,000	10,000,000	100.0%
H126A240048	NY	Blind	2,000,000	2,000,000	100.0%

FAIN	State	Agency Type	Additional VR AMT Requested	AMT Awarded Per Statutory Formula with ID Preference	PCT Request Received
H126A240052	OH	Combined	19,500,000	14,458,760	74.1%
H126A240054	OR	General	5,000,000	2,299,564	46.0%
H126A240055	OR	Blind	4,737,849	2,178,997	46.0%
H126A240056	PA	Combined	55,000,000	13,774,106	25.0%
H126A240062	SD	General	400,000	400,000	100.0%
H126A240067	VT	General	4,702,663	660,617	14.0%
H126A240068	VT	Blind	500,000	70,238	14.0%
H126A240069	VA	General	4,000,000	4,000,000	100.0%
H126A240070	VA	Blind	1,500,000	1,500,000	100.0%
H126A240071	WA	General	4,000,000	4,000,000	100.0%
H126A240072	WA	Blind	1,000,000	1,000,000	100.0%
	AL	Combined			10
H126A240082			3,694,836	3,694,836	0.0%
H126A240091	CO	Combined	2,500,000	2,500,000	100.0%
H126A240092	TX	Combined	30,711,532	30,482,239	99.3%
H126A240095	WV	Combined	21,000,000	2,791,674	13.3%
H126A240098	AR	General	1,276,353	1,276,353	100.0%
H126A240101	IA	General	2,250,000	2,250,000	100.0%
34			334,788,129	\$174,416,583	

DSB Statewide Meeting will be held on December 11-13, 2024, at the Double Tree Hotel-Little Rock. The DSB Board will have training on Thursday, December 12, 2024. A speaker from the Attorney General's office is pending for the training.

White Cane Safety Day will be held at World Services for the Blind (WSB) on October 15, 2024. Save the date announcements will go out to the President of consumer organizations and partners.

Dr. Stokes shared the following updates regarding Commerce Shared Services:

1. August 30th-Informed that the Vending Facility Program Fiscal Analyst and Fiscal Specialist will move to Commerce Shared Services Finance. Staff have been moved into the EASE system under the DSB Fiscal Support Supervisor instead of the actual Supervisor of Business and Technology Administrator.
2. Commerce/DWS is working with RSA to address questions regarding shared services and the impact on DSB employees. An approval from RSA to move forward with Shared Services under the currently approved state plan or MOU has not been received by the DSB Director. RSA did mention that they "will be available to provide technical assistance to ensure the processes are compliant with federal statutes.
3. Three employees were moved under the DSB Fiscal Support Supervisor. The DSB Director was not included in the plan to move the employees, which caused confusion among the employees involved. Two Vending Facility Program Employees and one DSB Extra Help Fiscal Employee were involved. The move was made by ARS's Chief Fiscal Officer. The question to Fiscal Services was regarding the VFP program and staffing, and long-term sustainability. To my knowledge, the plan is to move all employees with a fiscal title to Fiscal Shared Services regardless of whether the functional role operates on the program side.
4. Dr. Williams-Stokes indicated that her recommendation to resolve the issue with Fiscal Shared Services is to move any fiscal activities currently implemented by the Vending Facility Program staff to the fiscal staff for DSB to ensure long-term sustainability for the Vending Facility Program and to avoid unnecessary disruption to consumer services and to move existing fiscal staff to Department of Commerce (DOC) positions to work under Shared Services.
5. DSB and ARS signed an MOU to satisfy RSA's concerns regarding ARS staff providing Shared Services to DSB. The MOU is used to ensure that DSB receives Human Resources, Information Technology, and Fiscal Services. Any services provided by Commerce or DWS should be billed to DSB to ensure Shared Services are recorded properly. RSA requires DSB to have an indirect rate, cost allocation plan, or an approved billing process in place.

