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 7 STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL FOR THE BLIND

 8 BIMONTHLY MEETING

 9 VIA ZOOM VIDEOCONFERENCE

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 14 Thursday, December 7, 2023

 15 5:30 p.m.

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 1 APPEARANCES VIA ZOOM:

 2 REHABILITATION COUNCIL FOR THE BLIND SSB STAFF

 3 Corbb O'Connor, Chairperson Dave Andrews

 4 Judy Sanders, Vice Chair Jennifer Beilke

 5 Jan Bailey Jon Benson

 6 Frank Eller

 7 Sue Fager

 8 Samantha Flax

 9 Theresa Gfroerer

 10 Tom Heinl

 11 Rob Hobson

 12 Catalina Martinez

 13 Michael O'Day

 14 Jennifer Points

 15 Ryan Strunk

 16

 17 ALSO PRESENT:

 18 Natasha Jerde, Director of SSB

 19 Susan Kusz, State Program Administrator

 20

 21 Whereupon, the following proceedings

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

 23

 24

 25

 3

 1 MR. O'CONNOR: Welcome everyone. We

 2 will go ahead and get started with our State Rehab

 3 Council for the Blind meeting. A little bit of

 4 deja vu for some of us who are used to being in

 5 person and definitely some excitement and much of

 6 the same for those who have been attending

 7 virtually.

 8 So we will start with a roll call of

 9 councilmembers and we'll start with Frank Eller.

 10 No Frank yet.

 11 MR. ELLER: Frank Eller, yes.

 12 MR. O'CONNOR: Oh, there we go.

 13 Samantha Flax.

 14 MS. FLAX: Yes.

 15 MR. O'CONNOR: Ryan Haenze is, I

 16 believe, absent.

 17 Tom Heinl.

 18 MR. HEINL: Here.

 19 MR. O'CONNOR: Rob Hobson.

 20 MR. HOBSON: Here.

 21 MR. O'CONNOR: Catalina Martinez. Not

 22 seeing her.

 23 MS. MARTINEZ: Here.

 24 MR. O'CONNOR: Oh, hello.

 25 Michael O'Day.

 4

 1 MR. O'DAY: Here.

 2 MR. O'CONNOR: Kristin Oien is not on

 3 the Council anymore.

 4 Jennifer Points.

 5 (No response.)

 6 MR. O'CONNOR: Judy Sanders.

 7 MS. SANDERS: Here.

 8 MS. KUSZ: Jennifer is here, Corbb, I

 9 don't know what's wrong with her audio though,

 10 sorry.

 11 MR. O'CONNOR: I heard Judy and

 12 Jennifer, if you are there if you will unmute and

 13 let us know you are here.

 14 Ryan Strunk.

 15 MR. STRUNK: Ryan Strunk is here.

 16 MR. O'CONNOR: Trevor Turner.

 17 (No response.)

 18 MR. O'CONNOR: And Kyle Van Acker. I

 19 believe those two are absent.

 20 So we are meeting a quorum and I am

 21 here, Corbb O'Connor is here. So we are meeting a

 22 quorum by a razor thin margin.

 23 We will go next to members in the

 24 audience.

 25 MS. JERDE: Natasha Jerde.

 5

 1 MR. O'CONNOR: And we will see how

 2 good we are at staying in order.

 3 Yeah, go ahead.

 4 MS. JERDE: This is Natasha, I'm here

 5 in the audience. Jon Benson, I'm here. Susan

 6 Kusz, I'm here. Diane Dohnalik, I'm here.

 7 Jennifer Beilke. Jennifer Dunnam. Steve Jacobson.

 8 Jamie Richey. Harley Acy. Jan Bailey. Theresa

 9 Gfroerer. Dave Andrews. Lisa Rogers. Briley

 10 O'Connor. Rocky Hart. Maya Larson.

 11 MR. O'CONNOR: All right. Did we miss

 12 anyone? One last chance at it.

 13 (No response.)

 14 MR. O'CONNOR: Jan Bailey. I see your

 15 name here, I don't know if we heard your name.

 16 MS. BAILEY: Yes, I did.

 17 MR. O'CONNOR: Oh, okay, great. My

 18 memory is apparently failing me. Great.

 19 Well thanks everyone for attending.

 20 We have a few items of business tonight and I'm

 21 super excited and grateful to Lisa Larges for

 22 getting us the annual report so that we can get

 23 that approved at this meeting.

 24 It was sent via email late in the day

 25 today, so if you have not had a chance to review it

 6

 1 we will review it together. But also if you would

 2 like to have two streams of audio going for

 3 yourself, you certainly can read that as we go

 4 along.

 5 And Jennifer, I just saw your chat and

 6 great, I'm glad you are here and certainly

 7 participating by chat is perfectly fine.

 8 We will go ahead and get started with

 9 the approval of our minutes from the October 5

 10 meeting. Is there a motion to approve those

 11 minutes?

 12 MS. FLAX: So moved.

 13 MR. ELLER: Frank Eller, I --

 14 (inaudible).

 15 MR. O'CONNOR: I heard Samantha move

 16 and Frank Eller, would you be willing to second

 17 that motion?

 18 MR. ELLER: Frank Eller, second.

 19 MR. O'CONNOR: Great. Is there any

 20 discussion of those minutes?

 21 MS. SANDERS: Judy Sanders.

 22 MR. O'CONNOR: Yes, Judy.

 23 MS. SANDERS: I was listed in the roll

 24 call twice and so was Steve Jacobson. I don't know

 25 how Steve feels about this because he's not a

 7

 1 member, but I'm wondering if I can vote twice, does

 2 that work?

 3 MR. O'CONNOR: Thank you for pointing

 4 that out.

 5 MS. SANDERS: Yeah. I was in the roll

 6 call, I'm in the top part as vice chair and then

 7 I'm listed in the alphabetical order. And Steve is

 8 in there twice in the audience.

 9 MR. O'CONNOR: We wanted to make extra

 10 sure that we knew you were here. Thank you very

 11 much. We'll get that fixed.

 12 Is there further questions or comments

 13 or corrections to those minutes?

 14 (No response.)

 15 MR. O'CONNOR: Hearing none we will

 16 take our vote. Frank Eller.

 17 MR. ELLER: Frank Eller (inaudible).

 18 MR. O'CONNOR: Frank, I heard your

 19 name, but not your vote.

 20 MR. ELLER: Frank Eller, yes.

 21 MR. O'CONNOR: Frank is a yes.

 22 MS. FLAX: Yes.

 23 MR. O'CONNOR: Samantha Flax is a yes.

 24 Tom Heinl.

 25 MR. HEINL: Yes.

 8

 1 MR. O'CONNOR: Tom Heinl, yes.

 2 Rob Hobson.

 3 MR. HOBSON: Pass.

 4 MR. O'CONNOR: Rob Hobson passes.

 5 Catalina Martinez.

 6 MS. MARTINEZ: Catalina, yes.

 7 MR. O'CONNOR: Catalina, yes.

 8 Michael O'Day.

 9 MR. O'DAY: Yes.

 10 MR. O'CONNOR: Michael is a yes.

 11 Jennifer Points. Jennifer Points,

 12 yes.

 13 Judy Sanders.

 14 MS. SANDERS: Yes.

 15 MR. O'CONNOR: Judy is a yes.

 16 Ryan Strunk.

 17 MR. STRUNK: Ryan Strunk, yes.

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

 19 yes.

