Greetings Council,

Given the packed agenda, I am going to keep my report brief.

Deadline Reminders

SSB staff, along with the Council, have some work to do and pretty tight deadlines coming up.

You will be hearing a lot more today on the Combined State Plan, which is currently coordinated by Jennifer Beilke, but I will emphasize there will be some quick turnarounds and future voting needs around this. The Council is a key part of our CSP, and many of the committees are working on portions of the plan.

In addition to the CSP, we once again have the SRCB Annual Report deadline coming up. Lisa Larges, who coordinates and compiles the report, shares the following:

1. A report from each of the committees is by November 10th.
2. She would love a suggestion for someone or something to profile in the report.

I just want to express my appreciation to you all for your time in helping us with these two items. It just shows how important the work of the Council is, and how we do not and cannot do this work without you.

# Cafeteria Remodel Public Hearing Portion

Much like I had to do with ending order of selection, I also have to hold a public hearing on our upcoming cafeteria remodel. This is because this project falls under the category of establishment and construction, which needs to be included in the Combined State Plan. We are proposing some updates and modifications to our cafeteria to allow for our SSU & WDU rehab teachers, as well as community partners, to conduct 1x1 and group training sessions. The updates include:

* Reconfiguring the alcove into a walled off space with a door for private instruction
* Turning the kitchenette into a fully functional kitchen and laundry area, complete with countertops, cabinetry, and appliances
* Wiring, paint, flooring, lighting, venting, etc

The cost of this project is approximately $80,000, and the majority of the remodel comes from vocational rehabilitation dollars, with a small portion coming from older blind and other state dollars.

The cafeteria general space will still be available for SRCB members, the public, and staff. There will be information on when the kitchen space will be unavailable if there is private instruction happening. However, outside of the employee lunch hour and SRCB meals, this space doesn’t tend to get incredibly busy.

Are there any questions, concerns, or feedback from the public?

# Employer Reasonable Accommodation Fund Updates

We welcome Ray McCoy as our ERAF program coordinator. Ray started today, and he will be hitting the ground running.

The ERAF account technician, which is the fiscal support for the program, just came down on October 2nd and interviews will begin soon. We hope to have someone in that position by next month.

And, we have almost completed our first ERAF reimbursement to an employer.

As I mentioned last month, the key to a successful launch is a good outreach campaign. Our website is up and running [www.mn.gov/deed/eraf](http://www.mn.gov/deed/eraf) so please help us spread the word that this program exists.

# Assorted Projects and Notable News

## National Disability Employment Awareness Month

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month. VRS and SSB staff hosted an employer event on October 3rd. There were several presenters, and a number of employers received awards for their partnership with us in hiring people with disabilities.

## Community Partner Highlights

We had 2 new contracts executed and 1 is almost executed. These include: Envision Foundation – College Success Program (Formerly Learning Ally, Virtual Employment Services & Pre-ETS), Hands On Tech, Inc. – Debbie Bock, Vanward Consulting Services, LLC. (virtual employment services & Pre-ETS).

Next Community Partners + SSB Staff Forum is October 10th from 10am to Noon and takes place virtually by Zoom. The topics for October’s forum include a presentation on the Employer Reasonable Accommodation Fund (ERAF) with program resources for Community Partners and a website demonstration. There will also be a facilitated townhall discussion on contracting with SSB and the State of Minnesota. We will be gathering our community Partners’ experiences and ideas related to SSB and State of MN contracting requirements and ways to reduce barriers.

## Outreach News

A lot of our outreach these past few months has to do with our Communication Center Language for All work, especially as it relates to revitalization of Dakota and Ojibwe. We have been doing a lot of connecting with the Governor’s Office, State of Minnesota tribal liaisons, and the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council. Our hope is we can present the work the Communication Center has been doing at the next MIAC conference and make sure that what we are doing is bringing value to the community.