DSB Director Recommendation to the DSB Board:

1. Division of Services for the Blind is an Independent Commission which means the Board is required by legal statute to supervise the fiscal and administrative operations of the agency. The DSB Board is responsible for hiring the Division Director and gives authorization to the Director to hire staff to carry out the activities for the agency. DSB received approval from the Rehabilitation Services Administration to participate in Shared Services under a Memorandum of Understanding, and DSB Director Stokes and Arkansas Rehabilitation Services Commissioner Baxter signed that agreement. The recommendation is that the DSB Board Chairman meet with Department of Commerce Secretary Hugh McDonald and Director Cody Waits to discuss the realignment plan and the duties of the DSB Board regarding staff participation in the Shared Services. The goal is to ensure the DSB Board and DOC agree with the DSB staff participation in Shared Services and ensure the DSB Director works in a non-hostile work environment as the actions approved by the DSB Board are carried out per federal and state legal requirements.

Dr. Williams-Stokes stated that the most recent budget update was enclosed with the board packets and encouraged board members to contact her with any questions or concerns.

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 July 2024, however, Dr. Stokes has spoken with RSA and was provided with a summary of what will be included in the report.

***Consumer Success Story: Ronnie Patterson**

DSB Technology Lab & Vending Facility Program Update – Gustavo Manzanales:

Mr. Gustavo Manzanales stated that the Vending Facility Program (VFP) has received several requests and interests from potential new Vending Facility Program manager trainees. Staff are required to adhere to policy and procedures rendered by RSA for the Randolph Sheppard program and the DSB VFP. The current initiatives for VFP are listed below:

VFP Section:

- Overview of the status: sixty-five locations (14 highway locations, 34 third party locations, 17 managed by vendors), and 163 machines.
- These locations are visited each month. Cheryl Atkinson and Debra Newton monitor these locations every month and correct any issues that may arise.
- Overview of the process of getting new blind vendors, machine purchase, and training.

- Currently, the policy and procedure manual for RSA is being updated.
- The program has five current trainees and 2 potential trainees.
- Annual sales meeting that occurred August 10th: Financial literacy from Penny Forward, tech training, Vistar product vendor presented.
- Presented the President of the Blind Vendors to speak Pam Armstrong.

Tech Lab:

- Tech Lab New Hire: Megan Hudgins, Technology Director
- Conferences: Attended National Federation of the Blind conferences and learned new technology trends.
- Lab updates: renewing online service, and equipment.
- Lab location: The Lab moved to a permanent location near counselors at the Little Rock University office.
- In August, there were 69 consumer visits, 12 referrals received, and 11 recommendations were written by the Tech staff.

Braille Section:

- Mrs. Charlie Cain-Davis identified a Braille repair company to service DSB Braille equipment. Mr. Manzanales reminded board members to send alternative print requests to Mrs. Davis.

The final location for the technology lab has been moved to the DSB counselor's area at the University Local Workforce Site. The DSB Tech Lab has hired a new DSB Technology Coordinator (Megan Hudgins). The consumer's attendance remains consistent, and DSB Tech staff has made online training options available.

AIRS Update – Theresa Bertram:

AIRS Radio focus: **Quality of Life and Options**

AIRS averages approximately 1,400 listeners each 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. Newline has approximately 553 listeners signed up with 100 loyal users. The information to join Newline is on nfb.org. AIRS Radio has 300 active followers on Facebook. AIRS is now on Alexa. The command is "Open AIRS Radio."

Newline-

- 553 Number of Subscribers
- 1160 Calls for August – down about 100 since May
- 4256 Web Sessions – up about 1000 since May

- Working closely with Sandee Pinkstaff with Creative Descriptions. AIRS's agenda is to push audio descriptive services at live events in Arkansas, especially theatre, and great momentum is being gained in this area. Follow AIRS Facebook for opportunities for audio description.
- The end of summer programming is wrapping up and moving into fall programming. The new books to read: “Southern Fried” by Rex Nelson and “Jesse James,” The First Missouri Train Robbery by Ronald H Beights, as well as our Haunted Arkansas series are available.
- AIRs staff attended numerous events this quarter.
- Reporting information that is relevant to our listeners (Quality of Life) is a priority.