 20 MR. STRUNK: I also want to say I love

 21 that it reads Jennifer's chat as Jennifer Points to

 22 everyone when it comes across the chat.

 23 MR. O'CONNOR: Love it, great.

 24 Unanimously we will call that approved, thank you

 25 very much.

 9

 1 It occurs to me tonight is the first

 2 night of Hanukkah, so Happy Hanukkah to those who

 3 are celebrating and appreciate you are spending it

 4 here with the SRC-B.

 5 We are in need of two things, so in

 6 February at our February meeting, the date of which

 7 we will be setting in just a moment for those who

 8 want to flip your digital and paper calendars as we

 9 set our meeting dates. We will have an election

 10 for a Council Chair and a Vice Chair. And as much

 11 as I have enjoyed serving as your chairperson, I am

 12 not intending to serve in this capacity again for

 13 another year. I plan to stay on the Council, but

 14 would rather not be your chair.

 15 So anyone who is interested in that we

 16 will certainly call for nominations in February.

 17 Also happy to discuss with anybody here the roles,

 18 responsibilities, exciting monthly meeting that you

 19 would get to have with Natasha and our new staff

 20 liaisons and the great work that has been done up

 21 to this point. A little bit more involved than

 22 just running these meetings, but certainly that is

 23 a big part of it.

 24 So let's then, at the bottom of the

 25 agenda I have proposed some meetings dates for

 10

 1 2024. I have proposed February 8 knowing that

 2 there will be several people absent on February 1.

 3 April 11, June 6, August 1, October 3, and

 4 December 5 which will not be Hanukkah next year.

 5 I would entertain first any comments

 6 on those dates that we should be aware of?

 7 MS. SANDERS: This is Judy, I just

 8 have a question. Is there a reason April 11 is

 9 the -- we are doing it on the second Tuesday in

 10 April? I know why February's, but why not April 4?

 11 MR. O'CONNOR: That was very close to

 12 the CSAVR meeting.

 13 MS. SANDERS: Oh, okay, all right. I

 14 knew there might be a reason, that's why I

 15 wasn't --

 16 MR. O'CONNOR: Yep. Looking to you,

 17 Natasha, if you have further clarity on those dates

 18 we should be aware of?

 19 MS. JERDE: I'm just checking my

 20 calendar. But yeah, I think CSAVR is the first, I

 21 think it's going to be the first week of April.

 22 I'm going to confirm. So far everything looks

 23 fine, nothing seems to be overlapping, no other

 24 conferences. I'm doing a quick search.

 25 MR. O'CONNOR: And we can always amend

 11

 1 April as it gets closer.

 2 MS. JERDE: Oh.

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

 4 MS. JERDE: April 6 through the 10th

 5 is CSAVR and then NCSAB will be April 11 through

 6 the 13th.

 7 MS. SANDERS: Okay. So this is Judy.

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

 9 MS. SANDERS: I am recommending

 10 April 4 for the Council meeting.

 11 MR. O'CONNOR: We will make that

 12 change. I think those dates may have moved since I

 13 looked at it.

 14 MS. JERDE: This is Tasha, I thought

 15 it was actually the first week of April too.

 16 MR. O'CONNOR: So we can always

 17 adjust, we have February to adjust it if as that

 18 gets closer things become an issue. So we will

 19 instead move April 11 to April 4.

 20 Is there a motion to adopt those

 21 meeting dates?

 22 MR. ELLER: Frank Eller.

 23 MR. O'CONNOR: Frank has moved. Is

 24 there a second?

 25 MS. SANDERS: Judy Sanders, I second.

 12

 1 MR. O'CONNOR: Thank you, Judy. Any

 2 further discussion?

 3 (No response.)

 4 MR. O'CONNOR: We will move to a vote.

 5 Frank Eller.

 6 MR. ELLER: Frank Eller, yes.

 7 MR. O'CONNOR: Frank says yes.

 8 Samantha Flax.

 9 MS. FLAX: Yes.

 10 MR. O'CONNOR: Samantha, yes.

 11 Tom Heinl.

 12 MR. HEINL: Yes.

 13 MR. O'CONNOR: Tom is a yes.

 14 Rob Hobson.

 15 MR. HOBSON: Yes. Oh, I'm sorry,

 16 pass.

 17 MR. O'CONNOR: Rob is choosing to

 18 pass.

 19 Catalina Martinez.

 20 MS. MARTINEZ: I will abstain since

 21 this is my last meeting.

 22 MR. O'CONNOR: Catalina is abstaining.

 23 Okay. Michael O'Day.

 24 MR. O'DAY: That's actually true for

 25 me too, this is my last meeting so I guess I will

 13

 1 abstain also.

 2 MR. O'CONNOR: Michael also abstains.

 3 Jennifer Points. Jennifer Points is a

 4 yes.

 5 Judy Sanders.

 6 MS. SANDERS: Yes.

 7 MR. STRUNK: Ryan Strunk, yes.

 8 MR. O'CONNOR: Ryan is a yes.

 9 And Trevor Turner and Kyle absent.

 10 Corbb O'Connor is a yes, that's five.

 11 So let me just double check.

 12 MR. O'DAY: This is Michael. I can

 13 always say yes if the rest of the Council is okay

 14 with that.

 15 MR. O'CONNOR: Michael moves to a yes

 16 which is good, that moves us to seven and that puts

 17 us over the edge, great, now we have a majority.

 18 Thank you very much. Great.

 19 Moving back to our agenda then. You

 20 know, we usually have Hedwig looking at us, but I'm

 21 so glad that we have a little bit of hogwarts magic

 22 here that Sam has pointed out.

 23 We have two items on the agenda at

 24 6:00, so you will need to prepare your time

 25 turners. We will start with the first item on the

 14

 1 agenda and that is with Natasha to talk about

 2 federal compliance and our gubernatorial

 3 appointments.

 4 MS. KUSZ: You are on mute.

 5 MS. JERDE: Oh, I am talking, of

 6 course, I hit the button, it didn't work.

 7 THE WITNESS: So this is Natasha. I

 8 will give the high level overview of the issue and

 9 then I will turn it over to Susan for some of the

 10 appointment updates.

 11 But the feds are really looking at

 12 across the country issues with timely appointments

 13 for the rehab councils. We actually have a section

 14 now in our Combined State Plan where we need to lay

 15 out what the issues are that we are facing.

 16 In Minnesota we were told we would

 17 have appointments at the beginning of November, it

 18 is now December 7 and we have had no movement and

 19 we have been coordinating with the Secretary of

 20 State's office and it has not been successful.

 21 The State Rehab Council can do some

 22 advocacy. I don't know if a strongly worded letter

 23 to the Governor's office could make some

 24 movement -- and my pizza came at the wrong time, my

 25 dog is going crazy. But Susan, would you be able

 15

 1 to talk a little bit more about the appointment

 2 specifics and issues?

 3 MS. KUSZ: Sure, this is Susan. So I

 4 have been trying to work with the Secretary of

 5 State's office specifically like on Judy's

 6 appointment because it was -- when it was brought

 7 to my attention her Notice of Appointment actually

 8 was assigned the wrong dates.

