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7 STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL FOR THE BLIND

8 BIMONTHLY MEETING

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14 2200 University Avenue

15 St. Paul, Minnesota

16 Thursday, October 5, 2023

17 5:40 p.m.

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1 APPEARANCES:

2 REHABILITATION COUNCIL FOR THE BLIND      SSB STAFF

3    Corbb O'Connor, Chairperson      Dave Andrews

4    Frank Eller                              Jennifer Beilke

5    Sue Fager                                 Jon Benson

6    Samantha Flax                             Brianna Holeman

7    Ryan Haenze

8    Tom Heini

9    Rob Hobson

10   Catalina Martinez

11   Michael O'Day

12   Judy Sanders

13   Ryan Strunk

14 Kyle Van Acker

15

16 ALSO PRESENT:

17 Natasha Jerde, Director of SSB

18 Susan Kusz, State Program Administrator

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22 Whereupon, the following proceedings

23 were duly had and entered of record, to-wit:

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3 MR. O'CONNOR: All right. Well, we

4 shall call our October meeting of the State Rehab

5 Council for the Blind to order. I am Corbb

6 O'Connor who serves as our chairperson.

7 I would like to welcome you all and

8 would like to go through who is here. We will

9 start with the Council, we will work our way to

10 staff members and then to members of the public.

11 And so we will start with Frank Eller.

12 MR. ELLER: Frank Eller, here.

13 MR. O'CONNOR: Frank is here, if you

14 will kindly look for a mike. There we go.

15 Samantha Flax.

16 MS. FLAX: Here.

17 MR. O'CONNOR: Ryan Haenze.

18 MR. HAENZE: Ryan Haenze, here.

19 MR. O'CONNOR: Tom Heintl.

20 MR. HEINL: Tom Heintl, here.

21 MR. O'CONNOR: Rob Hobson is absent.

22 MR. HOBSON: Rob Hobson is here.

23 MR. O'CONNOR: Hi Rob, sorry.

24 Catalina Martinez.

25 MS. MARTINEZ: She's here.

1 MR. O'CONNOR: Michael O'Day.

2 MR. O'DAY: Here.

3 MR. O'CONNOR: Kristen Oien is

4 understandably absent.

5 Jennifer Points.

6 (No response.)

7 MR. O'CONNOR: Not hearing Jennifer.

8 Judy Sanders.

9 MS. SANDERS: Judy Sanders is here.

10 MR. O'CONNOR: Judy is here.

11 Ryan Strunk.

12 MS. RYAN: Ryan Strunk, here.

13 MR. O'CONNOR: Trevor Turner.

14 (No response.)

15 MR. O'CONNOR: Not here.

16 And Kyle Van Acker.

17 MR. VAN ACKER: Kyle Van Acker, here.

18 MR. O'CONNOR: Excellent, thank you

19 very much.

20 Let's go next to SSB staff members

21 that are in the room.

22 MS. JERDE: Natasha Jerde.

23 MR. KUSZ: Susan Kusz.

24 MR. ANDREWS: Dave Andrews.

25 MR. O'CONNOR: Excellent. Are there



1 staff members on Zoom?

2 MR. BENSON: Jon Benson.

3 MS. BEILKE: Jennifer Beilke.

4 MS. HOLEMAN: Brianna Holeman.

5 MR. O'CONNOR: Thank you. And we will

6 next go to our members of the public that are in

7 the room. Are there mikes back there or shall I

8 repeat?

9 MR. ANDREWS: There's one.

10 MR. O'CONNOR: I shall repeat, so go

11 ahead.

12 Rocky Hart. Briley O'Connor. Sharon

13 Monthei. Jamie Richey. Jeremy Richey. Steve

14 Jacobson. John Filek. Laurie McBride. Kim

15 Evavold, court reporter. Anyone else?

16 (No response).

17 Jan Bailey. Sue Fager with PACER

18 Center.

19 MR. O'CONNOR: Thank you, Sue.

20 Anybody we missed?

21 (No response.)

22 MR. O'CONNOR: Excellent. Well thank

23 you, everybody. So we are going to take just a few

24 minutes here for a required public hearing on our

25 cafeteria remodel, before that I will hand it over

1 to Natasha.

2 MS. JERDE: Excellent. So this is

3 Natasha, let me put my little paper up. So much

4 like I had to do with ending Order of Selection,

5 which is a much bigger deal than what I am about to

6 talk about, I also have to hold a public hearing on

7 our upcoming cafeteria remodel. I know, but that's

8 the feds for you.

9 This is because the project falls

10 under the category of establishment and

11 construction, which has to be added to our Combined

12 State Plan. And if you amend your Combined State

13 Plan you have to hold a public hearing. So we are

14 proposing some updates and modifications to our  
15 cafeteria to allow for our Senior Services and  
16 Workforce Development Unit teachers, as well as our  
17 community partners, to be able to come in and  
18 conduct one-on-one and group training sessions in a  
19 more IL environment.

20 The updates include reconfiguring the  
21 little alcove that's in the cafeteria into a walled  
22 off space with a door, turning our kitchenette,  
23 which is just really a sink, into a fully  
24 functional kitchen and laundry area complete with  
25 countertops, cabinetry and appliances. This will

1 be especially awesome for SRC-B and serving food.

2 And we are also going to be doing wiring, paint,

3 basic flooring, lighting, venting, et cetera. The

4 cost of this project is approximately \$80,000 and

5 the majority of the remodel will come from our

6 vocational rehabilitation dollars with a very small

7 portion coming from Older Blind and other state

8 dollars.

9 The cafeteria general space will still

10 be available for the SRC-B, for the public and

11 staff. The kitchenette will be or the kitchen will

12 be open as well. There will be information on when

13 the kitchen space will be unavailable if there is

14 private instruction happening, however, outside of  
15 the employee lunch hour and SRC-B meals the space  
16 doesn't tend to get incredibly busy. So I will be  
17 opening this up for any questions, concerns or  
18 feedback from the public.

19 It's a controversial conversation.

20 MS. SANDERS: This is Judy Sanders.

21 MS. MARTINEZ: Natasha, this is

22 Catalina.

23 MR. O'CONNOR: Catalina, go ahead.

24 MS. MARTINEZ: Now, with this new

25 kitchen will that take away some space from SSB,

1 will they have to get rid of a room so you can

2 accommodate the kitchen?

3 MS. JERDE: This is Natasha. Good

4 question. No, we are just -- right now in the

5 cafeteria there is this little kitchenette area

6 with a different flooring, it's like a vinyl

7 flooring or something. That space is kind of wide

8 open with a sink and some vending machines. We are

9 just going to add countertops and cabinetry to it

10 and kind of an island space. So it may cut into

11 the general cafeteria area, but we don't need to

12 lose any rooms or anything. We are just modifying

13 the space that's already there.

14 MS. MARTINEZ: Okay, thank you.

15 MS. JERDE: You are welcome.

16 MR. STRUNK: Ryan Strunk.

17 MR. O'CONNOR: Yes, Ryan.

18 MR. STRUNK: I appreciate that it's

19 gonna be closed off. Is there gonna be enough sort

20 of soundproofing, you know, are the walls going to

21 be constructed such that the people hanging out in

22 there during their breaks aren't going to be a

23 distraction for the students?

24 MS. JERDE: This is Natasha. I am not

25 a construction expert, but from the quote that I



1 saw, yes, there was soundproofing, updated ceiling  
2 tiles to prevent some of the noise, there is going  
3 to be a door. So I think so, but we will make sure  
4 when they actually come in.

5 MR. STRUNK: Awesome.

6 MR. O'CONNOR: Any other questions  
7 before we close the public comment or comments I  
8 should say?

9 MR. HOBSON: Yes, Rob Hobson.

10 MR. O'CONNOR: Rob, go ahead.

11 MR. HOBSON: I just wanted to know is  
12 there a timeline when this is going to start?

13 MS. JERDE: This is Natasha. I hoped

14 it was going to start six months ago, but then I  
15 found out I had to do a public hearing and the  
16 Combined State Plan and we already have quotes  
17 which have expired because I have to go through  
18 this process, so it's possible it won't start until  
19 this winter.

20 But everything is ready to go, we just  
21 have to have the federal government say yes, you  
22 can move forward with your project and then we can  
23 roll with it.

24 MR. HOBSON: Sounds great, awesome,  
25 I'm excited about it. Thank you.

1 MR. O'CONNOR: Further comment?

2 (No response.)

3 MR. O'CONNOR: Well, barring anyone

4 last minute I think we can close our public comment

5 period/public hearing.

6 MS. JERDE: Thank you very much, done.

7 MR. O'CONNOR: The public hearing

8 concludes. Thank you all for sticking around for

9 the best part of the meeting and we shall move,

10 then, to our next agenda item which is the approval

11 of the minutes from our August 3, 2023 meeting. Is

12 there such a motion?

13 MR. ELLER: Frank Eller motions.

14 MR. O'CONNOR: Frank moves. Is there

15 a second?

16 MR. STRUNK: Ryan Strunk, second.

17 MR. O'CONNOR: And Ryan seconds.

18 Is there discussion?

19 (No response.)

20 MR. O'CONNOR: All right.

21 MS. SANDERS: I don't have a question

22 about the minutes except that I want to make sure I

23 usually get material in Braille including the

24 minutes and I didn't get it so I wanted to know if

25 I am the only one who didn't or did something

1     happen?

2             MR. O'CONNOR: Susan.

3             MS. KUSZ: This is Susan. That's a

4     great question, I can check with Braille. I have

5     no idea why you would not have gotten it.

6             MR. O'CONNOR: Yeah, this is Corbb, I

7     did not receive it either, but we will look into

8     it.

9             Any further discussion? Otherwise we

10    shall move to a roll call vote.

11             Okay. Frank Eller.

12             MR. ELLER: Frank Eller, yes.

13             MR. O'CONNOR: Samantha Flax.

14 MS. FLAX: Samantha Flax, yes.

15 MR. HAENZE: Ryan Haenze, yes.

16 MR. O'CONNOR: Tom Heintl.

17 MR. HEINL: Tom Heintl, yes.

18 MR. O'CONNOR: Rob Hobson.

19 MR. HOBSON: Rob Hobson, yes.

20 MR. O'CONNOR: Catalina Martinez.

21 MS. MARTINEZ: Abstention.

22 MR. O'CONNOR: Catalina abstains.

23 Michael O'Day.

24 MR. O'DAY: Yes.

25 MS. SANDERS: Judy Sanders, yes.

1 MR. STRUNK: Ryan Strunk, yes.

2 MR. O'CONNOR: Kyle Van Acker.

3 MR. VAN ACKER: Kyle Van Acker, yes.

4 MR. O'CONNOR: And Corbb O'Connor,

5 yes.

6 Thank you all very much.

7 MS. KUSZ: Mr. Chair.

8 MR. O'CONNOR: Yes, Susan.

9 MS. KUSZ: This is Susan. I would

10 just ask that if people do want the minutes in

11 Braille if they could send me an email letting me

12 know so that when I do check with the Braille

13 Department I can let them know the updated list.

14 Thank you.

15 MR. O'CONNOR: Thank you.

16 MS. SANDERS: This is Judy. I didn't

17 get any Braille this month, that's my point. I

18 wouldn't have -- I mean, I want to get the minutes,

19 but it wasn't just about the minutes, it was about

20 Braille for all the handouts.

21 MR. O'CONNOR: This is Corbb. Yes,

22 understood. So if there's anyone that would like

23 to receive Braille material or newly wishes to

24 receive Braille material, whether on the Council or

25 member of the public, shoot Susan an email so we



1 can make sure that we get a complete list.

2 MS. KUSZ: Thank you.

3 MR. O'CONNOR: So we have two items in

4 the Chair's report before we get to our special

5 guests and so we will breeze through these.

6 The first of which is reviewing our

7 current Council vacancies and those whose terms are

8 expiring in just a few months. And for that we

9 look to our staff liaison, Susan Kusz.

10 MS. KUSZ: Thank you, Corbb, this is

11 Susan. So coming up probably the end of October,

12 the beginning of November people may receive a

13 notice, they may not. I believe starting

14 November 1 the Secretary of State's website will be  
15 open to take these applications if you need to  
16 reapply for your second term.

17 So this is how we are sitting right  
18 now. The State Independent Living Council, Judy  
19 Sanders, is on term two and will not be eligible to  
20 reapply. So we will need to find someone to fill  
21 her shoes, which may be really hard to do.

22 MS. SANDERS: This is Judy, I  
23 thought -- I saw that and I thought my term expired  
24 in 2025.

25 MS. KUSZ: I will double-check, Judy,

1 but I believe that it was the first of the year.

2 So I will look into it and I will let you know.

3 Next is an industry rep seat by

4 Michael O'Day. He is also on term two and not

5 eligible to reapply.

6 Disability advocate group ACB,

7 Catalina Martinez is also on term two and not

8 eligible to reapply.

9 Disability advocate group United

10 Blind, Tom Heint is on term one and is eligible to

11 reapply.

12 Current or former applicants for or

13 recipients of VR services, Frank Eller is on term

14 one and is eligible to reapply.

15 The Governor's Workforce Development

16 Council rep, Kyle Van Acker, is on term one and is

17 eligible it reapply.

18 And then advocate for individuals who

19 are Blind with multiple disabilities, Samantha Flax

20 is on term one and eligible to reapply.