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

Change Teams for Retention, Organizational Culture, and Process Improvement have been selected as part of the process to continue to improve DSB as an organization. Training for the staff involved is scheduled for October 9-10, 2024, with the VRTAC-QM and includes a diverse cross-section of employee participation. These teams will begin working on feedback from staff and reviewing aspects of the agency for ways DSB can improve and grow as an agency. DSB has been asked to present as part of a panel at the CSAVR Leadership Forum in October on our work with the Employee Engagement Survey and Change Teams.

DSB is collaborating with partners to sponsor White Cane Safety Day on October 15th at World Services for the Blind. In addition, DSB will participate in National Disability Employment Awareness Month and has a consumer speaking at the October 1st kickoff event.

DSB hosted the annual Field Services Meeting June 18-20, 2024, where staff talked about teamwork, morale, and agency goals. June 26-27, 2024, the Pre-ETS Team met with the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition: The Collaborative to discuss Pre-ETS services, best practices, and providing services. DSB will continue to work with the TAC to improve the provision of Pre-ETS services and ensure the obligation to spend at least 15% of our VR funds on Pre-ETS Services. The Assistant Director attended the ACB National Convention in July. DSB VR Counselors and supervisors will attend the WIOA Partners Meeting on November 6-8, 2024, in Little Rock. DSB’s OIB counselors will receive free training from World Services for the Blind on October 3rd, and two of the four OIB counselors have applied for the Mississippi State Vision Specialist Program.

DSB has been working to fill vacant positions. Since the last meeting, DSB has hired a VR counselor for Jonesboro, an OIB Counselor for Central Arkansas, a manager for the DSB Technology Lab, and a Quality Assurance Auditor. DSB was also able to promote staff in the technology lab to Administrative Analysts for the Technology Lab. In August, the Fayetteville Office welcomed a new intern from the University of Arkansas Master’s in Rehab Counseling program. On September 30, 2024, the new Statistician and Pre-ETS Counselor for Northeast will start. However, DSB still has several vacancies. The Field Administrator position has been vacant since October 2023 and has not been advertised. This delay is due to having to convert the

position from a DHS classification to a Commerce title through Human Resources, and this position has not yet been released back to DSB. DSB has counselor vacancies in Little Rock, El Dorado, and West Memphis. DSB cross-graded a counselor position to the vacant Grants Coordinator position. In addition, due to the hiring freeze on GS01-04 positions, DSB has 10 Administrative Specialist vacancies throughout the state and has started hiring extra help staff to reduce the workload impact. Currently, DSB has 1 Extra Help starting with the AIRS program, and 3 Extra Help staff starting September 30, 2024, to assist the Magnolia, Monticello, and Little Rock offices. DSB is also in the hiring process for additional extra help for Russellville, El Dorado, and the Central Older Individuals who are Blind team.

OIB Transportation Committee Update – Dr. Megan Lamb

DSB has not received contact from the DHS transportation committee in over a year and was not able to contact the chairperson for this committee.

Old Business Section:

DSB Board Member Appointments Update – Chairman David Henry:

Chairman Henry stated that the Governor appoints voting Board members. Currently, two members Keith Clark and Erica Evans are term-limited as of June 30, 2023, Tyrone Williams has resigned with Arkansas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, and the position needs a new appointee and William “Bill” Heaston is deceased and needs to be replaced with a new appointment. Contact was made with the Governor’s office regarding the vacancies and no new appointments have been made. The DSB Board does have several people who have applied for the positions. Dr. Williams-Stokes added that current board members are encouraged to continue serving as board members as indicated in the board member guidelines.