 9 So I did bring this up to the

 10 Governor's office as well as the Secretary of

 11 State's office, but I hear radio silence. I have

 12 been in contact with the Governor's office again

 13 about the appointments where people have applied

 14 and you guys have been sitting for, well, I guess

 15 it's pretty much like the whole year and the

 16 appointments haven't been made.

 17 When I went to NCSRC conference it was

 18 interesting to hear that another state had said --

 19 there was a gal there that said well, her

 20 appointment was up but that she was still going to

 21 sit in her seat because their state constitution

 22 said that they could do that.

 23 So, you know, for the six almost seven

 24 years that I have been the staff liaison this has

 25 been one of my concerns for our Council and I feel

 16

 1 kind of like I didn't get to get over that hurdle

 2 for the Council and get this to be a win, so I am

 3 hoping that moving forward there is some resolve

 4 with this.

 5 There is some other things, I think,

 6 too. This is not trying to go off track, but in

 7 the bylaws and the state statute that do need to be

 8 looked at, it's too late to do that for this year,

 9 but I would encourage the Council to look at this

 10 because, as a matter of fact, one of the things

 11 that I mentioned to Natasha about tonight's meeting

 12 was did I need to be at the office? Because in the

 13 statute it does say that someone is supposed to

 14 physically be there. And I know that during COVID

 15 we weren't doing that sort of thing.

 16 But back to the appointments. I am not

 17 sure what we can do. Natasha and I are very

 18 concerned that if they don't get these appointments

 19 done like where is that going to leave us with the

 20 quorum and are we going to be back to, you know,

 21 not having enough people to serve on the

 22 committees.

 23 I think we have been really blessed

 24 with quite a few people from the community stepping

 25 up and stepping in as far as being on the

 17

 1 committees are concerned, but nonetheless, you

 2 know, like this to me it's just inexcusable. I

 3 have told them time and time again this is a

 4 federal thing, it's different from the other state

 5 councils and boards and it needs to be treated

 6 differently and it just seems like it falls on deaf

 7 ears.

 8 So I would encourage the Council to

 9 come up with some sort of a plan to, as Natasha had

 10 mentioned, maybe reaching out to your Congress

 11 person or whomever. And I think moving forward the

 12 Council needs to come up with some sort of a game

 13 plan to talk to RSA or someone about what to do

 14 about this issue because it's just never changing.

 15 MR. O'CONNOR: Thank you, Susan and

 16 Natasha. Any questions or comments from anyone

 17 attending this evening?

 18 MS. FAGER: Hi, this is Sue Fager with

 19 PACER Center.

 20 MS. O'CONNOR: Briley.

 21 MR. O'CONNOR: Sue, go ahead and then

 22 we will go to Briley.

 23 MS. FAGER: Just an observation. One

 24 of my colleagues is sitting on the SRC for VRS and

 25 she put her application in about the same time I

 18

 1 did, January-ish of the year. She finally got

 2 appointed last month, so I don't know if the other

 3 SRC might have some insights into how they made

 4 that happen, just an observation.

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

 6 Briley.

 7 MS. O'CONNOR: Oh, I was just going to

 8 say I am happy to help draft a strongly worded

 9 letter. I'm not on the Council, but I do enjoy

 10 doing that kind of stuff. So if you want help, I

 11 will help.

 12 MR. O'CONNOR: I appreciate it, thank

 13 you very much.

 14 MS. KUSZ: This is Susan.

 15 MR. ANDREWS: Dave Andrews.

 16 MS. KUSZ: Go ahead, Dave.

 17 MR. O'CONNOR: We will go to Dave and

 18 then we will go to you, Susan.

 19 MR. ANDREWS: I'm on a couple other

 20 councils at other agencies and everybody has this

 21 problem and it is not unique to us or to rehab or

 22 to anything. And I don't know what the answer is

 23 but, you know, not to defend them, but there are

 24 hundreds and hundreds of councils out there and

 25 they have to do all the appointments. So I don't

 19

 1 know. It has gotten worse, I will say that, it's

 2 always been a problem, but it has gotten worse.

 3 MR. O'CONNOR: Thanks, Dave.

 4 Susan, before we come to you I just

 5 want to see if there is anyone else that wanted to

 6 jump in with comments or questions on this?

 7 MS. SANDERS: This is Judy.

 8 MS. FLAX: Sam.

 9 MR. O'CONNOR: I heard Sam and then we

 10 will go to Judy.

 11 MS. FLAX: I am wondering if we have

 12 enough people who applied. I know a lot of

 13 people's positions are up, so I was just wondering

 14 once everyone is approved if we are going to have

 15 enough people to fill in or whether there should

 16 also be a focus on advertising that there will

 17 still be open positions, even if people are

 18 confirmed?

 19 MR. O'CONNOR: Susan, do you want to

 20 speak to -- you might have that page right in front

 21 of you, I don't.

 22 MS. KUSZ: Well, I can. So I would

 23 have to go on the website actually and look, but

 24 one of the things that I do know is that we have

 25 been, you know, encouraging people to apply. When

 20

 1 I've seen openings is part of the reason why a

 2 couple people actually are visiting on the meeting

 3 tonight, Maya Larson, Diane from MDE, you know,

 4 like I asked them to come to the meeting and

 5 actually put in an application.

 6 As far as Maya is concerned, Trevor

 7 hasn't put in his resignation and until he does

 8 then his position isn't open and so then that

 9 causes an issue with anyone else trying to apply

 10 for that seat.

 11 So, you know, like I try to stay on

 12 top of or I have tried to stay on top of the

 13 openings that we've had or the openings that are

 14 about to appear after the first of the year because

 15 those positions are now open as of November.

 16 And so, you know, I worked with Lisa

 17 Larges to get a gov delivery pushed out, different

 18 ways to try to advertise how we can get people to

 19 apply. I've talked to my counterpart on the SRC to

 20 see, you know, like is there someone that might be

 21 a good fit for certain seats like Kyle, because he

 22 serves on both of the Councils.

 23 So I really tried to do that and it

 24 seemed like we were getting quite a few

 25 applications, so that was another concern because

 21

 1 it's like if they are going to do another round of

 2 appointments, it would be good if we could get as

 3 many of the applications done at one time. But

 4 like Dave said, I will just say what I was going to

 5 say and then pass it to whomever was going to talk,

 6 there is over 400 boards and commissions that they

 7 deal with. And so it basically ends up being a

 8 lottery where they pick, like this month we are

 9 going to work on this chunk of them and this month

 10 we are going to work on this chunk of them.

 11 And, you know, it's just difficult

 12 because a lot of them have this ruling where they

 13 can get away with it where even if the person's

 14 term is up they still can sit in a seat until the

 15 next appointment is made. Unfortunately for our

 16 Council we don't have that privilege. And so

 17 that's where I have really tried to advocate and

 18 say listen, I get that the rest of these have it

 19 this way, but we don't. And so we kind of need

 20 preferential treatment and they still just go

 21 sorry, like we have all these boards and

 22 commissions that we have to deal with. So that's

 23 it.

 24 MR. O'CONNOR: Got it, thank you,

 25 Susan, thank you very much.

 22

 1 Judy, we will come to you and then I

 2 would say maybe we can move on from this topic

 3 unless there's anything urgent after Judy.

 4 MS. SANDERS: Okay. I just want to

 5 emphasize that we need to point out the very thing

 6 that Susan is talking about, that we can't consider

 7 the federal rules, we can't. And the Governor says

 8 the same thing, so we probably do need to put more

 9 political pressure on the Governor's office.