21 We have had the current vacancies that

22 we are still waiting on appointments from the

23 Governor's office and the last time that I spoke

24 with them they said November 3. So I'm not holding

25 my breath, but here is where we sit with the

1 current vacancies.

2 So community rehabilitation program

3 service provider Daniel Ashman had been waiting for

4 his application because he was only on term one.

5 There is an industry rep where we

6 don't have any applicants.

7 Current or former applicant for or

8 recipient of VR services, Pat McGee has applied and

9 is waiting for appointment.

10 Department of Ed, we have no

11 applicants.

12 PACER representatives, Sue Fager, who

13 is on our meeting tonight, has applied and is

14 waiting for appointment.

15 And last but not least, American

16 Indian Vocational Rehabilitation projects, Connie

17 Berg, has applied but is still waiting to be

18 appointed.

19 If you have any questions or need help

20 with filing a reapplication, please contact me, I'm

21 happy to help you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

22 MR. O'CONNOR: This is Corbb. Thank

23 you, Susan. And I would note for those who have

24 heard one of those roles that is of interest to you

25 or to someone you know that even if there is a

1 candidate who has applied for that position you are  
2 more than welcome to apply for it as well, as those  
3 appointments have not yet been made. So don't take  
4 it as us not being interested in your application  
5 just because one person has put their hat in the  
6 ring.

7 So encourage people to reapply. We  
8 thank those who are going off of the Council for a  
9 short period and hopefully will come back once the  
10 waiting period between their terms is over.

11 Any questions on that that we should  
12 address?

13 MR. STRUNK: Ryan Strunk.

14 MR. O'CONNOR: Ryan.

15 MR. STRUNK: So I remember going back

16 and forth with Evelyn, I think that was her name,

17 quite a bit when my second term was supposed to be

18 up and when it was supposed to start and all of

19 that good stuff and to my memory, granted I have a

20 mind like a steel trap that is rusted and full of

21 tetanus, this should be the end of my second term.

22 If that is not correct I am happy to hear it, but

23 my understanding is that I came on in 2018 and so

24 2023 would be the end of six years.

25 MS. KUSZ: This is Susan. Can I



1 address that?

2 MR. O'CONNOR: Go ahead, please.

3 MS. KUSZ: So I do recall kind of,

4 sort of, maybe in a way what you are talking about.

5 MR. STRUNK: You have a mind like

6 mine. Well, no, I mean as far as the mix-up, but I

7 don't recall who all was involved and their term

8 dates getting mixed up. So if memory serves me,

9 what had happened was they appointed people from

10 the date like when they were or the year when they

11 were getting appointed.

12 And the way the appointments work is

13 let's just take Kristen Oien's position, for

14 example. So she has resigned, but let's say she  
15 only had until the end of this year until her term  
16 was up and then we don't appoint anybody for a  
17 whole other year, then they are only going to serve  
18 for two years instead of three. Does that makes  
19 sense?

20 MR. STRUNK: Yeah.

21 MS. KUSZ: It doesn't make much sense  
22 to me, but that's how they do it.

23 MR. STRUNK: I will do some digging.

24 MS. KUSZ: I will look again at your  
25 position as well, Ryan, and see what I can see.

1 MR. STRUNK: Yeah, I am happy to  
2 continue to serve, but I don't want to be caught  
3 flat footed in like April of next year and then we  
4 are scrambling for someone to fill the position.

5 MR. O'CONNOR: Absolutely.

6 MS. KUSZ: Well, most positions --  
7 this is Susan -- most positions are up at the  
8 beginning, they always start them in January. So  
9 even if you don't get, like these folks like Sue  
10 Fager, for instance, she applied, if she gets  
11 appointed and if her seat was vacant at the  
12 beginning of this year her term is going to start  
13 1-1 or 1-6 of 2023.

14 MR. STRUNK: Yeah, understandable.

15 And I don't want to get into minutia, except I

16 think that this is important, particularly for

17 advocacy organizations. And that is that if my

18 term as, say, the NFB rep expires at the end of

19 2023, then somebody from the NFB ought to be

20 applying in November to make sure that we have as

21 strong a chance as possible of having an NFB

22 representative on the Council in January of '24,

23 even though we know it will take longer than that.

24 If, say, somebody comes back in April

25 and says oh yeah, Ryan, your term was supposed to

1 be over four months ago, then that delays the  
2 application process for the next person who would  
3 be taking my spot. And that's true, I think, for  
4 any group. So I just want to make sure that we are  
5 squared away on that. And it's entirely possible,  
6 I started in 2019 and my memory is just that  
7 fantastical, but I don't believe so. And I think  
8 we will want to figure that out probably for a few  
9 people who got tangled up in that mess.

10 MS. KUSZ: Thank you.

11 MR. STRUNK: You bet.

12 MR. HEINL: Mr. Chair, Tom Heidl.

13 MR. O'CONNOR: This is Corbb. Tom,

14 just one second, I'm gonna ask Dave or Joe, can we

15 turn up the volume of those on Zoom here in the

16 room?

17 MS. JERDE: What color button?

18 MR. O'CONNOR: Tom, could you speak

19 again, please?

20 MR. HEINL: Yes, I'm just wondering,

21 my term is up the end of this year?

22 MR. O'CONNOR: This is Corbb, that's

23 correct, Tom.

24 MR. HEINL: Oh, okay. How time flies,

25 thank you.

1 MR. O'CONNOR: Thank you.

2 Okay. This is Corbb, we will move on

3 from that to our Annual Work Plan Task Force. So

4 our work plan is a document that guides the work of

5 this Council and it tells us in each month what

6 type of work should be happening based on

7 backdating ourselves from various deadlines so that

8 we make sure that if a report needs to be in by

9 December 30, that we are voting on it no later than

10 the December meeting which means it needs to be

11 drafted by the October meeting you see down the

12 way.

13 I'm very grateful that Ryan-ly Haenze

14 has agreed to chair this task force for this term  
15 that will probably only meet once or twice between  
16 now and our next meeting. Ryan, is that still  
17 correct that you are willing to serve in that role?

18 MR. HEINS: Yes, that is correct,  
19 thank you.

20 MR. O'CONNOR: This is Corbb, that was  
21 the right answer.

22 And I would like to take some names of  
23 those who would be willing to serve with Ryan on  
24 this task force and particularly looking to those  
25 who maybe have not raised their hands for previous



1 task forces, but would love any input from those on  
2 the Council.

3 MR. STRUNK: Ryan Strunk. I'm happy  
4 to help again, but I am also cognizant of your ask.

5 MR. O'CONNOR: Thank you, Ryan. I'm  
6 good with silence councilmembers, but I would  
7 rather hear your names and volunteering.

8 MR. HART: Rocky Hart. If no one else  
9 is interested I would be happy to as well.

10 MR. O'CONNOR: I do believe that task  
11 forces can have members of the public, so thank you  
12 Rocky. We could probably use one or two others,  
13 minimal commitment of an hour or two.

14 MS. SANDERS: This is Judy, I would

15 volunteer if I can get a Braille copy of it.

16 MR. O'CONNOR: Thank you, Judy. And

17 last chance for anyone else.

18 All right. We will take what we have

19 got. I would remind councilmembers that it's

20 certainly helpful for us to be able to do our work

21 if we are not having the same folks on every task

22 force, but I am grateful to those who have stepped

23 up to fulfill that role.

24 Somebody was seeking the floor?

25 MS. DUNNAM: This is Jennifer Dunnam.

1 I could not get to my mute button, I would be happy  
2 to help on the work plan because it tends to have  
3 an affect on our committee on a particular way.

4 Happy to help there.

5 MR. O'CONNOR: This is Corbb. Thank  
6 you Jennifer Dunnam.

7 Is there a motion to appoint the Work  
8 Plan Task Force of Ryan Haenze, chair, Ryan Strunk,  
9 Judy Sanders, Rocky Hart, Jennifer Dunnam. And did  
10 I miss someone?

11 MR. HOBSON: Rob Hobson, so moved.

12 MR. O'CONNOR: You were moving,  
13 correct, not volunteering? I just want to make

14 sure.

15 MR. HOBSON: I'm moving.

16 MR. O'CONNOR: Okay, great. Rob

17 moves, is there a second?

18 MR. ELLER: Frank Eller seconds.

19 MR. O'CONNOR: Frank seconds. Any

20 discussion?

21 (No response.)

22 MR. O'CONNOR: All right. Frank

23 Eller.

24 MR. ELLER: Frank Eller, yes.

25 MR. O'CONNOR: Samantha Flax.

1 (No response.)

2 MR. O'CONNOR: We will come back to

3 Samantha.

4 Ryan Haenze.

5 MR. HAENZE: Ryan Haenze, yes.

6 MR. O'CONNOR: Tom Heint.

7 MR. HEINT: Tom Heint, yes.

8 MR. O'CONNOR: Rob Hobson.

9 MR. HOBSON: Rob Hobson, pass.

10 MR. O'CONNOR: Catalina Martinez.

11 MS. MARTINEZ: Catalina, yes.

12 MR. O'CONNOR: Michael O'Day.

13 MR. O'DAY: Michael O'Day, yes.

14 MS. SANDERS: Judy Sanders, yes.

15 MR. STRUNK: Ryan Strunk, yes.

16 MR. O'CONNOR: Kyle Van Acker.

17 MR. VAN ACKER: Kyle Van Acker, yes.

18 MR. O'CONNOR: Samantha Flax.

19 (No response.)

20 MR. O'CONNOR: We will say pass for

21 this motion.

22 And Corbb O'Connor, yes. Great, thank

23 very much.

24 Okay. Now, with that out of the way I

25 am so excited to welcome a couple of special guests

1 to our meeting tonight, that is a direct ask of  
2 this Council. So the Professional Development Task  
3 Force that is chaired by Samantha Flax has put  
4 together recommendations on whom they -- on topics  
5 that the Council would like to hear more about and  
6 learn more about so that we can better serve the  
7 needs of individuals who are receiving or may some  
8 day soon receive our services from State Services  
9 for the Blind.

10 So very excited that John and Laurie  
11 are here from the Helen Keller National Center for  
12 DeafBlind Youth and Adults. And I will turn it  
13 over to the two of you.

14 MR. FILEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

15 Yes, both Laurie and I are very excited to be here,

16 thank you very much for the invitation. And I am,

17 for a visual description, I am a white male and

18 with great vulnerability approaching his 50th year

19 with a graying beard and wisps of white hair in my

20 dark brown hair with black rimmed glasses and a

21 black buttoned-down shirt. And Laurie.

22 MS. MCBRIDE: Thank you, John. This

23 is Laurie McBride. And my visual description is I

24 am --

25 MS. SANDERS: You might want to speak



1 a little louder or closer to the mike.

2 MS. MCBRIDE: Is this better, Judy?

3 MS. SANDERS: Yes, thank you.

4 MS. MCBRIDE: Okay, thank you. So

5 this is Laurie. My visual description is a

6 slightly older woman, dark brown hair, it's short

7 but I'm growing it out. I have dark black rimmed

8 glasses and a little bit less gray than John.

9 MR. FILEK: Starting out as two peas

10 in a pod. So I am the regional services

11 coordinator for Helen Keller National Center. I

12 represent six states in the north central region,

13 but my home state and indeed the state that I grew

14 up in and still reside is Minnesota.

15 Some of you may recognize me. I was

16 involved with DeafBlind services and the DeafBlind

17 community for over 20 years. I am a child of deaf

18 adults, grew up with deaf parents and that's part

19 of my background and heritage. And I am so excited

20 to speak about how to work with individuals who

21 have a combined hearing and vision loss and what it

22 means to be DeafBlind. And not being DeafBlind

23 myself I always think it's best coming from an

24 individual who is DeafBlind, I have many

25 experiences of -- and great friends that I work

1 with and hang out with.

2 My experiences have really lead me to

3 this love that I am enjoying. And for the

4 beginning of my career I have worked in the

5 children's program at DeafBlind services and one of

6 the things that I learned straight away working

7 with a child that has a combined hearing and vision

8 loss is the importance of access, access to

9 information. When a child is born not having the

10 understanding of what's happening in their

11 environment it becomes important for us to be able

12 to break down that information and create a

13 trusting bond with that individual.

14 I'm skipping a little bit ahead, I  
15 should actually start with the fact that with HKNC,  
16 as Helen Keller everyone believes and thinks when  
17 they hear the term DeafBlind they think Helen  
18 Keller or somebody who is completely deaf and  
19 completely Blind. But the fact of the matter is,  
20 the DeafBlind population is quite diverse, more  
21 diverse than you realize. And many of the  
22 individuals who call themselves DeafBlind or  
23 actually many who don't even know that they could  
24 fit the federal definition of DeafBlind has some  
25 usable hearing or vision.

1           And when hearing the term DeafBlind  
2   most people think oh, it's quite simply putting  
3   deaf plus Blind together when it's not as simple as  
4   one would take the word hot and the word dog and  
5   you would put them together and you would have a  
6   hot dog, it's nothing like that. It actually  
7   creates a unique set of conditions for that  
8   individual.

9           And it's important to take into  
10   consideration not only how much that person is able  
11   to see or hear or when they lost their hearing or  
12   vision, it really drives much of their experience  
13   of the world. When you think of a person born with

14 that combined hearing and vision loss or maybe they  
15 lose that, either their hearing or vision later in  
16 life.