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 September 30, 2024. The report categorizes expenditures by service category. For the same period of October 1, 2023, to September 11, 2024, the expenses by service category were as follows: assessment was \$15,391.29; diagnosis and treatment \$622,692.39; training \$1,741,000.29; job services \$81,250.00; transportation \$123,690.89; maintenance \$166,738.88; rehabilitation technology \$409,367.37; supported employment \$2,780.00; reader services \$0; personal attendant services \$0.00; interpreter \$61,101.40; other services \$1,051,466.30; technical assistance \$344.00; customized employment \$7,000.00. Training category as follows: graduate college was \$124,519.88; four-year college \$288,442.97; junior college \$5,856.97; vocational \$216,710.71; on-the-job \$5,536.00; apprenticeship \$4,515.23; disability skills training \$291,633.03; and, miscellaneous (costs that were more specific to the consumer’s individual needs) \$592,805.50; job readiness \$210,980.00. Job services are as follows: job search assistance \$1,000.00; job placement \$70,350.00; on-the-job support – time-limited \$3,225.00; on-the-job support - supported employment \$6,675.00.

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 68; diagnosis and treatment 278; graduate college 13; four-year college 49; junior college 6; vocational training 18; on-the-job training 5; apprenticeship training 1; disability skills training 39; miscellaneous training 38; job search assistance 2; job placement assistance 43; on-the-job supports time-limited 2; transportation 60; maintenance 43; rehabilitation technology 129; interpreter 2; reader services 0; personal attendant services 0; other services 87; customized employment 1; job readiness training 18; technical assistance 1, and on-the-job supports supported 2.

Dr. Lamb stated that the program year 2023 contains the full year of data. The program year runs from July 1, 2023- June 30, 2024. For the PY 2023, there were 52 Measurable Skill Gains, 47 Participants, 1 Educational Functioning Level, 4 Secondary Diploma/equivalent, 45 secondary report cards, or post-secondary transcripts, and 1 Skills Progression rate of 47/209 is 22.5%. The target rate is 55.6%. In the Measurable Skill Gains (MSG) Program Year 2022 there were 50 Measurable Skill Gains, 42 secondary report cards or post-secondary transcripts, 5 skill progressions, 2 training milestones, and 1 education functional level increase. The rate of 33/189 is 17.5%. 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 – March 31, 2024.

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

- ▶ 2 Associate's Degree
- ▶ 5 Bachelor's Degree
- ▶ 1 Attained Degree Above a Master's (e.g., Ph.D., Ed.D., J.D., M.D.)
- ▶ High School Equivalency (GED)
- ▶ Reported Credential Rate is 3/10 30%

2022 Credentials Comparison

- ▶ 2 Master's Degree
- ▶ 1 Vocational/Technical Certificate
- ▶ Reported Credential Rate is 4/10 40%
- ▶ DSB is 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 - \$16.00 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 – June 2024)
 - 115 Closed – Rehabilitated
- ▶ OIB Federal Fiscal Year 2023 (October 2022 - September 2023)
 - 115 Closed - Goals Met
- ▶ OIB Federal Fiscal Year 2024 Closures (October 2023 – June 2024)
 - 235 Closed - Goals Met

Employee of the Year Update - Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes:

Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes reported on the Employee of the Year (EOY) process. DSB Board selects one and/or several employees of the year depending on selection from the EOY committee. Ms. Brandy Bryant will email nomination packets no later than October 15, 2024, to board members assigned to the EOY committee. The nominees received a score of “4” which is “exceeds performance” category.

Consumer and Student of the Year Update – Dr. Megan Lamb:

Consumer of the Year (COY) and Student of the Year (SOY) nominees are being submitted by counselors and are due to the Assistant Director by September 30th. The final list will be submitted to the DSB Board COY/SOY Committee by October 15, 2024.

New Business:

SFY 2025 Biennial Budget – Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes – Vote Required*:

The Biennial Budget Preparation process has changed. Going forward, staff will work with Commerce Fiscal Shared Services to prepare the Biennial Budget. The current recommendation for the 2026-2027 State Fiscal year is as follows:

Administrative Operations- \$6,864,721
 Programs- \$6,000,000

The additional funds added are to ensure sufficient resources to provide services and operations for the agency.