 10 MR. O'CONNOR: Thank you, Judy. I

 11 will say that from a quorum prospective we are

 12 saved in that the quorum requires 50 percent plus

 13 one of those who are appointed. So as long as

 14 there are three people appointed we could

 15 technically meet.

 16 Our ability to get much work done with

 17 three people on the Council would be a problem, but

 18 technically our meeting could continue, our

 19 effectiveness certainly drops as we lose folks.

 20 So again, time turners in place we are

 21 now moving to approving the Annual Report for the

 22 Council. I'm curious for those who are on the

 23 Council, how much of the report have you had a

 24 chance to review in the last couple of hours?

 25 Maybe we will start by seeing if there's anybody

 23

 1 who is comfortable making a motion to approve the

 2 report and we will make some time for discussion.

 3 MR. ELLER: Frank Eller.

 4 MR. O'CONNOR: Only heard Frank's name

 5 so I'm gonna guess Frank was moving to approve the

 6 report. And Frank, you can correct me if that's

 7 not the case.

 8 Is there a second?

 9 MS. FLAX: I will second it, I got to

 10 read it.

 11 MR. O'CONNOR: Samantha seconds. Is

 12 there discussion from we will start with the

 13 Council and then we can certainly review the report

 14 together as well.

 15 What I will say is that with great

 16 thanks to Lisa Larges and several committees,

 17 former committees, current committee chairs.

 18 Samantha got a special shout out from Lisa Larges

 19 for helping to cajole, encourage, pick your verb,

 20 former chairs to submit their reports for this

 21 year.

 22 We have, I believe, a very strong

 23 report from the introduction that was written from

 24 Natasha covering, as well the visit from Secretary

 25 Gallo, as well there is also a section focused on

 24

 1 our work this year and encouraging stronger skills

 2 and good jobs being one of the headings in

 3 Natasha's note, the seniors work that we've done,

 4 call out to Minnesota's successful reading service

 5 and the budget increase that we received this year

 6 and ERAF, the Employer Reasonable Accommodations

 7 Fund also being highlighted. We then go into the

 8 mission and vision and each of the committees

 9 submitted an annual report as well as part of this

 10 annual report, of this overall annual report.

 11 Before we move to a vote are there any

 12 questions or comments on the report itself?

 13 MS. DUNNAM: Jennifer Dunnam.

 14 MS. SANDERS: This is Judy.

 15 MR. O'CONNOR: We will go to Jennifer

 16 and then to Judy.

 17 MS. DUNNAM: I think it's probably,

 18 since we kind of seem to have this discussion a

 19 lot, it is probably me that is having the problem.

 20 So I think we were also going to be approving our

 21 VR Effectiveness review, is that right, separately

 22 or are we just not going to do that separately?

 23 And I'm asking because it's a big part

 24 of the report. And so we would be approving the

 25 report and then going back and approving the middle

 25

 1 part of it?

 2 MR. O'CONNOR: That is correct, yes.

 3 We have them listed separately, fair point. We can

 4 certainly take the effectiveness up first if that

 5 would be maybe a better course of action here,

 6 Jennifer. Would that be your recommendation?

 7 MS. DUNNAM: As you wish. Yes, that

 8 would be my recommendation since it's part of the

 9 report.

 10 MR. O'CONNOR: Yep, I am now tracking

 11 with you.

 12 Judy.

 13 MS. SANDERS: Yeah, I agree with

 14 Jennifer, we should switch it around, but I also am

 15 not quite sure how I want to vote because I do not

 16 have access to my email, so I haven't read it and

 17 won't be able to. And I -- but I also trust Lisa's

 18 work and know it to be of good quality. So, you

 19 know what, I either abstain or I vote yes and I am

 20 willing to go either way which is going to make it

 21 work better.

 22 MR. O'CONNOR: Sure thing, Judy, thank

 23 you, I can understand. So why don't we put this --

 24 MS. SANDERS: Yes.

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

 26

 1 MS. SANDERS: But maybe we should just

 2 put that aside for now and do the effectiveness.

 3 MR. O'CONNOR: Exactly. So I'm going

 4 to suggest that we table that motion for now and

 5 move instead to the VR Effectiveness piece. Sorry,

 6 I have too many windows open here.

 7 Jennifer, I believe were you going to

 8 speak to the VR Effectiveness component?

 9 MS. DUNNAM: I would be happy to,

 10 sure.

 11 MR. O'CONNOR: Great. Why don't we

 12 move to that first and then we will come back.

 13 MS. DUNNAM: Okay. I will try to keep

 14 this as concise as possible, but I know people may

 15 not have had a chance to read it and so I'll go

 16 through it as thorough and concise as possible. Am

 17 I coming through okay?

 18 MR. O'CONNOR: Yes, you are.

 19 MS. DUNNAM: Okay, fantastic. This is

 20 one of the Council's responsibilities each year

 21 according to federal requirements of RSA and the

 22 Customer Satisfaction and Goals and Priorities

 23 Committee is intended to facilitate the Council's

 24 work in doing it.

 25 This is basically how did SSB do in

 27

 1 its VR program and it has four parts. The first

 2 part is SSB's performance on the performance

 3 accountability measures, which I will go through.

 4 Then there is a summary of the

 5 customer satisfaction survey, like how do people

 6 feel that SSB did.

 7 The third is a progress reported on

 8 how SSB did on the most recently completed program

 9 year of goals and priorities.

 10 And the last is the work for the

 11 upcoming goals and priorities. We won't go through

 12 that as part of this, but we will go through the

 13 first three parts.

 14 First part is the performance

 15 accountability measures. Relatively new, I guess

 16 they are not that new now. So the first measures a

 17 variety of things here and if anybody besides me

 18 wants to give context about this as we go, feel

 19 free, please stop me. This is for program year

 20 2021 and '22. I am going to do 2022 here because

 21 that's what we just ended.

 22 So the first one is the employment

 23 rate after exiting, and that's the second quarter,

 24 after the second quarter, and it was 36 percent to

 25 39 percent, I'll do both numbers for '21 and '22.

 28

 1 Quarter 2 median wage after exiting. 2021 it was

 2 $7,348 and 2022 7,326. Quarter 4, employment rate

 3 after exciting went 35 percent and 35 percent.

 4 Credential attainment measurable -- sorry, if

 5 anybody -- I have got 34 percent for this year.

 6 Measurable skills gain rate it looks like it went

 7 from 34 percent to 41 percent. I just embossed

 8 this if I'm getting any numbers wrong somebody stop

 9 me. So those are the performance accountability

 10 measures, those kind of hard numbers.

 11 Then we move into the customer

 12 satisfaction and that's got a variety of sections

 13 I'm going to summarize to the quickest of my

 14 ability here. The satisfaction survey question 1:

 15 How satisfied were you with the time it took to

 16 receive your answer? This program year it was

 17 90 percent. Usually anecdotally over the last

 18 years it's been hovering between 80 and 90 percent,

 19 this is a pretty good one. Question 2: Satisfied

 20 that counselor understood the customer's needs is

 21 also 90 percent. Question 3: Satisfied that the

 22 customer was given enough info to make good

 23 choices, unemployment plan, 84 percent

 24 satisfaction. Question 4: Satisfied that the

 25 customer had an active role in decisions about the

 29

 1 services, that is also 90 percent. Question 5:

 2 Satisfied that the service helped plan for and

 3 maintain employment is 80 percent.