17 A person who is born deaf and is  
18 culturally deaf their first language is sign  
19 language. As they begin to lose their vision later  
20 in life they are going to need to have different  
21 ways of interacting with their environment. They  
22 have to start looking at tactile sign language.

23 So a lot of when you consider how much  
24 a person sees and hears and when they lose their  
25 hearing and vision really impacts their experiences

1 as well as the accommodations and the approaches  
2 that someone working with an individual needs to  
3 take.

4 Today really for the amount of time  
5 that I have it really is a lot to cover and I'm  
6 hoping that I can cover at least some of the basic  
7 ideas or concepts. One of the most important  
8 things to realize is that that community is very  
9 diverse and in the American community survey that  
10 was done in 2019 there is two questions, one is:  
11 Are you Blind or have a serious difficulty seeing  
12 even with glasses? The other question is: Are you  
13 deaf or have serious difficulty hearing even with

14 optimum amplification. Two and a half million  
15 individuals said yes to both questions and 63  
16 percent of those individuals are 65 and older, not  
17 surprising, of course.

18           So that community is diverse and many  
19 of those individuals would never consider thinking  
20 oh, could I consider myself DeafBlind. Fact of the  
21 matter is, you could. The federal definition from  
22 the Helen Keller Act is for vision it's 20/200 or  
23 their field is less than 20 degrees or that there  
24 is a progressive loss. For hearing it's so severe  
25 that the person cannot be understood even with



1 optimum amplification and, again, or progressive  
2 hearing loss. The other one is that that  
3 combination of hearing and vision is so severe that  
4 it impacts their independence and daily living.

5           So many individuals 65 and older  
6 wouldn't even realize oh, I might even benefit for  
7 some of the programs out there that serve DeafBlind  
8 individuals. It's understandable too that many  
9 would run away from that term DeafBlind, however,  
10 of course, the misunderstanding is am I anything  
11 like Helen Keller or am I totally deaf or totally  
12 Blind?

13           Another takeaway that I want to make

14 sure that I share is that, and I'm going to speak  
15 specifically to individuals who have had to -- when  
16 we talk about access and we think about what  
17 information that we take in for a child who is born  
18 with that combined hearing and vision loss, how  
19 their -- they have a distrust of their environment,  
20 especially if they have an additional disability or  
21 maybe they are medically fragile and they find  
22 themselves in a doctor's office, they don't even  
23 know they are in a doctor's office or even what a  
24 doctor is and then they get painful shots.

25 Or even quite simply a glass of milk

1 on the table and that milk suddenly is in their  
2 lap, they didn't even know when did that glass of  
3 milk appear? And it creates unpredictable  
4 situations that would cause any one of us to fear  
5 our environment.

6 And so working with kids that are very  
7 young that were nonverbal, it was a matter of  
8 establishing trust and being able to find moments  
9 in which an individual, a child, was calm, and be  
10 able to then start gathering what was of interest  
11 to them and being able to attach language.

12 So of course that's all very basic  
13 human development, but so much of what happens then

14 is true even of adults. Being able to create  
15 predictable environments and feel safe and then be  
16 able to engage with your environment and be able to  
17 make choices.

18           Someone who has a combined hearing and  
19 vision loss that can't trust their distance senses,  
20 their hearing and vision become -- even what is  
21 available to them isn't dependable, then the next  
22 thing that is dependable is their sense of touch,  
23 how to interact with their environment that is  
24 within reach.

25           For a child so much of the development

1 is about how do you bring the world to that child  
2 within their reach so that they can build an  
3 understanding of their environment and, of course,  
4 one of the biggest things is incidental information  
5 that there is a glass of milk that will appear on  
6 that table in front of you every day, breakfast,  
7 lunch or dinner. That reinforcement of information  
8 is what many individuals take in as part of their  
9 development, but for a child it has to be directly  
10 taught, it has to be brought to them.

11 So when working with an individual who  
12 is DeafBlind or identifies as DeafBlind and their  
13 access to the world is within arm's length, then it

14 begins a process of thinking how do you break down  
15 information in their environment? How do you  
16 communicate that information through touch?  
17 So a lot of the things that we  
18 practice and we teach through Helen Keller National  
19 Center and the various trainings that we do, we  
20 talk about how we empower an individual by breaking  
21 down information in the environment, first by  
22 finding out what is their preferred method of  
23 communication. And this actually goes -- sorry.  
24 You have to actually get to know the individual,  
25 you have to start with knowing what is their

1 background, what is their etiology, how does that  
2 impact their hearing and vision now, is it  
3 progressive? And then figuring out what is the  
4 best way for accessing that environment whether  
5 it's sign, text, speech, is it tactile? And  
6 speaking in regards to the tactile piece, how do  
7 you convey the incidental information in realtime  
8 at the same time that they may be conversing with  
9 somebody else.

10 So I'm gonna share a quick story about  
11 a very dear friend of mine who is no longer with  
12 us, sadly, but he was my best friend, best man at  
13 my wedding, we worked together for over 20 years.

14 He was my introduction to the DeafBlind world. And

15 the amazing thing that I learned from him was how

16 do I share what's going on in his environment?

17 His job was to travel and he had

18 speaking engagements all over the country and he

19 had a fabulous team which I was glad to be a part

20 of and it was always amazing when being a part of a

21 speech engagement how if you were one of those

22 individuals in the audience and you had that same

23 thought that many people do about the term

24 DeafBlind you think well, okay, so this person must

25 be fully deaf, fully Blind, I don't know. It seems



1 like he is communicating through sign language, but  
2 there is all sorts of accommodations that are  
3 happening there. The interpreter has to be within  
4 two feet of him because that's how far away he can  
5 see and the interpreter has to have, depending on  
6 their skin color, the clothing that they wear, the  
7 shirt or the blouse has to be in contrast to that  
8 person's skin color and it has to be a solid color.  
9 Again, it's breaking down the information in the  
10 environment, simplifying the information.

11 And as the person is taking in  
12 information through sign language, there is another  
13 interpreter on his back and they are doing things

14 on his back which you are not quite sure what

15 that's about. And then as he begins to speak you

16 are amazed at how he is able to recognize when

17 somebody in the middle back has a question and he

18 immediately picks up on that. Or that there is

19 somebody that's fell asleep in the front row and he

20 makes some sort of joke is there something I can do

21 to make this more lively for you? Or that there

22 are certain individuals that leave the room and he

23 says are you going to the bathroom, sir?

24 What's amazing is there is the

25 incidental information that's happening because

1     there is a person either providing haptics  
2     communication or protactile communication and the  
3     ability to have all of that information and, of  
4     course, it has to be selective, none of us wants to  
5     walk into a room and know how many windows there  
6     are. We focus on -- we have selective, we are  
7     selective, we want to know where is the exit,  
8     where, you know, where is the buffet, which was  
9     very good by the way, so thank you.

10            I have to talk to Susan because I'm  
11     part of the SRC DeafBlind Committee and we don't  
12     meet like this and have a meal, so it's all Zoom  
13     meetings. But that's part of being aware of the

14 importance of breaking down information, giving

15 them access so that they can be fully participating

16 and making choices in their environment.

17 I lost track of time and I want to

18 make sure that -- Laurie has a few things to share.

19 Some things I want to quickly say about as far as

20 some practical tips that I encourage everyone to

21 keep in mind if you are working with an individual

22 that's DeafBlind and seeking work through SSB is

23 really get to know the person, be able to learn

24 more about their background and how much they see

25 or hear or when they lost their hearing and vision

1 because it does inform their experience of the  
2 world.

3 And follow their lead. Really check  
4 in with them and find out what their preferences  
5 are. Don't be afraid to break down information as  
6 you work with that individual, try to be as  
7 concrete as possible.

8 One of the great things I know SSB  
9 developed is that step-by-step guide about the VR  
10 process and some of the things that in our  
11 DeafBlind Committee we talked about some DeafBlind  
12 resources, as well as various methods and modes of  
13 communication and, of course, HKNC is always

14 available to provide training in haptics and other

15 means of accessibility.

16           And the last thing that I will share

17 is just be patient. Because as a person is taking

18 in information, particularly if it is tactile

19 information, for example, if they are working with

20 an interpreter and their hands are focused on the

21 interpreter and you are sharing with them some new

22 device that they have no exposure to. And again, I

23 will remind you about the incidental learning that

24 many typically take in through their eyes and their

25 ears, but their experience has to be directly

1 provided to them, that is something worthy.

2 Time needs to be allowed for process,

3 to process what they are taking in through their

4 hands in terms of communication and then to attend

5 to the object that you are sharing with them. And

6 it can be a very exhausting process, build in

7 breaks if they need to, that goes to going back and

8 checking with them, seeing how they are doing, if

9 it's a long meeting in particular.

10 So I think I used probably all the 30

11 minutes, I'm sorry, Laurie, but here you go.

12 MS. MCBRIDE: This is Laurie speaking.

13 What we like to call that, John, is the DeafBlind

14 time, everything does take longer. I will disclose  
15 that I am DeafBlind so I am in the spectrum of low  
16 vision/hard of hearing. And as John alluded to,  
17 you know, finding the etiology and then finding out  
18 when the hearing and vision loss was noticed or  
19 diagnosed.

20 My hearing loss was diagnosed at  
21 birth, but my vision loss wasn't diagnosed until 13  
22 years ago. So as I said, I'm a little older than  
23 John, but I'm under 65.

24 So the vision loss really caused havoc  
25 for me because I've always relied on my vision for



1 my hearing to take the place. So that's why it's  
2 important to understand an etiology and when the  
3 diagnosis came.

4 The other thing, too, promoting  
5 self-advocacy with our consumers is an important  
6 piece for myself because they should advocate, they  
7 should be the ones asking for certain things, but  
8 they may not have that skill so we have to try and  
9 promote that.

10 And I always picture them any time I  
11 am working with consumers, as I am an employment  
12 specialist for both Minnesota and Iowa, I do reside  
13 in Iowa and I travel up here, obviously I don't

14 drive, they don't let me, but I get a driver. I

15 hire a driver through work and he drives me up here

16 and I give him the address I said here, here is

17 where we go. I really struggle with backseat

18 driving.

19 I did save us from an accident

20 yesterday, but I always put my consumers in the

21 front seat, they are in the driver's seat and

22 that's important to make them aware that they are

23 the ones driving the bus, even if they can't see or

24 hear they are still driving, it is their choices so

25 we have to make sure that we give them all of those

1 choices and that information. And it's got to be  
2 what is going to work for them. So we need to get  
3 to know them.

4 And as John said, getting to know them  
5 but then you need to identify the providers who can  
6 help us understand the DeafBlind piece, so call us,  
7 you know, call John, I'm sure you have his number  
8 or email him, you know, but contact us, we are  
9 here.

10 And as I mentioned, my DeafBlind is  
11 different, I have Usher's Syndrome Type 2C, but  
12 it's still different than other people who may have  
13 Usher 2C. The experience is different so we are

14 all unique and so understanding the individual

15 accommodations and support is important.

16 And then the needs of the individuals

17 with combined vision and hearing loss is different

18 with a single sensory loss, it is different. And

19 like I said, I survived my school, my high school,

20 all of that with just a single loss of hearing.

21 Back at the University in having a combined

22 vision/hearing loss it is a different way of

23 learning than I did before. I can't do a lot of

24 reading anymore so I have to use other methods. So

25 it's a learning curve there. So that's why there

1 is so much difference. Thank you.

2 MR. FILEK: Do we time for questions?

3 MR. O'CONNOR: This is Corbb. Thank

4 you, Laurie and thank you, John, for your

5 presentation. Laurie for traveling here, we

6 appreciate it, and John, for coming across town.

7 I would love to open it up for

8 questions and maybe as folks are assembling their

9 questions, start one that comes to mind for me:

10 When I received my Adjustment to Blindness Training

11 the philosophy that I was taught with was let's use

12 sleep shades for your trainings because clearly

13 your vision isn't efficient, so then let's teach

14 you how to do things nonvisually. Then if you go  
15 home and have some vision, great, but if you lose  
16 more vision you have the skill to rely back on. Or  
17 if the environment changes and you suddenly can't  
18 see what you could, you know you can still do that  
19 task.

20 And so I am curious, recognizing the  
21 individuality of the folks you serve, is there a  
22 program or a training method that would be similar  
23 for that that you've used, like you mentioned your  
24 friend who had an interpreter that had to be in a  
25 specific position wearing specific clothing, where,

1 you know, they would rely on maybe a different  
2 sense that doesn't have that reduction so that they  
3 are always efficient regardless of what their  
4 lighting or the time of day or whatnot, how that  
5 might change.

6 MR. FILEK: That's a good question.

7 And much of what we do at the Center is we figure  
8 that out through the evaluation process, the  
9 assessment process. And depending on the person's  
10 background, we do introduce a couple of different  
11 methods for further training to make sure that, you  
12 know, which works best, what are they comfortable  
13 with. And it's in collaboration with the

14 individual that we go from there.

15 And some individuals, they want to

16 hold onto their residual hearing or vision as a way

17 of gathering information from their environment and

18 so we do respect that.

19 MR. O'CONNOR: This is Corbb. Thank

20 you.