Funds were not budgeted for Capital Outlay expenses. This includes vehicles if Commerce decides not to lease vehicles. DSB will need at least 5 new vehicles to cover travel throughout the state.

Chairman David Henry asked for a motion to approve the SFY 2025 Biennial Budget. Erika Evans made a motion to approve the SFY 2025 Biennial Budget. Theresa Petrey seconded, and the motion carried.

DSB Board Travel – NSRC – Chairman David Henry:

Chairman Henry stated that travel to the National State Rehab Council (NSRC) conference will be hosted in Seattle Washington on October 19-20, 2024. DSB Board members are encouraged

to attend. Therefore, if any employees or board members are interested in participating, please let Dr. Cassondra Williams-Stokes or Brandy Bryant know so that they can make the appropriate travel arrangements.

DSB Board Annual Training- Dr. Cassondra Williams-Stokes:

The DSB Board has an annual training to educate board members on various topics related to oversight of the Division of Services for the Blind. Relevant training has focused on Fiscal, Vocational Rehab, and OIB. The Attorney General's office has provided training to address governance and implementation of the Independent Commission legal statute. The training normally takes place 9:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m. on the Thursday before the December board meeting. The DSB Board will have the training on Thursday, December 12, 2024. The DSB Board Training speaker is pending, awaiting a response from the Attorney General's office.

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

National Federation of the Blind (NFB) Historical Review of Division of Services for the Blind – Chairman David Henry:

Chairman David Henry began by stating the historical part of DSB in the 1960s was under rehabilitation services. In 1972, the organization became a separate entity. At that time, DSB did not have a governing board, and because of that board members were advisory under rehabilitation services. In 1983, under Act 481, was enacted by the state legislature, which created the Division of Services for the Blind Governing Board. This board was created to respond to the needs of blind or visually impaired Arkansans. The board was created using a framework of having individual stakeholders, meaning those consumer organizations that deal with the blind, such as NFB, and ACB, then we also have representatives from Lions. We have representatives from education, veterans, Friends of Arkansas Information Reading Services (FAIRS), and many other agencies. The DSB Board is an Independent Commission as you heard presented today. The primary responsibility is overseeing and directing the agency under the direction of Dr. Cassondra William-Stokes who was hired by the DSB Board.

Mr. Larry Wayland added that he has been around since 1978. When Mr. Wayland joined, he started working for the Agency for the Blind in El Dorado which was still a separate agency working under the general rehab agency. But in the early 1980's, the agency was being reduced quite a bit and members were sitting around wondering where they were going to be next. The building on 411 Victor Street was getting pretty empty and Bill Clinton was Governor at that time and moved DSB under DHS as a separate agency and the board was established in 1983. Since then, DSB has been working as a separate agency under the Department of Human Services. So, until just recently, "I do not know the exact year I think around 2020 we were put under the Department of Workforce, but still a separate agency." Mr. Wayland expressed that he hopes DSB continues to operate as such to be able to provide direct services for the blind and visually impaired.

Ms. Donna shared her experience as a counselor in the field with the agents and with clients. Ms. Donna stated, "I can tell you for sure that I should have stayed a counselor because I enjoyed it much more than trying to supervise grown-ups. I like doing one-on-one work. I think my main

focus has been that when you start shared services for fiscal and all that, it's fine. But like you said, Cassandra, DSB has an MOU now, you need to make sure whatever changes they make, they do not just slide in on you like they did before. And you need any, you know, whatever you are going to do specifically as far as responsibilities and benefits, all that needs to be in writing because down the road, stuff gets changed and people do not remember why the changes were made. People are good at asking forgiveness rather than permission and suddenly, the process gets changed.”