 4 Skipping to Question 11, and it will

 5 become apparent why we are going that in a moment.

 6 Question 11: Overall satisfaction with services

 7 provided, 87 percent. Question 12: The extent to

 8 which services have met expectations, that was

 9 79 percent. Question 13: Comparison with ideal

 10 set of services was 77 percent.

 11 Then we have the customer or the

 12 Consumer Satisfaction Index which we look at

 13 rolling totals over the year and that trended

 14 upward. We start looking at '19 to '20 and moving

 15 to the current program year and it goes 63 percent,

 16 69, 68, 72 and 78. So that is looking good. The

 17 number of people surveyed, this is also the highest

 18 total number of people who completed the survey in

 19 this rolling totals, so that's also a positive, it

 20 seems like a good thing.

 21 All right. Then we are looking, going

 22 back to questions 6, 7 and 8 which have to do with

 23 assistive technology. Question 6: Have you

 24 received any technology from State Services for the

 25 Blind? And the yes response is 56 percent, so the

 30

 1 next question is among those respondents. Question

 2 7: Think about when you most needed to use your

 3 assistive technology, how prepared did you feel to

 4 use the assistive technology when you needed it?

 5 Very well prepared, somewhat prepared, not very

 6 well prepared or not very well prepared at all.

 7 This program year very prepared was 54 percent and

 8 somewhat prepared was 32 percent. So there is

 9 that.

 10 And then Question 8: How useful do

 11 you think the technology equipment received would

 12 be or was in helping you meet your vocational

 13 goals? The responses this time very useful was

 14 81 percent, somewhat useful 14 percent.

 15 We then looked at the three questions

 16 on the survey that started in 2020 to address

 17 changes in service delivery caused by the pandemic.

 18 And Question lA: Please describe the primary

 19 method of how you interacted with SSB to receive

 20 your services. In person was 10 percent, phone

 21 call 40 percent, email 30 percent, online like zoom

 22 was 21 percent. 8B: How satisfied were you with

 23 the nontraditional method you used for SSB to

 24 receive your services? Very satisfied 44 percent

 25 and satisfied 42 percent. And following the

 31

 1 pattern of how we typically measure these we added

 2 very satisfied and satisfied to get 86 percent.

 3 Then there were about, I want to say,

 4 three pages responding to this next question which

 5 are not on this report, they will be available in

 6 the full survey that's on the DEED website, but the

 7 question is please explain how the process of

 8 meeting in a nontraditional way went for you in

 9 receiving services from SSB. And some people just

 10 talked about yep, it was Zoom and some people said

 11 that it went great, some people said it didn't,

 12 just a lot of verbatim responses.

 13 Then we look at questions like

 14 Question 9: In your opinion, this is more general,

 15 in your opinion what is or was the most important

 16 part of services that you received? And the most

 17 common responses there involve technology and

 18 equipment, staff and trainer, vendor assistance and

 19 education classes and training.

 20 Question 10: If you could change one

 21 thing about the services that you received, what

 22 would that be? The most common is centered around

 23 issues relating to finding and searching and

 24 getting trained for a job, staff improvements and

 25 process issues.

 32

 1 That's a summary of the survey. I

 2 should probably pause in case there are any

 3 questions or additional comments anybody wants to

 4 provide.

 5 (No response.)

 6 MS. DUNNAM: Hearing nothing. Moving

 7 into the review of the goals and priorities.

 8 Review of progress on them and how things went

 9 during the past program year. Thank you to Jon

 10 Benson and to all the staff who helped provide

 11 input in putting this together.

 12 The first progress -- so okay, sorry.

 13 Number 1, the first priority, competitive

 14 integrated employment. The strategies were

 15 implement a model for coordinating employer

 16 services with DEED, Workforce Innovation &

 17 Opportunity Act, partners including Title One Adult

 18 and Dislocated Workers. And we go down the variety

 19 of these.

 20 It says SSB is working with DEED

 21 partners and stakeholders to develop a client

 22 relationship management tool. Currently partners

 23 are determining the cost to use Minnesota IT for

 24 consulting and services and what funding they can

 25 commit. Once this is finalized the planning

 33

 1 process will begin by identifying partner

 2 businesses and customer needs and how to assemble

 3 these into a cohesive product.

 4 The next one: Monitor the employer

 5 one-stop online virtual representing all partners

 6 and available services to determine any

 7 modification adjustments needed to ensure its

 8 effectiveness. And it's also monitoring the EPM

 9 end section of the disability hub website. I'm

 10 going to skip over that. And a review of that is

 11 that SSB has made considerable progress to employer

 12 services across the department, for example, we

 13 have now regional meetings across DEED division

 14 related to serving businesses and connecting them

 15 with workforce services, including talent

 16 recruitment. There's been, unfortunately, no

 17 progress on the Client Relationship Management, CRM

 18 tool.

 19 We are not able to create the employer

 20 One Stop hub as we envisioned since the department

 21 put resources instead toward improving the career

 22 force MN.com platform, however, we have identified

 23 a new avenue to accomplishing both items which

 24 includes leveraging the new labor exchange system

 25 that's being designed. Several partners within

 34

 1 DEED expressed interest in obtaining a CRM such as

 2 sales forum to better track or contract businesses.

 3 A few divisions within DEED already have sales

 4 force and other divisions did not see the benefit.

 5 While it has limits, it's a good tool for tracking

 6 (inaudible) for -- and my page is cut off, system

 7 across partners, which includes funding agreements

 8 and joint policies. It's a large scale effort that

 9 requires consensus.

 10 I will continue to read this, but it

 11 is quite lengthy if there is anybody that wants to

 12 summarize this part or say anything about it that

 13 would be more concise please feel free.

 14 (No response.)

 15 MS. DUNNAM: If not, I'm going to move

 16 onto the next major section here which is implement

 17 ongoing training, tracking and oversight of

 18 measurable skills gains and credential attainment

 19 of students to reach negotiated targets and monitor

 20 staff tracking to customers and input in

 21 appropriate documentation of in depth review of

 22 staff, customers, MSGs and credentials between

 23 enrollment and disenrollment.

 24 There are a couple of other bullet

 25 points under here, but getting to the review part.

 35

 1 This is SSB, while we have made considerable

 2 progress as it relates to reporting on and tracking

 3 measurable skills, gains and credential attainment

 4 we still have a long way to go. Based on recent

 5 data reports from RSA, SSB is below mean when it

 6 comes to performance rates for these two measures.

 7 We attribute this primarily to incomplete and

 8 inaccurate tracking by staff in our case management

 9 system.

 10 We have employed several strategies to

 11 mitigate this. Our quality assurance specialist

 12 does in depth reviews of the MSGs and credentials

 13 claimed after each semester while also flagging

 14 staff and potential MSGs that have not yet been

 15 claimed.

 16 Additionally, multiple reminders are

 17 sent as MSG deadlines approach. These reminders

 18 include instructions on what needs to be collected

 19 as well as links to various training through the

 20 years. Additional training is provided to

 21 counselors on MSG's -- I apologize, I've got some

 22 pages that have margins that are cut off here, so

 23 I'm gonna skim through.

 24 However, while the strategies have

 25 helped us double our MSG rate from the previous

 36

 1 program year, they are not fully resolving the

 2 issues we have.