21 What questions do we have from

22 councilmembers or from the public in the room or on

23 Zoom?

24 MS. FLAX: Samantha.

25 MR. O'CONNOR: Yes, go ahead.



1 MS. FLAX: Laurie, I am really curious  
2 about your experience because as you guys were  
3 talking I was thinking about it from the other  
4 direction. I'm someone who has taught a lot of  
5 Blind people and I'm Blind myself, so for me I rely  
6 a lot on my hearing. And the way I know to teach a  
7 lot of blindness-related skills is through  
8 listening and through exploring one's environment  
9 and things like that.

10 So my default, for example, I always  
11 thought well, if I couldn't hear I would primarily  
12 use Braille because then it's tactile and I could  
13 use it all the time and that's sort of a default.

14 And then a few years ago I found out that that's

15 not the case for a lot of DeafBlind people, that's

16 not always what people use.

17 And I know you said you work with

18 individuals and really figure out what individuals

19 need, but I'm wondering is there a standard

20 suggestion that you have in terms of if someone is

21 just getting started and they don't know what to

22 advocate for, are there basic suggestions for

23 someone that is DeafBlind, standard techniques or

24 communication methods that tend to be used the

25 most, things like that?

1 I guess I am curious in terms of  
2 people can't advocate for themselves unless they  
3 know what's out there, what is available. So I  
4 guess just thinking about what are standard things  
5 that are used?

6 MR. FILEK: Another great question,  
7 Samantha, and I really should put you in contact  
8 with the Communication Learning Center.

9 In terms of standards, it's really an  
10 exploration through that assessment. And there  
11 isn't anything that I can think of that we would  
12 say, I mean, again, you go back to what is the  
13 person's etiology? Is there other factors? Could

14      there be sensory neuropathy? So it's almost, I'm  
15      not going to say impossible, but I'm almost there  
16      to recreate a set of standards when you are working  
17      with a very diverse population.

18                 Some of the things that you know, of  
19      course, are things when working with Blind or low  
20      vision, of course we are familiar with those, but  
21      again it goes back to the individual and that's  
22      where we really have to follow their lead.

23                 MS. FLAX: Thank you. Can I ask one  
24      more quick question?

25                 MR. FILEK: Certainly.

1 MS. FLAX: So I was struck by the idea  
2 of bringing the environment to a person. You know,  
3 with blindness there's an encouragement, like with  
4 little kids, for example, for them to take their  
5 cane and go around and explore things. Are there  
6 things like that in terms of once someone -- once  
7 you have established that communication whether  
8 someone has lost a sense or they never had it, once  
9 people start to sort of have that basic level of  
10 communication are there ways of having them  
11 explore?

12 I don't know if that question makes  
13 sense. I guess I'm thinking of it from developing

14 an independence perspective of like okay, how do

15 you discover that the milk is on the table kind of

16 thing?

17 MR. FILEK: A lot of what I used to do

18 as an intervener in the community, as well as some

19 of the consulting that we would do in school

20 systems, is not to overlook the importance of

21 exploring your environment and following where the

22 child's interest is and then trying to develop from

23 there.

24 There was one child I remember, and it

25 was almost impossible to assess how much she could

1 see or hear until one day the mother noticed she  
2 spent an inordinate amount of time looking at these  
3 really, really tiny lights, which again was just  
4 surprising to her. But it was from that that we  
5 were able to -- and they were these tiny fiber  
6 optic lights, but she was able to explore the  
7 length of the fiber optic chord, we were able to  
8 start working on certain concepts like on and off,  
9 how big, how small.

10           There's a whole conversation here, but  
11 it goes back to that being able to take the time to  
12 explore the environment and it's repetition too.  
13 It's setting up, I say controlled with quotes,

14 meaning it's an environment that is understood and

15 known, four walls, a door and from there that

16 safety that the individual feels and then be able

17 to build language and concepts from that.

18 Sorry, I could go on.

19 MS. FLAX: Thank you. I appreciate

20 it.

21 MR. FILEK: Yep.

22 MR. O'CONNOR: This is Corbb, did you

23 want to add anything to that, Laurie, I want to

24 make sure that we give you the time?

25 MS. MCBRIDE: This is Laurie. As far



1 as like exploring my environment now as low vision,  
2 I mean, I use a long cane and if there is good  
3 light I can see very well, but it's very central  
4 and so it's very often that people appear out of  
5 nowhere in front of me because I don't have any  
6 peripheral. It never really made me jumpy because  
7 I think I just know it's going to happen so it  
8 doesn't scare me so much, but it's a learned thing  
9 because you experience it. And I loved horror  
10 movies so it doesn't phase me much, you know, so  
11 it's what you get used to in your environment.

12 MR. FILEK: Yeah.

13 MS. MCBRIDE: Like my vision loss is

14 so progressive that I probably had vision loss as a  
15 child, but it was so minimal and so gradual nobody  
16 noticed it, including myself.

17           The person that did notice my night  
18 vision loss was because I was driving at night and  
19 she complained, my stepdaughter, she complained to  
20 her mother that I suck at driving. And it's that  
21 environment, you know, it just wasn't conducive  
22 anymore, but we didn't know.

23           You just learn these things as you go.  
24 So when you start realizing what the cause of your  
25 vision loss, or that you have it, then that's where

1 you do relearn your environment. And so I learn it  
2 a different way now and that's just doing a preview  
3 when it's good light.

4 The best example is my hotel room.

5 Yesterday I walked into it, I've been at this hotel  
6 this is my third time, the same hotel, I like it  
7 because then I know where everything is. But it  
8 was a different room, of course, but it's the same  
9 layout but it was reversed. I could find the light  
10 switch but it turned on a teeny tiny light on the  
11 other side of the room and I'm like okay.

12 So I stepped in the room and found the  
13 bed with my leg, so I said okay, the bed is there.

14 So I had to remember and picture in my head the  
15 layout of the room. And I knew there was two beds  
16 so I found the middle of the room by walking along  
17 the edge of the bed and then I could find the light  
18 switch.

19 So again, it's all tactile, but it is  
20 exploring the room safely as long as there is  
21 nothing in the middle of the floor, but I had my  
22 cane.

23 MR. O'CONNOR: This is Corbb. Thank  
24 you.

25 Other questions?

1 MR. O'DAY: This is Michael.

2 MR. O'CONNOR: Michael.

3 MR. O'DAY: Yeah, actually this

4 question is maybe more for Natasha or Jon, but I'm

5 wondering what is the population of DeafBlind

6 people that are in -- that are receiving services

7 through, especially through WDU, and then also

8 given kind of the specialized nature of and such a

9 variety of what the needs would be of the

10 population, does SSB have that expertise in-house,

11 do they reach out to other organizations for

12 support in helping folks in the DeafBlind

13 community? I was just wondering how that works?

14 MS. JERDE: This is Natasha. I can  
15 start and Jon, please jump in. I'm pulling up our  
16 data dashboard for how many DeafBlind individuals  
17 we served last quarter. It's usually between 40  
18 and 50, give or take a few folks, that tends to be  
19 a pretty steady number. We do have in-house  
20 expertise, but we also work a lot with Helen Keller  
21 and other community providers.

22 We have a counselor that has a primary  
23 DeafBlind caseload, her name is Lindsay Escalara,  
24 who signs. We also have Hannah Edwards who  
25 actually worked for a community provider called

1 Stone Arch Employment Solutions and she is a fluent  
2 signer with background in DeafBlind placement and  
3 she is one of our employment specialists. The  
4 supervisor overseeing that team, Sara Kreiling,  
5 used to work for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services  
6 herself.

7 So we do have a lot of in-house  
8 expertise, but we are so happy to have a contract  
9 with Helen Keller. We have, I don't know, maybe  
10 one or two people a year who will go out to New  
11 York to the Center, but we also like having the  
12 back door/front door support of Helen Keller being  
13 right here in Minnesota.

14 Jon, anything you want to add to that?

15 MR. BENSON: Thank you, this is Jon.

16 First of all I just want to thank both

17 John Filek and Laurie for presenting today,

18 absolutely wonderful. Thank you.

19 I would add that the SSB director and

20 our other supervisor, Lindsey Hanson, both are

21 familiar with and are cognizant of issues in the

22 DeafBlind community and both have the ability to

23 sign. We are very fortunate at SSB to really have

24 quite a, I would suggest given our size, an

25 abundance of folks who are expert in this area.



1           And so we do have oftentimes to  
2           consult with John or others with HKNC and we do our  
3           best to make sure that folks are hooked up with  
4           what they need in order to do what they need to do.

5           MR. FILEK: This is John. I want to  
6           just add now that I have had the experience of  
7           working with VR agencies in other states, there is  
8           a lot that Minnesota has to be proud of. There is  
9           that expertise that's here and SSB has really put  
10          you guys head and shoulders above many of the other  
11          states in the country.

12          MS. JERDE: This is Natasha. I  
13          shouldn't have forgot, but I did forget. I was the

14 DeafBlind counselor a few years back, it's been a  
15 while, I'm starting to get old, but the DeafBlind  
16 community has always been near and dear to my heart  
17 because once you really get to know that community  
18 and get engaged in a lot of the social activities  
19 they are just amazing people, it's an amazing  
20 community in Minnesota.

21 MR. O'CONNOR: This is Corbb. And I  
22 will tell you John Filek that you are speaking the  
23 language of VR agencies when you start comparing  
24 and contrasting, it's a very competitive group of  
25 people.

1           We probably have time for one more  
2           question from those who are at the meeting today  
3           virtually or in person.

4           MR. HART: Rocky Hart.

5           MR. O'CONNOR: Yes, Rocky, can you get  
6           to a microphone or if it's a brief question I can  
7           repeat it for you and save you the trip.

8           MR. HART: I can absolutely get to a  
9           microphone.

10          MR. O'CONNOR: Okay. I believe it is  
11          in the center of the tables in the back of the  
12          room. Or you could borrow Frank's microphone right  
13          where you are.

14 MR. HART: That works too.

15 MR. ELLER: Right here.

16 MR. HART: All right. Are we good?

17 MR. ELLER: Right there.

18 MR. O'CONNOR: Yep, just get very

19 close to it. Rocky, you need to get down to the

20 microphone.

21 MS. JERDE: There is a chair right in

22 front of you and in front of that chair is a

23 microphone.

24 MR. HART: Thank you very much.

25 MS. JERDE: You are welcome.

1           MR. HART: Thank you guys for your  
2           patience. I would like to take this opportunity on  
3           behalf of the Helen Keller National Center, because  
4           I was a consumer there and also an employee, to  
5           thank John and Laurie for coming here. I know when  
6           we and as the Professional Development Task Force  
7           were looking at good candidates to give this  
8           presentation, you guys came up and I don't think we  
9           could have asked for a better presentation. And so  
10          I just want to thank you guys both.

11                 I think you really -- I can tell you  
12           as a DeafBlind person myself you really spoke  
13           eloquently to the real challenges and also the

14 contributions of the DeafBlind community. So thank  
15 you both. And I think that State Services and the  
16 SRC-B will learn a lot from what you had to offer,  
17 so thank you guys very much.

18 MR. FILEK: Thank you, Rocky.

19 MR. O'CONNOR: This is Corbb. Thank  
20 you, John. Thank you, Lauri, really appreciate you  
21 being here. I personally have a dozen more  
22 questions now than I did at the beginning, I work  
23 in digital accessibility and I can empathize a  
24 little better with people who learn parts of  
25 accessibility for the first time and then realize

1 what that opens up as they start to explore. So I  
2 am confident that we will have more conversations  
3 along the way and glad to have you with us tonight.  
4 Please stay as long you are able and as long as you  
5 like to.

6 MR. FILEK: Thank you very much and  
7 thank you for having us here.

8 MR. O'CONNOR: So we will move to some  
9 other business items. We got a few things to do as  
10 a Council and then we will take a break and come  
11 back for the SSB Director's report. And I realize  
12 for those of you who really like tradition, I am so  
13 sorry.

14           So we move to our next item which is  
15   updates and expectations of councilmembers for the  
16   State Plan and our Annual Report. Did Lisa make it  
17   on the call tonight?

18           MS. JERDE: This is Tasha. No, but  
19   she did give me information to share.

20           MR. O'CONNOR: Excellent, okay. So I  
21   will give you this as a little bit of an  
22   introduction to that report.

23           So the Annual Report is something that  
24   we put together once a year and we send it to the  
25   Governor, but did you know, fun factoid, the



1     Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended by Title IV  
2     of the Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act, pop  
3     quiz if you can get the date right when that was  
4     passed, we will do that contest at the break.  
5     Anyway, requires State Rehab Councils to submit the  
6     Annual Report to RSA, our friends at the Rehab  
7     Services Administration and the State Governor. So  
8     the Act doesn't actually tell us what we need to  
9     do, but it does say that we should provide  
10    information on the status of the VR programs  
11    operating within the state and that the report is  
12    to be made available to the public through  
13    appropriate modes of communication.

14           So lest you think that this report is  
15   just some nice thing that we give to Governor Walz,  
16   au contraire, it is to keep us in compliance and  
17   for reporting out this information. So there are  
18   some things that we will need to do and I'm glad  
19   Natasha is here to tell us what those are.

20           MS. JERDE: This is Natasha. Two  
21   things we will talk about is the Annual Report and  
22   then a lead into the Combined State Plan, which I  
23   think you guys will get into in a little bit.