“So, I said, I remember when I was in DHS in 1981 and shortly thereafter Ray Scott came in with the governor and revamped DHS. That was a total disaster because we were under three different pay plans. You know, some people, like I said, were paid with a shift differential because they had to operate 24-hour facilities. Some people were paid twice a month. Other people are paid every two weeks. So, it was just trying to consolidate, it never really got all the way consolidated and it just eventually most of it was taken back apart when another governor and thing and that seems to be what happens sometimes things get put together or they get taken apart. And then other changes get made. Like you said those people right now are talking about some of the physicians only being fiscal, but then if their responsibilities change and they put them doing other fiscal jobs, then you lose staff that you are paying and you don't have the positions or the budget to replace because you're already budgeting to pay these other people and things just get slid in on you and get changed. And like I said, people seem to forget.”

“But the main thing I noticed that we need to avoid is too much consolidation of services because, before Dr. Stokes, our director decided to put things together. The VR counselors were going to start doing some limited mobility training. They were going to do rehab teaching. And it did not work very well because for one thing, they were supposed to be doing a VR counselor job, and that was one whole set of skills and one whole thing they had to do. When we had clients who needed to learn Braille and all, there were two or three of us who ended up going way outside our area to provide that service because the people that were in that area, there was not a Rehab Teacher or there was a Rehab Teacher that did not know how to do any of that. So, you really need specialized services. The thing is, you cannot have successful VR outcomes if people do not have those other skills. If they do not know how to get to work, if they do not know how to do their laundry, get their groceries, all those other things take care of their other life skills. Then they are not going to maintain successful employment. You know, it is like you must know how to get to work, how to find your desk when you get there, how to organize things at your job. I know the first job I had with DHS, and I walked in to do an interview. The first thing they freaked about was they had a multi-line phone and how was I going to know which line was ringing? So, I would know not to answer someone else's call or pick up? You know, it was not mine. And they, you know, it was a simple thing, like a light probe but, they didn't know that, and you need somebody who knows about those devices like Gustavo said, you know, we need people that know about accessible technology and then just basic low tech.”

Mrs. Terry Sheeler joined the conversation by stating that she served as the DSB board chair during the transformation to Commerce. Mrs. Sheeler recommended open and continual communication with DOC. Mrs. Sheeler worked a lot with the Attorney General's office via e-mail mainly and worked with the DSB Director. Several of the board members attended the

Arkansas Rehab Council Advisory Board meetings to understand and process the information. Mrs. Sheeler said the plan for Director Waits to get more information to be transparent and create open lines of communication for everyone. Mrs. Sheeler wrapped up her comments by suggesting that all board members must be present in the conversation so they can understand and process how shared services may affect the Division of Services for the Blind in the future.

OIB Report- Terry Sheeler:

Mrs. Terry Sheeler stated that the OIB met this morning. The OIB meeting has all its agendas and meeting minutes approved prior to proceeding with the meeting. Dr. Stokes gave DSB's Directors' report and Megan gave the DSB field services report. Mrs. Sheeler moved on into old business where transportation was discussed. This has been on the OIB agenda for a while and the OIB Committee received some information today that the transportation committee no longer exists with DHS. So, the OIB committee is looking into other avenues regarding transportation. The OIB Committee would like to invite some speakers to the next meeting again to obtain more updated information. The OIB list is getting updated and will keep board members updated on progress. Amy Jackson provided the OIB staff update and the OIB Service and Outcome Update to include the reallocation announcement. Then the committee talked just for a quick minute about the lab, and the new people in the lab, which is great. The OIB Committee looks forward to the DSB Board training opportunity in December. The next meeting is in March 2025.

FAIRS Update – Larry Wayland:

The Fairs Board is an Advisory Board for what was previously Arkansas Information Radio Reading Services, which is now the AIRS Plus news line. Mr. Wayland stated Ms. Bertram is doing new and creative things with the broadcasts and with NewsLine. Mr. Wayland said he knows sometimes he hears about the problems with Newsline and works to resolve the issues quickly. Mr. Wayland concluded by saying that FAIRS meets quarterly, and Ms. Teresa Bertram did a really good job with the report today.