 3 This coming year we will be looking at

 4 the following activities: Full system integration

 5 between our case management system and the National

 6 Student Clearinghouse. I'm gonna do the first

 7 sentence here and if anybody wants to fill out they

 8 can.

 9 Second bullet, hiring an

 10 administrative support specialist to assist the

 11 quality assurance specialist in case reviews, which

 12 will include fixing data entry errors in the system

 13 and tracking down supporting documentation.

 14 And then we are up to monitor the

 15 recommendation document submitted by the Advisory

 16 Task Force on the legislative subcommittee.

 17 Recommendations included items and proposed

 18 statutory changes that will specifically support

 19 the hiring and retention of Blind, visually

 20 impaired and DeafBlind customers including a

 21 requirement for all technology and digital content

 22 to be accessible and provided in a timely manner.

 23 Job posting language to be nondiscriminatory

 24 including not requiring a driver's license when one

 25 is not actually needed. Hiring managers are made

 37

 1 aware of the state accommodations fund, reasonable

 2 accommodations are provided to allow for full

 3 participation. And rehabilitation services must be

 4 consulted when it comes to any updates or changes

 5 to the Connect 700 policy, training and staff,

 6 inclusive environments, digital standards and the

 7 Americans with Disabilities Act. Working with the

 8 management on budget to ensure these

 9 recommendations are carried out.

 10 So the review of this is all

 11 strategies in this area are considered complete.

 12 This past legislative session put all the advisory

 13 task force recommendations into the appropriate

 14 statutes, which I will not read in their entirety

 15 because they mirror what I read above, but they are

 16 great. So when you get a chance, read them.

 17 Then we are looking at the next

 18 priority which is internal controls and quality

 19 assurance. Those strategies that we approved at

 20 the last time, last meeting, I'm gonna pass over,

 21 even though I have been reading them, but I want to

 22 get to the review part which says "while we've made

 23 some progress in this area, we are not as far along

 24 as we wanted to be. Our data analyst went on a

 25 one-year extended leave so we have relied on other

 38

 1 department data analysts to assist when they are

 2 available. We have, however, been able to work

 3 with DEED's performance, a technical management

 4 division, to begin building data dashboards Empower

 5 VI. We have one report fully completed which is

 6 the post-pandemic Application of Successful Closure

 7 Trends Report.

 8 And there is more on this, I am going

 9 to go to the next priority which is

 10 underrepresented populations. And we approved the

 11 strategies there and the review of this is we have

 12 made considerable progress in our intentional and

 13 targeted outreach efforts toward underserved and

 14 underrepresented communities, however, we still

 15 need to do more.

 16 And the bullet points, which the State

 17 Rehabilitation Council for the Blind revitalized

 18 and renamed the Minority Outreach Committee to the

 19 Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Committee. This

 20 group is tasked with helping SSB reach and serve

 21 more individuals from BIPOC communities. We added

 22 a demographic profile to our Customer Satisfaction

 23 Survey so we had contract satisfaction by age,

 24 gender, race and ethnicity. Satisfaction shows a

 25 higher satisfaction with our services if you are

 39

 1 Hispanic, Latino, BIPOC or DeafBlind.

 2 We are hiring a second outreach

 3 coordinator to be able to devote time and connect

 4 with those communities who are historically

 5 underserved, which include our tribal communities.

 6 Data show that we are serving more individuals from

 7 BIPOC communities than in the past. However,

 8 across the board these communities have higher

 9 unsuccessful closures, establishing contact with

 10 people who are fluent in Somali, launching literacy

 11 for all campaigns in the Communication Center which

 12 means offering more accessible materials in

 13 languages other than English, been able to

 14 translate the brochures in multiple languages both

 15 written and via audio. In addition, we are in

 16 early stages of supporting the language

 17 revitalization effort through the Minnesota

 18 Department of Education, which is an effort to

 19 revitalize the Dakota and Ojibway languages.

 20 A work group was created to

 21 investigate application closures, data and identify

 22 gaps and trends. This group spent a considerable

 23 amount of time reviewing historical data from the

 24 last three to five years. They even dug into case

 25 notes to determine what led to the unsuccessful

 40

 1 closure.

 2 Through a considerable amount of

 3 research they identified the biggest area of need

 4 has to do with serving new Americans and refugees.

 5 DEED is fortunate to have the Office for New

 6 Americans and work -- this sentence is going to be

 7 cut off because of my paper.

 8 So they are working to learn more

 9 about the population including cultural components.

 10 It identified that many staff lacked cultural

 11 awareness, especially when it comes to how we

 12 describe our services and the purpose of our

 13 program.

 14 We also have a significant lack of

 15 service providers who know how to bridge the

 16 language and cultural barriers, especially when the

 17 barrier is partnered with a vision loss or

 18 blindness. We are not yet sure what we can do to

 19 develop community partners with the skill set, but

 20 we are considering the creation of a community

 21 liaison who will be a cultural bridge between SSB

 22 staff and the communities.

 23 All the staff are receiving ongoing

 24 training as it relates to diversity, equity,

 25 inclusion and accessibility, but this training is

 41

 1 geared more towards their employment through the

 2 State of Minnesota and less around how to engage

 3 with people -- how to engage with and serve

 4 customers.

 5 We are considering implementing the

 6 ABCs of cultural competence to staff, which is a

 7 training offered through UA CURRENTS. I don't know

 8 what UA CURRENTS is, does anyone? Can anyone tell

 9 us what UA CURRENTS is?

 10 MS. JERDE: This is Natasha, I can.

 11 UA CURRENTS, if you attend an SCSAB conference you

 12 can attribute that entire conference to UA

 13 CURRENTS, it's the University of Arkansas and they

 14 do professional training and development.

 15 MS. DUNNAM: Thank you.

 16 All right. Getting near the end here.

 17 This is the next priority which is transition and

 18 pre-employment transition services, Pre-ETS. The

 19 strategies I will skip over unless we need to go

 20 back to them, those were ones that we had approved

 21 previously, but the review of how we did on them,

 22 the strategies were not implemented and thus has

 23 not been successfully completed due to SSB staffing

 24 changes and shifts in the leadership of a committee

 25 this work was unable to be completed and will move

 42

 1 forward with the study once the second SSB data

 2 analyst has been hired. So yeah, looking at a

 3 variety of things with transition folks.

 4 The next priority. Staff training and

 5 development strategies. Variety of training

 6 strategies listed here. The review here, SSB hired

 7 a dedicated staff, can't read the next line here,

 8 it has to do with annual training plan as well as

 9 ad hoc and on-demand training.

 10 Our trainer has improved the existing

 11 onboarding training creating a robust and

 12 comprehensive onboarding for all new WDU staff.

 13 Counselor and VR tech training plans have been

 14 created along with training plans geared more

 15 toward the other roles in WDU and other units that

 16 require a less comprehensive training.

 17 MR. O'CONNOR: This is Corbb. The

 18 cutoff line is just saying that SSB hired a

 19 dedicated staff development specialist.

 20 MS. DUNNAM: Thank you. Yes, please,

 21 help me with my cutoff lines there.