24           So we do have some deadline reminders  
25   and I will start with the State Rehabilitation

1 Council Blind Annual Report, that deadline is fast  
2 approaching. Lisa Larges, our outreach  
3 coordinator, is the one who coordinates and  
4 compiles this report but she does that in consult  
5 and coordination with the Council and committees.

6 She shares that a report from each  
7 committee is due by November 10, earlier the  
8 better. And in addition she would love a  
9 suggestion for someone or something to profile in  
10 the report. So previous years we profiled a  
11 project or a special activity, we've profiled  
12 former customers who have achieved a really cool  
13 employment outcome, volunteers, Communication

14 Center participants, so she is looking for ideas.

15 And that is the Annual Report piece.

16 I will pause there before I talk anything else.

17 MR. O'CONNOR: Are there questions

18 about the Annual Report and what is needed from

19 you, committee chairs, who chaired a committee in

20 the past year? And I would ask those of you who

21 are now chairing the committee, not technically

22 your responsibility, but it sure would be helpful

23 if you could maybe contact your predecessor and

24 help encourage them to meet this deadline, along

25 with lots of reminders from myself, Susan and Lisa.

1           Any questions? I will say for the  
2 first three committees who submit your reports I  
3 will buy you Candyland, just saying.

4           MS. SANDERS: This is Judy. The  
5 Senior report is already in, we'll take our candy.

6           MR. O'CONNOR: It shall be issued.  
7 Two more committees you can make it in tonight.

8           All right. Next up is the Needs  
9 Assessment piece.

10          MS. JERDE: Combined State Plan.

11          MR. O'CONNOR: Combined State Plan,  
12 sorry. You can go there first.

13          MS. JERDE: So the second deadline

14 reminder is that you will be hearing a lot more  
15 today on the Combined State Plan which is currently  
16 being coordinated by Jennifer Beilke. But I will  
17 emphasize there will be some quick turnarounds,  
18 there may be some quick asks from her and we  
19 anticipate future voting needs around many of these  
20 items.

21           The Council is a key part of our  
22 Combined State Plan and many of the committees are  
23 working on portions of the plan. And I just want  
24 to express my appreciation to you all for the time  
25 and helping us with these two items. It just shows

1     how important the work of the Council is and how we  
2     do not and cannot do this work without you.

3             And the Annual Report will be due  
4     before the Combined State Plan, but the Combined  
5     State Plan is like the word, combined with other  
6     programs within our department and they put the  
7     time frames on us, we don't get to make the  
8     deadlines. So there are a lot of things due in a  
9     very quick period of time. That's all.

10            MR. O'CONNOR: This is Corbb. The two  
11     pieces to note, just to make sure we touch them  
12     both, are the Comprehensive Needs Assessment and  
13     the Goals and Priorities; is that correct?

14 MS. JERDE: That's correct.

15 MR. O'CONNOR: Okay, making sure I

16 didn't forget something.

17 All right. So we will move, then, to

18 Samantha whose chairing the task force on the

19 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment and I

20 suspect Jennifer Beilke may have some comments on

21 that afterward, so we will make time for that

22 before we turn to questions. Samantha.

23 MS. FLAX: Thanks, Corbb. Everyone

24 bear with me, I am a little under the weather today

25 so if I say something that doesn't make sense, just



1 let me know.

2 So the task force has met a few times.

3 We are all currently reviewing the draft that

4 Jennifer has sent us with what we have for the

5 needs based assessment so far. Some overview of

6 some things that we have are we have some really

7 detailed sections on Pre-ETS services, information

8 on how many students are getting services, which

9 programs and community partners. We are working

10 with things like how to reach more students,

11 particularly how to get students in rural Minnesota

12 involved in the metro area, for example.

13 We are also looking at adding some

14 data in terms of centrally related to ethnic  
15 diversity, ELL programming, things like that. We  
16 have details on community partners and growing  
17 relationships with that and with the DeafBlind  
18 community as well as we have been discussing a lot  
19 tonight.

20 So just as an ask for the Council, we  
21 will be sending out that plan within the next, I  
22 would say, two months or so before our next  
23 meeting. And we will probably be voting on  
24 approving that at the next meeting, so keep an eye  
25 out for that and of course we will go over just an

1 ask that everyone be mindful that we will be  
2 reaching out. As Natasha said, there's a lot of  
3 deadlines coming up so we need to be mindful of  
4 that.

5 But as an overview we have a lot of  
6 really great information, we are looking at adding  
7 some data and some numbers and some more research  
8 and things. But we made a lot of progress, thank  
9 you so much to Jennifer for getting that draft to  
10 me, it's been great to look at it and see the  
11 progress.

12 I'm probably forgetting things so  
13 Jennifer, if you have anything you want to add or

14 clarify or share that I missed I would really

15 appreciate it.

16 MS. BEILKE: This is Jennifer. I

17 think you covered it pretty well, Sam.

18 MR. O'CONNOR: This is Corbb.

19 Excellent, thank you Jennifer and --

20 MS. BEILKE: Can I --

21 MR. O'CONNOR: Oh, go ahead, Jennifer.

22 MS. BEILKE: Can I take that back? I

23 guess just to say that we have, I mean as Sam

24 mentioned, we have data that is being run and it's

25 in the process of being run, so yes, it is coming

1 and there is some suggestions for, you know, is  
2 this an area where we want to get more details and  
3 questions like that that we could pursue, but there  
4 is also areas where, you know, we need to pull  
5 data, that it needs a bit more thorough analysis to  
6 be conducted. So that was all, thank you.

7 MR. O'CONNOR: This is Corbb. Thank  
8 you, Jennifer and Samantha. Any questions on our  
9 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment?

10 (No response.)

11 MR. O'CONNOR: Excellent. Prepare for  
12 some light reading for our next meeting.

13 We then look to our Customer

14 Satisfaction Goals and Priorities Committee. There  
15 was, and as Jennifer makes her way to a microphone  
16 hopefully, or to her microphone, there was a draft  
17 sent to the Council via email that you might want  
18 to reference.

19 Jennifer, anything you wish to add?

20 Jennifer Dunnam, that is, our committee  
21 chairperson.

22 MS. DUNNAM: I received -- am I coming  
23 through okay?

24 MR. O'CONNOR: You are.

25 MS. DUNNAM: All right. Hello from

1 Baltimore.

2           So I assume that what was sent out is  
3 similar to what we were working with, I did not get  
4 a chance to look at those notes, but I will say we  
5 have met -- the development of draft and  
6 preliminaries of the Goals and Priorities has been  
7 a long time function of this committee and we are  
8 happy to be working on that again with SSB. This  
9 is a joint effort with SSB to develop, agree to  
10 these goals and priorities and strategies.

11           This committee is the Council's -- we  
12 facilitate the Council's work doing it. So there  
13 is early, early preliminary drafts of these. We

14 will be presenting them in December for approval,  
15 but the desire was to kind of get a jump on getting  
16 people to think about it a little bit.

17           There are four broad goals here, the  
18 first one being improving -- and some of these are  
19 different ways of saying what has been a focus in  
20 the past, but just kind of different ways of  
21 looking at it to try and get angles that are  
22 improvement.

23           So the first one, improving  
24 partnerships. Increase inner agency coordination  
25 with local and state workforce partners so that



1 employers and individuals who are Blind, low vision  
2 and DeafBlind have a customer centric positive  
3 experience, no matter which door they enter.

4           And some of the things that are being  
5 looked at is to implement an outreach and training  
6 campaign for, you know, the various stakeholders  
7 that we have involved in this to, you know, people  
8 who are -- workforce centers and other areas where  
9 people might come through some of those doors, if  
10 you will.

11           And to develop a universal application  
12 and process so that prior to their intake at SSB  
13 that there is some basics that can be caught by

14 whatever agency someone is coming through, you  
15 know, if it just happens to be a Workforce Center  
16 or somewhere else, that there is a unified way to  
17 capture the data that is needed to get people into  
18 SSB as quickly as possible toward the intake  
19 process where they are developing their individual  
20 plans and needs. That's some examples of  
21 strategies for the first goal.

22 The second goal: Increase the  
23 workforce participation rate, build relationships  
24 with businesses that lead to career opportunities  
25 with family sustaining wages for individuals who

1 are Blind, low vision and DeafBlind. And there's a  
2 bunch of things in the Evolve program, or excuse  
3 me, in the Evolve plan that's been distributed  
4 that's gonna be in here. Again these are very,  
5 very early drafts so there will be more strategies  
6 for these.

7 The third one, focus on diversity,  
8 equity, inclusion and accessibility. Create an  
9 agency that better meets the needs of the current  
10 and emerging workforce, including improving  
11 services to new Americans, underrepresented  
12 communities and veterans.

13 And again, a lot from the Evolve VR

14 plan, but you know there is in addition to the  
15 cultural and other types of things to be focused on  
16 with diversity that there's been such a change over  
17 the last few years in the workforce itself and the  
18 people that they served, peoples approach to work,  
19 there is a lot to be considered. So please stay  
20 tuned for more on that.

21 And the fourth one is innovate and  
22 create. Identify and implement innovative and  
23 evidence-based practices for service delivery  
24 approaches so individuals with disabilities have  
25 the same opportunity to engage in the labor market

1 as everyone else. And one example of the strategy  
2 there is the employer Reasonable Accommodations  
3 Fund and Program and variety of things from Evolve  
4 as well.

5 Jon Benson and Jennifer Beilke and the  
6 rest of the committee were at the most recent  
7 meeting we had. We will be meeting again to deal  
8 with this and some of the other aspects of our  
9 committee near the middle or end of October.

10 If there is anything that I have  
11 forgotten that any of the rest of the committee or  
12 Jon or Jennifer would like to add, please let me  
13 know. If not, that is my report.

14 MR. O'CONNOR: This is Corbb. I will  
15 say I misspoke, that was not distributed, it was  
16 just in the same folder with the things that were  
17 distributed.

18 MS. DUNNAM: Okay, no worries.

19 MR. O'CONNOR: I apologize.

20 Jon Benson, Ryan Haenze or Jennifer  
21 Beilke, anything you wish to add? And forgive me,  
22 I think I am forgetting somebody else I think was  
23 at that meeting.

24 MS. DUNNAM: I think Ryan Strunk was  
25 there too.

1 MR. O'CONNOR: Ryan, thank you.

2 MS. DUNNAM: It was the Ryans.

3 MR. BENSON: This is Jon. As usual,

4 Jennifer, an absolutely concise and wonderful

5 presentation of the summation of our work. We are

6 looking to beef up some of these areas, we will be

7 putting back -- we will be inclusive of more

8 details in it, but that's pretty much the summation

9 as Jennifer has indicated, so.

10 And as always, if other members of the

11 Council or even of the public have some thoughts

12 around some of these things, let me know.

13 MR. O'CONNOR: This is Corbb. For

14 those who are curious, the giggling the room was  
15 that Jon, you were at about a 400 percent volume  
16 for a second and really making sure that we have  
17 Joe in the back keeping his hand on the dial, so  
18 grateful for that.

19 MR. BENSON: Well, I'm glad that I was  
20 able to be heard.

21 MR. O'CONNOR: Any questions for the  
22 committee?

23 (No response.)

24 MR. O'CONNOR: So again, the ask --  
25 the summaries of asks. One for the goals and



1 priorities, if you have -- not if, the feedback  
2 that you do have, please make sure to get that to  
3 our committee to any of those individuals.  
4 Jennifer Dunnam is chairing it.

5 The Statewide Needs Assessment, as I  
6 say, be prepared to read and discuss and vote on  
7 that at our next meeting.

8 And then the Annual Report, committees  
9 please get us your reports for that. If you need  
10 guidance, previous reports to model off of, let us  
11 know as well as looking for, you know, a consumer  
12 or an event or a program that we should highlight  
13 in the report above the committee reports, please

14 send that to Lisa Larges all by November 10 and two  
15 other committees are getting Candyland out of the  
16 deal.

17 Pausing in case there is any further  
18 discussion or questions on those items.

19 (No response.)

20 MR. O'CONNOR: Okay. So we will take  
21 a ten-minute break here. Before you head out, if  
22 you are on the Council it is time for some pictures  
23 so that we can put those in said Annual Report. If  
24 you are here in the room we can certainly grab your  
25 picture, if you are on Zoom or if you are in the

1 room and wish to use a different photo of yourself  
2 in perhaps a more interesting outfit, please email  
3 that to Susan tomorrow. I am looking to get all  
4 the photos in before the weekend so that, and most  
5 importantly, before we all forget.

6 So we will take ten minutes and  
7 reconvene at 7:15.

8 (Break taken from 7:05 to 7:15 p.m.)

9 MR. O'CONNOR: Now that I am unmuted  
10 we will call ourselves back to order. We will  
11 start up again.

12 All right. Thank you everyone for  
13 making it back from our break and now you can all

14 rest a little easier knowing that we are now moving

15 on to our Director's report.

16 MS. SANDERS: We need the other half

17 of the room to listen too.

18 MR. STRUNK: I think they are getting

19 situated.

20 MR. O'CONNOR: They will catch up,

21 this is Corbb. So we will now turn to Natasha for

22 the Director's report.

23 MS. JERDE: All right. This report is

24 much abbreviated because I knew that this agenda

25 today was going to be action packed, so I will not

1 have the nine pages like I usually do, so you are

2 welcome.