Disability Rights Arkansas (DRA) – Wensday Kraemer on behalf of Mollie Hernandez:

Ms. Wensday Kraemer introduced herself and stated that she works with Mr. Tom Masseau and Mollie Hernandez as a disability employment advocate at Disability Rights Arkansas (DRA). For the DRA report, Ms. Kraemer stated that DRA currently under the client assistant program is working with one consumer of DSB to help them communicate better with their counselor. DRA staff will attend the Arkansas Association of People Supporting Employment (APSE) First Conference in October in Hot Springs.

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. Teresa Petrey stated that the ACB state affiliate will not be holding a convention this Fall, but will have one in the Spring, April 25th, and 26th in Fayetteville. Mrs. Petrey will confirm with the ACB State President Rita Reese-Whiting and will have that information of the venue's actual venue by December at the Hilton Garden Inn in Fayetteville. Mrs. Petrey was able to attend the national ACB Convention in Jacksonville, FL. ACB had general sessions, of course, and a lot of the voting was done virtually. We contacted our delegate and or alternate delegate of our state or special interest affiliates. I had three or four people to reach out to test my vote, and we did that making the voting process faster. We had some meetings that were done before the actual convention, they were done via Zoom on June 27th, 28th, and 29th. The meetings were composed of different speakers talking about things like books in some states being banned in certain schools and how to obtain a membership card at your local Public Library and what your local Public Library can offer you, even though you are blind or visually impaired, some type of print disability.

Mrs. Petrey indicated that she was able to test out the Glide. The Glide is a type of mobility device that you hold a handle, you walk with it, and it's supposed to be able to detect if there's an object or a person in front of you, and it would stop and then you could work your way around whatever that object or person is so that you don't bump into him, her or whatever the object is. Mrs. Petrey also shared that she wanted to check out a smart cane called WeWalk. WeWalk is a type of cane to help blind or visually impaired individuals navigate as they walk.

National Federation for the Blind (NFB) Chairman David Henry:

Chairman David Henry gave a brief synopsis regarding NFB. The National NFB Convention was held in Orlando, Florida. Currently, NFB is getting ready to have some fundraisers to raise money for the Washington seminar in which the organization will go to Washington, DC for advocacy work. NFB will also have a state convention in Northwest Arkansas next year in the first part of April.

Arkansas School for the Blind (ASBVI) - Dr. Chris Barnes:

Dr. Barnes stated that ASBVI has been working closely with DSB to work with some supports on their end to strengthen their vocational programs as part of an expanded core curriculum. ASBVI is working with DSB to strengthen the residential program. ASBVI has also been working with their partnerships with World Services for the Blind to be able to look at how their transitional support services and their independent living skills programs can be strengthened as well. So, School for the Blind is getting support there to begin a lab process there on their campus that will get the work that they need to do to strengthen the process. ASBVI is also working with the Governor's office to support the School for the Blind and School for the Deaf joint building structure. ASBVI is working with an architect to build those programs and try to look at that building now. ASBVI has had several stakeholder meetings to look at those buildings, what they would look like, and to identify the needs. The Governor and the legislature

have been supportive of those processes. ASBVI is excited about what is going to be happening in the future. Dr. Barnes knows that the partnerships that ASBVI is having with DSB and World Services for the Blind and other external partners are going to only help them to build their programs to the full capacity. ASBVI is also looking at trying to expand its career and technical offerings and utilizing its partnerships as well as building additional partnerships with Pulaski Tech and other universities to be able to assist with the process.

Dr. Williams-Stokes announced White Cane Safety Day will be held on October 15, 2024, at World Services for the Blind. The Save the Date will go out to the Presidents of consumer organizations and partners.

Schedule of Next Meeting:

DSB Statewide Meeting will be held on December 12-13, 2024, at the Double Tree Hotel - Little Rock. Located at 424 W. Markham Street. Little Rock, AR 72201. In the Main Conference Room - Salon D. The DSB Board will have training on Thursday, December 12, 2024.

Motion to Adjourn:

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

ADJOURNED at 3:31 p.m.