 22 All right. The trainer has also

 23 created an Annual Training Plan to ensure the unit

 24 staff are receiving the necessary training to

 25 continue to do their work and develop in their

 43

 1 roles. This includes monthly counselor-only

 2 training sessions that focus on topics specific to

 3 counselors and provide counselors a venue to

 4 collaborate with one another regularly. At times

 5 training topics may be relevant to other unit roles

 6 and the staff in those roles are invited to attend

 7 those sessions.

 8 Additionally there is a training

 9 newsletter that goes out weekly and identifies

 10 training opportunities that may be available to

 11 unit staff. We have been able to procure the --

 12 another cutoff line.

 13 MR. O'CONNOR: Yes, LMS platform, that

 14 puts together content for us and houses all of the

 15 training.

 16 MS. DUNNAM: Yeah, cool, great.

 17 All right. We have successfully

 18 created this strategy.

 19 Next, increase the level of awareness

 20 of importance of timely communication of the

 21 customers in response to customer comments on the

 22 Customer Satisfaction Survey.

 23 The Outcomes and Goals and Priorities

 24 Committee together with SSB will monitor the

 25 frequency of comments on the subsequent surveys

 44

 1 about that issue. SSB staff will investigate other

 2 internal controls that could be used to identify

 3 any communication timeliness problems.

 4 Review each year the results of the

 5 annual survey are released. SSB leadership reviews

 6 each and every comment while timeliness and

 7 communication continues to be a frequently

 8 referenced issue -- there's that line and then

 9 talking about something about two specific staff

 10 and not entire work unit.

 11 MR. O'CONNOR: The rest of the

 12 comments were directed about to staff so we have

 13 been able to address it through performance

 14 management.

 15 MS. DUNNAM: Cool.

 16 Overall due to steps we've taken and

 17 continue to take to reduce administrative burden on

 18 staff, we will see less complaints about

 19 communication responsiveness.

 20 Staff turnover is another majority

 21 factor in communication timeliness. At one point

 22 we were down several counselors and VR techs and we

 23 had turnover rates of more than 30 percent, that's

 24 very high. At the time of this review of our goals

 25 and priorities we are almost fully staffed with

 45

 1 less than 5 percent turnover. Caseloads are at an

 2 average of 45 and we have no counselor vacancies.

 3 We also have a number of internal controls in place

 4 to monitor this on an ongoing basis.

 5 Okay. I'm gonna go through this

 6 because it's talking about the internal controls

 7 about timeliness that I'm sure we will find great.

 8 I'm skipping through these internal controls and

 9 communications here.

 10 And that is the end of part three,

 11 those are the outcomes on the goals and priorities

 12 of the year. So that ends my sort of summarizing

 13 and the reading of the VR effectiveness review,

 14 Mr. Chair.

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

 16 and thank you to the committee who helped with this

 17 report with a lot of input from the staff in terms

 18 of getting some of this data. But a big thank you

 19 to Jennifer for chairing this group, along with

 20 Jennifer Points, Steve Jacobson, Ryan Haenze and

 21 Ryan Strunk for participating in the meeting. The

 22 last paragraph of the section says that we had

 23 meetings over the fall to review these measures and

 24 chart next year's goals and priorities.

 25 I would love if there is a motion

 46

 1 first and then we can come to discussion. Is there

 2 a motion to adopt the VR Effectiveness report that

 3 was emailed and summarized verbally?

 4 MR. ELLER: Frank Eller, yes.

 5 MR. STRUNK: And Ryan second.

 6 MR. O'CONNOR: I heard Ryan second

 7 Frank Eller's motion, I believe.

 8 MR. STRUNK: Yes.

 9 MR. O'CONNOR: Is there a discussion

 10 of the report?

 11 (No response.)

 12 MR. O'CONNOR: So I will jump in just

 13 to point out one piece and that is around sales

 14 force. The sales force application, while they

 15 have a large group of people working on

 16 accessibility and they have been known to make an

 17 accessible interface, I have serious concerns with

 18 the accessability of their tooling in general and

 19 have found many critical blockers to most of their

 20 tools in the work flows.

 21 And so I just want to flag that for

 22 the SSB team as we evaluate technology with our

 23 vendor partners to make sure that we are adopting

 24 the most accessible technology out there.

 25 MS. JERDE: This is Tasha.

 47

 1 MR. O'CONNOR: Yes, Natasha.

 2 MS. JERDE: I remember you mentioning

 3 this, I think, a few CSAVRs back and we are no

 4 longer pursuing sales force, but we are a home

 5 baked tool that is getting put together which will

 6 be fully accessible, I think, is what we are going

 7 to be using.

 8 MR. O'CONNOR: Wonderful. Thank you,

 9 Natasha, for always being so responsive to feedback

 10 in that regard.

 11 Other discussion or questions before

 12 we vote on the VR Effectiveness report?

 13 (No response.)

 14 MR. O'CONNOR: Okay. I'm pausing just

 15 a second, I thought I heard someone looking for the

 16 floor.

 17 Hearing none we will go to Frank

 18 Eller.

 19 MR. ELLER: Frank Eller, yes.

 20 MR. O'CONNOR: Samantha Flax. Frank

 21 Eller votes yes.

 22 MS. FLAX: Yes.

 23 MR. O'CONNOR: Samantha votes yes.

 24 Ryan Haenze is not here.

 25 Tom Heinl.

 48

 1 MR. HEINL: Yes.

 2 MR. O'CONNOR: Tom Heinl votes yes.

 3 Rob Hobson.

 4 MR. HOBSON: Rob Hobson, pass.

 5 MR. O'CONNOR: Rob passes.

 6 Catalina Martinez.

 7 MS. MARTINEZ: Yes.

 8 MR. O'CONNOR: Catalina a yes.

 9 Michael O'Day.

 10 MR. O'DAY: Yes.

 11 MR. O'CONNOR: Michael O'Day, yes.

 12 Jennifer Points. Jennifer Points is a

 13 yes.

 14 Judy Sanders.

 15 MS. SANDERS: Judy Sanders, yes.

 16 MR. STRUNK: Ryan Strunk, yes.

 17 MR. O'CONNOR: And with Judy and Ryan

 18 both voting yes, Corbb votes yes and we are

 19 approving the VR Effectiveness report.

 20 All right. Let us now, the very

 21 formal word of untable, resume discussion, I think

 22 is the other word we are looking for, on the motion

 23 that we've previously had about the Annual Report.

 24 Is there any further discussion on the Annual

 25 Report as a whole before we move to a vote on that?

 49

 1 (No response.)

 2 MR. O'CONNOR: Hearing none, Frank

 3 Eller.

 4 MR. ELLER: Frank Eller, yes.

 5 MS. FLAX: Samantha Flax, yes.

 6 MR. O'CONNOR: Tom Heinl.

 7 MR. HEINL: Yes.

 8 MR. O'CONNOR: Tom Heinl is a yes.

 9 MR. HOBSON: Rob Hobson, yes.

 10 MS. MARTINEZ: Catalina, yes.

 11 MR. O'CONNOR: Catalina votes yes.

 12 MR. O'DAY: Michael O'Day votes yes.

 13 MR. O'CONNOR: Thank you.

 14 Jennifer Points. Yes.

 15 Judy Sanders.

 16 MS. SANDERS: I'll abstain.

 17 MR. STRUNK: Ryan Strunk, yes.

 18 MR. O'CONNOR: Thank you Judy. Ryan

 19 votes yes. And Corbb votes yes. So we will adopt

 20 that motion as well. Excellent.