3 So first I want to start off with some

4 Employer Reasonable Accommodation Fund updates.

5 Just as a quick refresh. ERAF, as we are calling

6 it, is a reimbursement program for small to

7 midsize businesses. They can get reimbursed for

8 job accommodations they make for job applicants and

9 employees with disabilities. They can use this

10 fund to get reimbursed for interpreters,

11 captioners, if they purchase JAWS, if they buy a

12 CCTV. All of those things could be reimbursed.

13 And we have big news which is now we

14 officially have a program coordinator for ERAF, his  
15 name is Ray McCoy, he comes from a program called  
16 Hired and before that he worked in Pennsylvania  
17 serving veterans and veterans with disabilities.  
18 Ray actually started today and he will be hitting  
19 the ground running.

20 One of the biggest things he will be  
21 doing is connecting with all of the various  
22 programs that interact with businesses throughout  
23 the state to tell them about this program.

24 We are also hiring for an ERAF account  
25 technician, which is the fiscal support for the

1 program. That position just came down on October 2  
2 and interviews will begin soon. And we are hoping  
3 to have someone in that position by next month.

4 And we have almost completed our very  
5 first reimbursement to an employer and the really  
6 cool thing is that employer is a small business  
7 owner who also is Blind and supporting individuals  
8 he is hiring who has disabilities. So he is going  
9 to be featured in a, I don't know, a press release  
10 or a blog post about our very first employer who  
11 uses our program.

12 And as I mentioned a few months ago,  
13 the key to a successful launch is a good outreach

14 campaign so our website is now up and running and

15 you can check it out at [mn.gov/deed/eraf](http://mn.gov/deed/eraf) so that

16 you can continue to help us spread the word that

17 this program exists.

18           Onto some assorted projects and

19 notable news. I first wanted to start out with I

20 will be attending the National Governors

21 Association's Disability Policy Action Lab. In a

22 few weeks I'll be attending with the Governor's

23 Workforce Development Board and we are going to be

24 talking about Minnesota's disability policies that

25 actually a lot of that just happened this last



1 legislative season. We'll be talking about the  
2 Employer Reasonable Accommodation Fund as well as  
3 the work that the Communication Center is doing  
4 under their Literacy For All campaign. And we are  
5 going to be talking about the funding that both VRS  
6 and SSB got this last year.

7 We also recently, and many  
8 councilmembers were there, had the customer --  
9 well, it was the management analysis division who  
10 interviewed a few individuals and staff about their  
11 experiences with SSB.

12 Both Jon and I were not entirely  
13 pleased with the service we got from the

14 contractors. I think there was a lot of questions  
15 that came out of the rundown a few weeks ago about  
16 how many interviews the contractor did, did they  
17 truly reach out to everyone they possibly could to  
18 get some information? And so we thanked them for  
19 their work and we ended their contract at the end  
20 of September and we were going to move forward with  
21 other avenues to gather information from others.

22           The National Disability Employment  
23 Awareness Month is this month. VRS and SSB staff  
24 hosted an employer event on October 3 and there  
25 were several presenters and a number, about 21

1 employers, received awards for their partnership  
2 with hiring people with disabilities.

3 Jennifer shares some community partner  
4 highlights. We have three new contracts that were  
5 executed and we have -- actually I don't think one  
6 is almost, because Jennifer texted me and said they  
7 just went through. So those contracts include  
8 Vanward Consulting, which is led by a man named  
9 Gary Horton. Then we have Envision Foundation -  
10 College Success Program, this used to be known as  
11 Learning Ally Virtual Employment Services and  
12 Pre-ETS. And we also have Hands On Tech which is  
13 run by Debbie Bock.

14           Our next community partner forum is on  
15   October 10 from 10:00 a.m. to noon. That will take  
16   place virtually by Zoom. The topics for that forum  
17   will include a presentation on the Employer  
18   Reasonable Accommodation Fund with program  
19   resources for our partners and a website  
20   demonstration.

21           We will also be having a facilitated  
22   townhall discussion on contracting with SSB and the  
23   State of Minnesota. We will be gathering community  
24   partners' experiences, many negative with our  
25   contracting process that the state has, and gather

1 ideas that they have related to ways we can reduce  
2 barriers. The great news is our frustrations are  
3 being heard and our Commissioner's office is  
4 willing to go to the Department of Administration  
5 and try to find better ways to contract.

6 Right now small business owners, if  
7 you are a business of one, you have to carry a lot  
8 of insurance that's very expensive and almost  
9 impossible to get as a small business owner. And  
10 so we are hoping we can make some changes to make  
11 it easier to contract with us.

12 Onto some outreach news. A lot of our  
13 outreach these past few months has to do with our

14 Communication Center Literacy For All work. I am  
15 the only one calling it Literacy For All, there is  
16 actually no catchy phrase for it, but I'm just  
17 going to see if it will take on a life of its own.

18 But what Literacy For All means is  
19 that we have been doing a lot of work bringing  
20 materials to our Communication Center in other  
21 languages and we have especially been working on  
22 the revitalization of Dakota and Ojibway.

23 So we have been doing a lot of  
24 connecting with the Governor's office, the State of  
25 Minnesota Tribal liaisons and the Minnesota Indian

1     Affairs Council to see what else we can do to  
2     support the tribal community. Our hope is that we  
3     can present the work the Communication Center has  
4     been doing at a future MIAC conference and make  
5     sure that what we are doing is actually bringing  
6     value and if it's not what else can we do to  
7     support the tribal communities.

8             We had a really cool visit from the  
9     assistant secretary, Glenna Gallo. The assistant  
10    secretary, Glenna Gallo, comes from the U.S.  
11    Department of Education's Office of Special  
12    Education and Rehabilitation Services, otherwise  
13    known as OSERS. Basically they are the Fed's Rehab

14 Services Administration, she is their boss's boss,

15 so she's very high up in the Department of

16 Education.

17 She actually came to Minnesota as part

18 of the Department of Education Secretary Cardona's

19 Raise the Bar Bus Tour and the assistant secretary

20 got to hear from our very own Corbb O'Connor, a

21 college student who has been receiving our

22 services, Catherine Durivage with the Minnesota

23 Braille and Talking Book Library and several other

24 staff. She toured our Communication Center and

25 Anna Werner in our Braille unit presented her with



1 a tactile graphic of the Department of Education

2 seal.

3 An update from engineering. This is

4 going to be very disappointing, I think, news. So

5 due to changes in technology we will no longer be

6 able to provide audio materials on cassette. So we

7 apologize in advance for any inconvenience this may

8 cause our customers. Though we can make cassettes

9 up by hand, and in those cases where there is

10 absolutely no other alternative we may be able to

11 assist. At some point, though, that's not going to

12 be possible because of the aging equipment.

13 I vaguely recall Dave and others

14 telling me a story not that long ago of changing a  
15 record needle or something with the record player,  
16 so that wasn't that long ago I don't think.

17           Some Pre-ETS and transition quick  
18 hits. Our August canoeing activity with Wilderness  
19 Inquiry had ten students learning about  
20 self-advocacy and teamwork while paddling on the  
21 Mississippi.

22           Sky's the Limit, which is a program  
23 created by David Denotaris, will be presenting a  
24 workshop with Academy students November 6 through  
25 the 8th. We will host a virtual college 101

1 workshop at the end of November. This is an  
2 opportunity for high school students to talk with  
3 college students about what college life and  
4 learning is like.

5 And staff are presenting at and  
6 participating in upcoming conferences including  
7 MRA, the Minnesota Rehabilitation Association,  
8 MDVI, I'm not entirely sure what that acronym  
9 stands for, CSAVR and NCSAB.

10 Onto Business Enterprise program quick  
11 hits. Our BEP elected committee of Blind vendor  
12 chair, Mike Colbrunn, as well as BEP Director John  
13 Hulet, visited Turnkey Corrections in October.

14 They are exploring potential commissary operation

15 partnerships.

16 The elected committee holds its last

17 quarterly meeting of 2023 on October 29 and BEP is

18 starting the collection of data on October 1 for

19 completing its Annual Federal RSA 15 Report.

20 Onto Workforce Development Unit. I do

21 have a little bit of data to share, but it is super

22 exciting data actually.

23 MR. O'CONNOR: This is Corbb. Before

24 you dig into your data there, are there questions

25 up to this point in Natasha's report?

1 MR. STRUNK: Ryan Strunk.

2 MR. O'CONNOR: Ryan.

3 MR. STRUNK: First of all, Natasha, I

4 would like to say regarding cassettes, how dare

5 you? This is what my tax dollars go for. But also

6 I did want to ask you if you can share the

7 profession of the individual who took advantage of

8 the first ERAF position? Essentially what industry

9 is the first ERAF recipient in, are you able to

10 share that?

11 MS. JERDE: This is Natasha. Yes,

12 it's in the technology arena.

13 MR. STRUNK: Great, okay. I think the

14 thing that I am particularly excited about here is  
15 not only are we providing an opportunity for a  
16 Blind person to get a job through this program, but  
17 we are also building Blind management and  
18 leadership as well by offering this program to that  
19 particular employer. So I'm excited to see how  
20 this continues to unfold.

21 MS. JERDE: This is Natasha. I too.

22 I mean, small business and people with disabilities  
23 who run small businesses, I think this is awesome.  
24 And I take it back, it's not technology, it's  
25 media, digital media. So not quite technology.

1 MR. STRUNK: All right.

2 MR. O'CONNOR: This is Corbb. Are

3 there other questions or comments up to this point?

4 (No response.)

5 MR. O'CONNOR: Hearing none, we will

6 continue.

7 MS. JERDE: All right. Some data

8 updates. And sometimes when I read data I'm like

9 oh gosh, this is not going to sound good, I really

10 don't want to but I need to. This is not that

11 time, we actually have some really great news.

12 So we get quarterly dashboards from

13 the feds and we just got our most recent dashboard

14 last week, this is from April to June of 2023, it's  
15 really the last quarter of our program year so it's  
16 a big one.

17 So the number of people we've served,  
18 and these are comparing so it's April to June  
19 compared to the quarter before that, so we are  
20 comparing quarters. We've had a 34 percent  
21 increase in the number of people we are serving.

22 While we are down 12 percent for number of  
23 applicants, we have 7 percent more eligible  
24 individuals and 6 percent more IPEs, first IPEs  
25 that were developed. Our eligibility timeliness



1 went down about 4 percent, but our IPE, getting  
2 them in, we have 100 percent of our IPEs are  
3 created within the time frame.

4 The number of people who received  
5 career services increased by 34 percent and the  
6 number of people who received training services  
7 increased by 30 percent. The number of people who  
8 leave us unsuccessfully went down .2 percent.

9 And our employment rate is pretty much  
10 the highest I have ever seen it in 15 years that I  
11 have been at SSB. Our employment rate, we  
12 officially broke 50 percent, we are at 51 percent  
13 employment rate. The feds want to see 50 or higher.

14 I don't know many times where we have broke that 50  
15 percent. The quarter before that it was  
16 47 percent, so we had an increase in our employment  
17 rate.

18 I will not be happy until that's over  
19 60 percent, then we would be number one in the  
20 country because, you know, we are all about  
21 competition. But what that really means is that  
22 more people are getting jobs than leaving our  
23 program unsuccessfully and that's the most  
24 important thing. So I'm happy to share that data.

25 MR. O'CONNOR: This is Corbb. When

1 you are talking about the increases, that's quarter

2 over quarter, year over year?

3 MS. JERDE: Quarter over quarter.

4 MR. O'CONNOR: So Q4 compared to -- or

5 April to June compared to January through March?

6 MS. JERDE: Correct. And this is

7 Tasha, but the employment rate, that is really

8 capturing the entire year and that's really what

9 the feds are going to be looking at. When they put

10 our name up on the big board at CSAVR, Corbb is

11 very familiar with they blast all of our data out

12 for everyone to see and then you hide your head in

13 shame when you are, you know, not the best. We

14 will be up there, we will be up near the top.

15           Onto some staffing updates. Starting

16 with the Workforce Development Unit, we have filled

17 all three of our posted VR tech positions. We

18 welcome Cheryl Lavrenz, Jeremy Hoke, who used to be

19 our mailroom coordinator, and Jennifer Fischer. We

20 also welcome Evan Gardener who is our new low

21 vision assistive technology trainer, so he focuses

22 on low vision technology.

23           For Senior Services we have two

24 positions posted for vision specialist. One will

25 be serving down in the Rochester area. The recent

1 general appropriation increase we received is  
2 allowing us to expand our senior services to more  
3 people, which means we need more staff to serve.  
4 Ed reports a really competitive applicant pool and  
5 I think two people actually came from the medical  
6 field, namely, ophthalmology and occupational  
7 therapy.

8 News from Administrative Services

9 which includes Bri and my teams. We welcome  
10 Woinitu Estifanos as our new assistant fiscal  
11 coordinator. She transfers to us from our  
12 department's administrative and financial services  
13 team.

14           We will soon begin interviews for a  
15           second outreach in communication specialist who  
16           will be in charge of the Combined State Plan moving  
17           forward. And they will be helping Lisa with  
18           outreach events and communications.

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

23           Interviews begin next week for the  
24           mailroom and Linda Lingen retired from her role as  
25           an intermittent driver. We will be hiring another

1 driver to fill that vacancy. Hopefully soon we  
2 will also be hiring for a part-time driver that  
3 we'll offer a more set and stable driving schedule  
4 for our staff.