## Assistant Secretary Glenna Gallo Visit

We were excited to welcome the US Dept of Education OSERS Assistant Secretary Glenna Gallo to SSB. She was visiting Minnesota as part of the Secretary Cardona’s Raise the Bar bus tour. The Assistant Secretary go to hear from our very own Corbb O’Connor, a college student who received our services, Catherine Durivage with MBTBL, and several staff. She then toured our Communication Center, and Anna Werner presented her with a tactile graphic of the Dept of Education seal.

## Update from Engineering

Due to changes in technology, the Communication Center will no longer be able to provide audio materials on cassette. We apologize in advance for any inconvenience that this may cause our customers.

At this time, we can make cassettes up by hand, in those cases where there is absolutely no other alternative. At some point, we will not even be able to do this because of aging equipment.

## Pre-ETS and Transition Quick Hits

* Our August canoeing activity with Wilderness Inquiry had 10 students learning about self-advocacy and teamwork while paddling on the Mississippi.
* Sky's the Limit will be presenting a workshop with MSAB students Nov. 6-8.
* We will host a virtual College 101 workshop at the end of November. This is an opportunity for high school students to talk with college students about what college life and learning is like.
* Staff are presenting at and participating upcoming conferences including MRA, MDVI, CSAVR, and NCSAB.

## Business Enterprise Program Quick Hits

* BEP Elected Committee of Blind Vendor chair, Mike Colbrunn, and BEP director John Hulet visiting TurnKey Corrections in October to explore potential commissary operation partnership.
* BEP Elected Committee of Blind Vendors hold its last quarterly meeting of 2023 on October 29th.
* BEP starts the collection of data on October 1st for completing its annual RSA 15 report.

## Workforce Development Unit Data Dashboard Update

We received our dashboard for PY2022 Q4 (April-June 2023), and I am thrilled to report some incredible data:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Selected Qtr.** | **Prior Qtr.** | **Change** |
| **Total Participants Served** | 674 | 640 | 34% |
|  |  |  |  |
| **Quarterly Count** |  |  |  |
| Applicants | 64 | 76 | -12% |
| New Eligible Individuals | 75 | 68 | 7% |
| Initial IPEs Developed | 68 | 62 | 6% |
|  |  |  |  |
| **Timeliness** |  |  |  |
| Eligibility | 96.0% | 100.0% | -4.0% |
| IPE | 100.0% | 100.0% | 0.0% |
|  |  |  |  |
| **Services to Participants** |  |  |  |
| Career Services | 674 | 640 | 34% |
| Training Services | 507 | 477 | 30% |
|  |  |  |  |
| **Total Exiting** | 38 | 37 | 1 |
| Attrition prior to IPE | 7.9% | 8.1% | -0.2% |
| Employment Rate | 51% | 47% | 4.4% |

Staff Updates

## Workforce Development Unit

We have filled our three posted VR Tech positions. We welcome Cheryl Lavrenz, Jeremy Hoke (who was our SSB mailroom coordinator), and Jennifer Fischer.

We also welcome Evan Gardner, who is our new low vision assistive technology trainer.

## Senior Services

We have two positions posted for vision specialists. The recent general appropriation increase we received is allowing us to expand our senior services to more people, which means we need more staff to serve. Ed reports a really competitive applicant pool.

## Administrative Services

Woinitu Estifanos joins us as our new assistant fiscal coordinator. She transfers to us from our Department’s Administrative and Financial Services team.

We will soon begin interviews for a second outreach and communications specialist, who will be in charge of the Combined State Plan and will be helping Lisa with outreach events and communications.

I am hiring an assistant contracts specialist to assist Jennifer Beilke with contract monitoring, tracking of contracts, and other activities.

Interviews begin next week for the mailroom.

Linda Lingen retired from her role as an intermittent driver. We will be hiring another driver to fill that vacancy. Hopefully soon, we will also be hiring for a part-time driver that will offer a more set and stable driving schedule for our staff. We are experiencing a driver shortage due to factors outside of our control, and staff are understandably frustrated with the limited options.