5 We have been experiencing a driver  
6 shortage due to factors outside of our control and  
7 staff are understandably frustrated with the  
8 limited options and they are not able to get out to  
9 their customers as much as they would like to.

10 And so that is my update. I have kept  
11 it within my time frame I think. I will turn it  
12 over for any other questions.

13 MR. O'CONNOR: This is Corbb. You

14 always do and it's the biggest part of the meeting

15 for lots of great reasons, so don't feel pressured

16 to keep it in the time frame.

17 Are there questions or comments on

18 Natasha's report?

19 So this is Corbb. One question I had,

20 you mentioned at the end there I think you were

21 talking about the folks with medical experience,

22 that was for -- was that for the Senior Services

23 role?

24 MS. JERDE: Correct.

25 MR. O'CONNOR: And what excites you



1 about that, at least you sounded excited?

2 MS. JERDE: This is Natasha. It's not

3 exciting in the sense that it's not like the

4 medical model piece, it's interesting because at

5 least one, I believe, is a like doctor who is

6 considering leaving the medical arena to come into

7 State Service, which was interesting.

8 MR. O'CONNOR: This is Corbb.

9 Definitely not the usual path.

10 MS. JERDE: Right.

11 MR. O'CONNOR: Got it. Thank you.

12 Any other questions before move on?

13 (No response.)

14 MR. O'CONNOR: Great. Thank you very

15 much.

16 So we now turn to a report from our

17 Vendor Outcomes and Measures Committee. And this

18 is the review of survey data of Adjustment to

19 Blindness providers and the lady who took the job

20 asked if we could limit the amount of statistics.

21 Her very first report to this Council is all about

22 statistics, we turn to Judy Sanders.

23 MS. SANDERS: Okay. What we

24 discovered about these statistics was that there

25 were so few of them that we couldn't really

1 determine much. There wasn't enough of a  
2 percentage to decide what it all meant. And so  
3 what we've been focusing on -- well, I've only been  
4 at one meeting, so. And all the rest of the  
5 committee, I believe, has been coming a little bit  
6 longer than that, but I don't think -- well, I'm  
7 trying to think. Jennifer Beilke was there, but I  
8 don't know that anyone else is -- was at -- goes  
9 past before my tenure.

10 MR. O'CONNOR: I think Jan was.

11 MS. SANDERS: Oh yeah, Jan Bailey may  
12 have things she would like to add, yes. Otherwise  
13 we will just talk about you Jan, or something.

14           Anyway, so it's a little bit -- even I  
15   couldn't mess up these statistics there are so few  
16   of them. So what we really wanted to do was figure  
17   out what are we going to do to get a larger  
18   percentage of the population that should be being  
19   surveyed to answer their surveys. And we have --  
20   oh, Briley is on that committee too, so you may  
21   want to make some comments.

22           So we had submitted two questions to  
23   Natasha and I wanted her to talk about it at this  
24   meeting. And she promptly answered the two  
25   questions that I sent or that the committee sent

1 out, but I still would like to read those questions  
2 to everyone here. And I don't know if you want to  
3 talk about your answers, Natasha, or not.

4 MS. JERDE: Sure.

5 MS. SANDERS: Okay, that will be good.

6 So let's do these one question at a time. And we  
7 asked her this first question: We would like to  
8 see a higher participation rate for the vendor  
9 satisfaction survey and we have been told that  
10 adding additional survey methods to include Braille  
11 mailings and live phone calls would be expensive.  
12 So then we asked who has the power to change the  
13 survey methods and from which department's budget

14 would that come? So let's start with that question

15 and see if you want to comment on it, Natasha.

16 MS. JERDE: This is Tasha. I have my

17 response up and I apologize for being long-winded,

18 but then I proceed to be very long-winded in my

19 response to Judy. But frankly, what I said was

20 that that group has a lot of influence and by

21 coming to me and saying that this is something we

22 need, then let's make it so. All the costs

23 primarily come from our voc rehab budget because

24 it's proportionate to how many people respond to

25 the survey. So if 80 percent is related to the VR

1 Program and 80 percent of that cost comes from the  
2 VR Program. The other part of that money would  
3 come from Senior Services.

4 At this time we do have funding  
5 available to do this, can't predict what five, ten  
6 years from now brings. The reason the phone  
7 surveys were cut was there was a budgetary  
8 situation at SSB and we didn't have extra funds,  
9 that's not the situation now.

10 The biggest barrier is really staff  
11 time, which is a very sought after and limited  
12 resource. So if there is SSB staff that has to do  
13 extra work for that it's going to be harder to

14 accomplish, but I think we have contracted out in

15 the past and --

16 MS. SANDERS: Yes, we have.

17 MS. JERDE: -- that option is still

18 available, we can contract out again.

19 MS. SANDERS: Okay. Anybody else with

20 that first question want to add to that or ask more

21 about it?

22 MS. JERDE: This is Natasha. Jennifer

23 adds Braille is already provided for it.

24 MS. SANDERS: Okay. That, I assume,

25 is upon request, you don't just send out Braille



1 without knowing?

2 MS. BEILKE: This is Jennifer.

3 MR. O'CONNOR: Go ahead, Jennifer,

4 you're a little choppy but we'll make the best of

5 it.

6 MS. BEILKE: I'm sorry. I'm on

7 vacation in Wisconsin in the middle of nowhere, so.

8 The Braille is determined by looking

9 at the list or the query. Devin, when he pulls the

10 query, a list of customers to be surveyed, and

11 sends the list to me I look through it and --

12 MS. SANDERS: Wait, you said sends the

13 list -- Jennifer hang on because you broke up.

14 Sends the list where or who?

15 MS. BEILKE: He sends the list to me.

16 MS. SANDERS: Oh, okay.

17 MS. BEILKE: He sends it to me and I

18 look through it because we do the pre-letter.

19 Remember we send out that pre-letter and so -- oh,

20 you know what, Judy, when you are talking about

21 Braille are you talking about Braille for the

22 survey or Braille for the pre-letter?

23 MS. SANDERS: For the survey.

24 MS. BEILKE: Okay, then I guess I

25 should clarify that. I assumed you were talking

1 about Braille for the pre-letter.

2 MS. SANDERS: Briley what did you

3 want?

4 MS. O'CONNOR: Both things.

5 MS. SANDERS: Both things.

6 MS. BEILKE: We send for the

7 pre-letter in Braille.

8 MR. O'CONNOR: So this is Corbb. So

9 just as a point of clarification in case you were

10 unaware. This is a survey to people who have

11 completed their Adjustment to Blindness training

12 and it asks them a lot of questions about their

13 satisfaction with the training.

14            Before that survey comes out, which  
15            comes out quarterly, you will receive a letter,  
16            which as Jennifer said, may be in print, may be in  
17            Braille, based on your reading media presence that  
18            says hey, you are going to get a survey soon.

19            That survey is then emailed to you and  
20            if you don't respond you get a text message that  
21            says hey, go check your email, there's a survey, in  
22            essence. I'm short handing this, it's a lot better  
23            worded than that. But that's it, those are the  
24            only two ways that you get that survey.

25            And so what the committee has long

1 discussed and I'm super excited that all it takes  
2 is a question to Natasha, is how do we make sure  
3 that people get a higher -- that we get a better  
4 response rate through more touch points in  
5 different formats.

6 Jennifer, anything you wish to add  
7 before we go to Briley?

8 MS. BEILKE: They can request  
9 alternative formats for that survey. And people do  
10 request alternative formats for that survey. So,  
11 for example, if an individual is DeafBlind and they  
12 would like to come into SSB and have tactile  
13 interpreters, they may do so. All it takes is a

14 request to Devin, his name is on the pre-survey

15 letter, they just contact Devin and say I would

16 like it in this format. And we can make that

17 happen.

18 So if they want a Braille copy they

19 just need to contact Devin and let him know and we

20 will provide whatever alternative format is

21 requested.

22 MR. O'CONNOR: This is Corbb. Briley.

23 MS. O'CONNOR: Yes, just as a quick

24 follow-up to that. I have, you know, as we've

25 discussed on the committee, we have no doubt that

1     SSB is wonderful at providing accommodations when  
2     they are requested, but another question that has  
3     come up is: Is primary reading medium or preferred  
4     format notated in any way and you use Workforce  
5     One?

6             MS. JERDE: This is Natasha. Yes.

7     And there is always a caveat because it is a free  
8     form, I believe, and they could have multiple  
9     methods or they may not be accurate or they may  
10    have changed their reading mode. So it's  
11    something, but it's not perfect.

12            MS. O'CONNOR: Right.

13            MS. BEILKE: This is Jennifer. I have

14 talked with Courtney about changing those fields in  
15 Workforce One and she is putting in -- I mean, she  
16 has put in that request with the folks at Workforce  
17 One, but it will take many months for that to  
18 happen, but we have addressed that because that is  
19 a great frustration of mine for that survey. So it  
20 will be addressed, but it will take quite a bit of  
21 time to get that addressed.

22 MS. O'CONNOR: And language preference  
23 also is similar, I am assuming?

24 MS. BEILKE: Yes, yes.

25 MR. O'CONNOR: Briley, did you have



1 further comment on that on suggestions of what  
2 should be done?

3 MS. O'CONNOR: I mean, it should be in  
4 there, not as an optional field that can be  
5 skipped, right.

6 One of the things to think about, even  
7 though providing accommodations is great and we  
8 certainly can't know everything up front, these  
9 surveys, because of the way they are currently  
10 conducted, is somebody may get it three months  
11 after they finish training.

12 And so most people, especially when we  
13 need feedback from them, they are not going to

14 necessarily go through the extra, some will, some  
15 will, you know. I probably would because I am a  
16 pain in the neck, but a lot of people who are not,  
17 or they are busy or they are working or what have  
18 you, are not going to necessarily go through the  
19 extra step. Or if in particular they can't speak  
20 English very well they are not going to necessarily  
21 be able to, you know, access that pre-letter,  
22 right, in their preferred language.

23 So any way we can streamline the  
24 process is preferable to prevent people having to  
25 come back to us and say hey, can you give it to me

1 this way?

2 MS. SANDERS: Anything else?

3 MR. HOBSON: This is Rob.

4 MS. SANDERS: Who is seeking the

5 floor?

6 MR. HOBSON: This is Rob --

7 MS. SANDERS: Yes, Rob.

8 MR. HOBSON: -- Hobson. So from a

9 counselor perspective since, like I say, I hold

10 that seat on this Council, I can tell you that

11 people's preferences change from before and after

12 training, sometimes it does, sometimes it doesn't,

13 it can change I guess is a better way to put it.

14           The other piece is that counselors are  
15    kind of left out of this whole process for bias  
16    reasons and I find that very frustrating. And  
17    maybe this isn't the format to say that, but it's  
18    frustrating because we are like the front line  
19    people who primarily communicate with customers.  
20    If it's not me it's my tech or vice versa, we are  
21    constantly communicating with them but we are not  
22    really allowed to say much about it. And I would  
23    like to see that change in some form or fashion  
24    because I think counselors can help facilitate that  
25    process if we are allowed to. So that's my little

1 piece there.

2 MS. SANDERS: Okay. We probably can  
3 discuss that and make recommendations through the  
4 committee and we will bring it back to whoever has  
5 to know it.

6 Anything else that anyone wants to  
7 comment just on the survey itself? And then we had  
8 one more question that we put to Natasha and I  
9 think it will be a shorter answer.

10 MR. O'CONNOR: Go ahead, Judy.

11 MS. SANDERS: All right. So the other  
12 question that we posed to Natasha was: We heard a  
13 few times about updating the VR rule in Minnesota

14 and the committee would like to discuss enhancing  
15 provisions around the frequency of evaluations and  
16 assessments. When will comments be open for the  
17 rule and how long will that comment period last,  
18 because we don't want to miss our big chance?

19 MS. JERDE: This is Natasha. So I  
20 lied a little bit in number 2 because I missed out  
21 another opportunity which is you can share that  
22 information any time as we are looking at the rule,  
23 but the first formal opportunity is when the first  
24 public comment period opens up and that public  
25 comment period is just us saying look it, we are

1 going to change the rule. And that's all it is and  
2 you get 60 days to respond with any ideas or  
3 thoughts.

4 We are hoping to be able to do that in  
5 the next few months. We just finished our internal  
6 review of the rule, we now have to loop in our  
7 general Council's office and we should be launching  
8 our rulemaking committee here now this fall.

9 You then get a second opportunity to  
10 do public comment when we release the final draft.

11 And then we put out the draft and say now you have  
12 60 days to respond to what we are now proposing.

13 And then in C I put there is also an

14 ongoing opportunity, though, via the rulemaking  
15 committee, which we will be forming and once we get  
16 commissioner approval to begin our rulemaking. And  
17 I will be extending an ask to the Council and  
18 several advocacy organizations who have  
19 participated in this in the past so that we can  
20 form a rulemaking committee.

21           And it's going to be intense because  
22 there is a lot of conversation and I think there is  
23 going to be a lot of healthy debate, but perhaps  
24 someone from the Vendor Outcomes Committee will  
25 want to participate on the rulemaking committee.



1 Judy, Corbb.

2 MS. SANDERS: Someone will, I don't  
3 know who yet, but when would this committee be  
4 formed?

5 MS. JERDE: This is Natasha. It's  
6 going to depend on when the Commissioner gives us  
7 approval to kick off our rulemaking, but  
8 potentially this fall. Well, it's already October,  
9 how about this winter, this winter we will have our  
10 first meeting.

11 MS. SANDERS: Okay. And, you know, I  
12 hope you will be announcing when you are looking  
13 for those people so we make sure or we will take it

14 up at our next meeting and we will see who wants to

15 do this. We will probably fight over it.

16 MS. O'CONNOR: We might.

17 MS. JERDE: This is Tasha. It's

18 actually a really fun group, the Rulemaking

19 Committee is a lot of fun and a lot of stress but

20 in a good way, good stress.

21 MS. SANDERS: Okay, all right. So

22 that is it and stay tuned.

23 MR. O'CONNOR: So this is Corbb. And

24 I will say if you are looking for those statistics

25 on the vendors and their measures and what not, we

1 can get that report to you. The quick version of  
2 why we don't have a lot of that data is one,  
3 response rates, people actually have to take the  
4 survey for us to have data. And two, each vendor  
5 has to have a minimum number of people complete  
6 that survey so that, which I believe is five, so  
7 that there is anonymization of the data and all  
8 that has to happen within four 90-day periods.

9           So if in all four, let's say across  
10 the year you had 20 responses but you only had  
11 five -- more than five in one quarter, you are only  
12 going to show up 25 percent in the data. So all of  
13 that to say as you know people finishing their

14 training, remind them to take the survey and  
15 hopefully we will have some opportunity, it sounds  
16 like, to change the way that we are surveying folks  
17 as well.

18 Further questions for Vendor Outcomes  
19 before we move to our other committee reports?

20 (No response.)

21 MR. O'CONNOR: All right. Our State  
22 Rehabilitation Council, do we have a report for  
23 this Council?

24 (No response.)

25 MR. O'CONNOR: Moving to our Statewide

1 Independent Living Council.

2 MS. SANDERS: Okay. Well, we are

3 trying -- we just got a whole bunch of new members

4 and I haven't heard from them. We are going to

5 have our first meeting with all these new people in

6 October, so there will be lots of new interesting

7 people to meet.

8 We had our elections and then we -- I

9 ended up -- this is very weird. I ended up being

10 elected parliamentarian, can you believe that's one

11 of the -- that means I won't have to do anything

12 much, but I decided that what I needed was I needed

13 to know about Robert's Rules of Order because

14 somebody might really ask a question and then what

15 would I do.

16 So I downloaded Robert's Rules of

17 Order from BARD and this is when my e-reader is

18 coming in very handy, because that book is eight

19 volumes. So putting it in my e-reader is a really

20 great deal, I can search for anything I want in

21 there. And so I hope nobody asks a complicated

22 question, because I might have to just make it up.

23 All right. So we are going to start

24 our new fiscal year as is everybody and so we will

25 see what happens with all of this, but I think

1 that's the excitement for it.

2 MR. O'CONNOR: This is Corbb. Thank

3 you, Judy. Are there questions or comments for our

4 SILC representative?

5 (No response.)

6 MR. O'CONNOR: Great. We'll move to

7 our Communication Center Committee and that is

8 chaired by Steve Jacobson who is making his way to

9 a microphone.

10 MR. JACOBSON: Thank you, Corbb. Last

11 May we set a date for the Communication Center

12 meeting as a tentative date and it turned out that

13 when we got close to September 28 we found that we

14 had several members who could not attend, as well  
15 as some other conflicts. So we are rescheduling  
16 that meeting hopefully within the next month or so,  
17 but that date has not yet been established. Thank  
18 you.

19 MR. O'CONNOR: Thank you, Steve.

20 Our DeafBlind Committee is chaired by  
21 Trevor Turner who I don't believe is here this  
22 evening. Is there a report from that committee  
23 though?

24 (No response.)

25 MR. O'CONNOR: Next committee is the



1 Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee and  
2 Briley O'Connor chairs that. Do you have a report  
3 for this group?

4 MS. O'CONNOR: Sure. The Diversity,  
5 Equity and Inclusion Committee has not met since  
6 our last SRC-B meeting where we talked a lot and  
7 gave a lot of recommendations. I just want to let  
8 everyone know we did send those recommendations on  
9 behalf of the SRC-B to, oh goodness I'm blanking on  
10 the --

11 MR. O'CONNOR: Jessica and Joshua.

12 MS. O'CONNOR: Jessica and Joshua, the

13 MAD consultants. So those were sent. I just

14 wanted to let everybody know that and we will be

15 meeting before our next SRC-B meeting.

16 MR. O'CONNOR: Thank you DEI.

17 Our Employment Committee is chaired by

18 Samantha Flax, do we have a report?

19 (No response.)

20 MR. O'CONNOR: Samantha might be

21 making her way to a mute button.

22 MS. JERDE: I don't see her.

23 MR. O'CONNOR: She dropped off, okay.

24 I know she was feeling under the weather earlier.

25 Senior Services is chaired by Judy

1 Sanders.

2 MS. SANDERS: Hi. Okay, so we met on  
3 September 15 and we began by reviewing what we  
4 thought should be in the Annual Report, which is I  
5 didn't even know we'd get candy for this, but we  
6 turned it in by the end of September and so that's  
7 done.

8 Also our big project for this year is  
9 being a small part of the Possibilities Fair for  
10 Seniors that is going to occur in May. That's an  
11 event we've done it I think three times before, I'm  
12 not sure. It's an event that's hosted by the  
13 National Federation of the Blind of Minnesota and

14 also partnering with them is State Services for the

15 Blind.

16 And the Council committee is doing a

17 lot of the work to get ready for it for SSB and

18 then BLIND, Incorporated is also a part of it. And

19 so we have Ed, Ed Lecher and I, are scouting places

20 to find a place to hold this thing. And it's going

21 to happen in May so everything we are going to do

22 is geared toward that.

23 And so I think -- well, you know, we

24 don't have a date for it because we can't really

25 until we know where it's going to be. So that's

1 what we are working on now.

2 Ed Lecher gave his report to us and he  
3 is very excited because the attendance, I mean, the  
4 caseloads are really full. They probably served  
5 last year over 4,000 people and we think that our  
6 statistics will make us second in the nation for  
7 number of people served. So that's what we have.

8 MR. O'CONNOR: Thank you, Senior  
9 Services. Any questions or comments for the group?

10 (No response.)

11 MR. O'CONNOR: All right. I believe  
12 Samantha might be back with us for a report from  
13 the Employment Committee.

14 MS. FLAX: Yes, I'm back, sorry about  
15 that. Not much to report yet except I will be  
16 hunting down Dan so we can get some candy if he  
17 hasn't already submitted that. And I will be  
18 scheduling our first meeting in the next two weeks  
19 so those of you on the committee, I'm planning to  
20 meet the week after next so keep an eye on your  
21 email.

22 MR. O'CONNOR: Before you go away,  
23 Samantha, the Transition Committee.

24 MS. FLAX: Absolutely. The Transition  
25 Committee will be meeting next Monday at 4 o'clock

1 or 4:30, I am drawing a blank in my head right now.

2 If somebody else who is here remembers what I said,

3 the calendar invite will be going out tonight. If

4 anyone who is not on the committee would like to

5 join that meeting Monday afternoon, please let me

6 know and I will send you the invite.

7 MR. O'CONNOR: Thank you, Samantha.

8 Are there any task forces or committees I have

9 skipped?

10 MS. DUNNAM: Jennifer Dunnam.

11 MR. O'CONNOR: Yes, Jennifer.

12 MS. DUNNAM: Customer Satisfaction

13 Committee. We did talk earlier, but we have other

14 things going on which I guess I did sort of mention  
15 already, but so that people know, because I am sure  
16 people are super duper tuned into this every year,  
17 the Customer Satisfaction Survey data for the  
18 general survey about people's overall case with  
19 SSB.

20 That data, oftentimes we have had that  
21 by now, but that will not be available as we  
22 understand it until the end of October. So the  
23 first time the Council will see any reporting on  
24 this year's data will be as part of the evaluation  
25 of the VR effectiveness, which is part of the



1 Annual Report. So we will be working on that.

2 We are also working with SSB to pull

3 together the progress on the recently completed

4 goals and priorities and how those -- how we did on

5 those. So stay tuned.

6 MR. O'CONNOR: Thank you, Jennifer.

7 Any other committees or task forces?

8 (No response.)

9 MR. O'CONNOR: All right. Hearing no

10 questions or comments on those committee reports,

11 we turn to public comment. Is there public

12 comment?

13 MR. JACOBSON: Mr. Chair, Steve

14 Jacobson.

15 MR. O'CONNOR: Steve Jacobson.

16 MR. JACOBSON: Yes. I wanted to

17 mention that we have the NFB of Minnesota has the

18 state convention coming up and we are going down to

19 Rochester this year, we are hitting the road on

20 November 3 through 5th, so we welcome anybody to

21 come along.

22 We got a pretty good hotel rate of \$99

23 per night and you can get more information about it

24 on our website at [www.nfbmn.org](http://www.nfbmn.org). I got that mn in

25 this time for those of you that were here a couple

1 of meetings ago. Thank you.

2 MR. O'CONNOR: Thank you, Steve.

3 MR. STRUNK: Ryan Strunk.

4 MR. O'CONNOR: Ryan Strunk.

5 MR. STRUNK: So I want to put for a

6 moment on my BLIND, Incorporated hat as the

7 president of the board of directors for BLIND,

8 Incorporated to give you all a couple of updates.

9 BLIND, Incorporated, being one of the

10 vendors that provide services to State Services for

11 the Blind and an NFB affiliated training center,

12 Jennifer Kennedy, who was our assistant director

13 for four years and served in that capacity ably,

14 has left to pursue other opportunities. And so we  
15 have for the time brought on an interim executive  
16 director in the form of Jamie Richey.  
17 Jamie joined us on extreme short  
18 notice coming up from Nebraska to spend some time  
19 in what has so far been the unfrozen north and I'm  
20 very excited about that. And it is particularly  
21 noteworthy that she has done so because,  
22 particularly coming up on short notice she has left  
23 some of her family back home in Nebraska and so we  
24 very much appreciate Jamie's flexibility and her  
25 family's flexibility, but I am also pleased to note

1 that she is here with her husband Jeremy this  
2 evening. And so we are pleased to have her  
3 participating in the State Rehabilitation.

4 (Clapping.)

5 MR. STRUNK: Absolutely. So I won't  
6 put you on the spot, Jamie, but I will say that I  
7 am very glad you are here, we're glad to have you  
8 you at BLIND, Incorporated and we are looking for  
9 some great things there.

10 The other thing that I would share  
11 with you all is as I mentioned, Jamie is our  
12 interim executive director and we are in the  
13 process of hiring for a full-time permanent

14 executive director position. Applications are open  
15 now. If you have questions about that or wish to  
16 submit an application you can contact careers and  
17 that's plural careers@blindinc.org,  
18 careers@blindinc.org and we would be happy to  
19 answer any questions that you might have.

20 MR. O'CONNOR: Thank you, Ryan. Is  
21 there further public comment?

22 (No response.)

23 MR. O'CONNOR: Hearing none, is there  
24 someone who wants to make a motion?

25 MS. SANDERS: I move we adjourn.

1 MR. O'CONNOR: Judy moves.

2 MS. FLAX: I second.

3 MR. O'CONNOR: Judy moves, Samantha

4 Flax seconds. Is there discussion?

5 (No response.)

6 MR. O'CONNOR: Hearing none we will

7 move to Frank Eller.

8 MR. ELLER: Frank Eller, yes.

9 MR. O'CONNOR: Samantha Flax.

10 MS. FLAX: Yes, I vote yes since I

11 seconded the motion.

12 MR. O'CONNOR: Ryan Haenze.

13 MR. HAENZE: Ryan Haenze, yes.

14 MR. O'CONNOR: Tom Heidl.

15 MS. HEINL: Tom Heidl, yes.

16 MR. O'CONNOR: Rob Hobson.

17 MR. HOBSON: Rob Hobson, pass.

18 MR. O'CONNOR: Catalina Martinez.

19 MS. MARTINEZ: Yes.

20 MR. O'CONNOR: Michael O'Day.

21 MR, O'DAY: Michael O'Day, yes.

22 MS. SANDERS: Judy Sanders, yes.

23 MR. STRUNK: Ryan Strunk, yes.

24 MR. O'CONNOR: Kyle Van Acker.

25 MR. VAN ACKER: Kyle Van Acker, yes.



1 MR. O'CONNOR: And Corbb O'Connor,

2 yes.

3 We are adjourned and we will see you

4 on the meeting that shall not live in infamy but be

5 on December 7. We are adjourned.

6 (Meeting adjourned at 8:06 p.m.)

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1 STATE OF MINNESOTA)

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3 COUNTY OF HENNEPIN)

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7 REPORTER'S CERTIFICATE

8

9 I, Kimberly K. Evavold, do hereby

10 certify that the above and foregoing transcript,

11 consisting of the preceding 105 pages is a correct

12 transcript of my stenographic notes, and is a full, true

13 and complete transcript of the proceedings to the best

14 of my ability.

15 Dated: October 18, 2023

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KIMBERLY K. EVAVOLD

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Court Reporter

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