 21 We have then the next item on our

 22 agenda is I believe it is Natasha's Director's

 23 report. Forgive me one -- yes, Natasha's

 24 Director's report will come next.

 25 MS. JERDE: All right. And let me get

 50

 1 it ready. So greetings Council it's great to be

 2 here with you all virtually. Before I go into my

 3 updates I want to take a moment to recognize our

 4 colleague, Dan Gausman, who passed away

 5 unexpectedly on November 9. Dan was a man of ideas

 6 and many of the projects I have shared in past

 7 Director's reports came from those ideas. The work

 8 we have been doing with materials in other

 9 languages has been so successful because of Dan.

 10 The DSM-5 project happened because Dan said we

 11 would make it happen. His Memorial on Sunday was

 12 standing room only and that just shows what an

 13 impact he has made on so many people.

 14 RSA just today announced that there is

 15 finally a new Commissioner, it's only been three or

 16 four years since we had someone confirmed. The

 17 Senate confirmed Dante Quintin Allen, he comes from

 18 California and was the executive director of

 19 CalABLE.

 20 At the end of October I attended the

 21 National Governors' Association Disability Policy

 22 Action Lab in Washington. I joined a few others

 23 from the Governor's Workforce Development Board's

 24 Disability Equity Committee which I am the staff

 25 liaison for.

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 1 As a result of that action lab we are

 2 developing a disability policy landscape map that

 3 outlines all the disability related policies that

 4 exist here in Minnesota and identifies any areas of

 5 need, contradiction or overlap.

 6 We then have plans to introduce

 7 policies or legislation that would address those

 8 areas. The Governors' Association is now offering

 9 a chance for us to participate in a longer term

 10 collaborative, so we formed a core team and are

 11 applying for it.

 12 The core team includes our Disability

 13 Equity Committee chair Josh Berg, Senator Hoffman,

 14 Nicauris Heredia with the Governor's office and

 15 David Dively who is the executive director of the

 16 Council on Disability. And I will be the team lead

 17 for that. And so if accepted we are going to be

 18 convening a large group of state and local partners

 19 that are invested in the disability policy and that

 20 want action to happen.

 21 The next area is around Evolve VR.

 22 Evolve continues to be the road map for our vision

 23 and strategy. I presented a one year later update

 24 during the leadership forum at CSAVR and Jon and I

 25 will be sharing that same update with staff next

 52

 1 week. So when you really sit down to list out all

 2 of the progress that has been made and how much is

 3 still left to go, it can be both exhilarating and

 4 defeating all at the same time. Some days we take

 5 two steps forward and one step back and other days

 6 we take three steps back.

 7 Our biggest most obvious success has

 8 been all the progress we made with awareness. We

 9 have had more media hits this past year than I ever

 10 remember. We have a DEED media specialist within

 11 our department who has taken an interest in what we

 12 do and, in fact, I just took her on a tour of SSB

 13 on Tuesday. Our Employer Reasonable Accommodation

 14 Fund is gaining traction not only here in

 15 Minnesota, but from other states who are interested

 16 in duplicating it.

 17 And now I don't know if this is

 18 correlation without causation or what, but later on

 19 in my updates I will share that we have finally

 20 seen a notable spike in how many people we are

 21 serving in our Workforce Development Unit.

 22 And now for some administrative

 23 updates. Yesterday Susan Kusz transitioned into

 24 her new role as assistant contract specialist. She

 25 will be working closely with Jennifer Beilke on a

 53

 1 variety of things including facilitating the

 2 background check process, maintaining the

 3 SharePoint and website for Community Partners and

 4 coordinating contract monitoring. Susan will

 5 continue to assist the SRC-B until we are able to

 6 hire for her replacement. And we do anticipate by

 7 the April council meeting we will have a new staff

 8 liaison who has been trained in.

 9 An update on master contracts. Where

 10 we are at, we have had three master contract

 11 amendments executed. We have one request in for an

 12 amendment, one in negotiation and Jennifer is

 13 working with an individual who went through our

 14 assistive technology certification process and they

 15 intend to submit an application and proposal for a

 16 contract.

 17 We also have a few updates on some

 18 other exciting contracts. Our very own court

 19 reporter has successfully become a certified

 20 targeted vendor and now we can move forward with

 21 developing an equity select contract which

 22 basically means we can go up to $100,000 without

 23 going through the solicitation process.

 24 We are also planning to do another

 25 contract for the Blind Abilities podcast with Jeff

 54

 1 Thompson and we are looking into the possibility of

 2 a contract with the State of South Dakota for

 3 Adjustment to Blindness services with their

 4 training facility. This could be used when

 5 customers are geographically closer to South Dakota

 6 and Minnesota partners are not able to meet the

 7 needs of the customer.

 8 And moving to outreach. Yesterday we

 9 welcomed --

 10 MR. O'CONNOR: Natasha, before we do

 11 that.

 12 MS. JERDE: Oops.

 13 MR. O'CONNOR: If I could pause you.

 14 MS. JERDE: Sure.

 15 MR. O'CONNOR: If there are any

 16 questions up to this point in Tasha's report?

 17 (No response.)

 18 MR. O'CONNOR: Great, we can move on

 19 then.

 20 MS. JERDE: Beautiful.

 21 So yesterday we welcomed Lisa Rodgers

 22 to the SSB team and she is our second outreach

 23 coordinator. Yes, indeed, we will have two Lisas.

 24 And in addition to working closely with Lisa Larges

 25 on outreach events, she will be our new Combined

 55

 1 State Plan coordinator. Lisa joined our call today

 2 so I will turn it over to her for a brief

 3 introduction.

 4 MS. RODGERS: Hi, I am really happy to

 5 join you tonight and I am very excited to start a

 6 new career at SSB. Just real quickly, I come from

 7 a background of working in education where I worked

 8 for a curriculum development company for a couple

 9 of decades.

 10 And I bring along to SSB my skills of

 11 writing, editing and conducting presentations and

 12 delivering contacts, working with training,

 13 outreach marketing. So I'm really, really thrilled

 14 to be able to take my tool of tricks and skills and

 15 really apply them in this new position to make a

 16 difference in people's lives.

 17 So thank you everybody for welcoming

 18 me aboard, it's been just a great couple of days.

 19 I've enjoyed my time with everyone that I have sat

 20 down with and got a chance to meet or have meetings

 21 with, everybody has been very welcoming and

 22 accommodating and I am thrilled to be here.

 23 MS. JERDE: We are thrilled to have

 24 you. Thank you, Lisa, for coming tonight.

 25 A few other updates from Outreach.

 56

 1 The January/February edition of The Women Today in

 2 Duluth will be featuring a story about Judy Bruer.

 3 Judy is a patron of our National Library Service

 4 and was actually the person who requested the --

 5 DSM-V. Our media team within our department had

 6 shared the story with a few media outlets and one

 7 picked it up.

 8 Lisa Larges, Anna Werner and I

 9 presented at the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council

 10 last month. Lisa and Anna shared about the work

 11 the Communication Center has been doing that

 12 supports the Language Revitalization for Dakota and

 13 Ojibway. We hope that the presentation helped us

 14 gain traction in finding native speakers of those

 15 languages to read for us. We also hope to be able

 16 to compensate them for their time, as their time is

 17 incredibly valuable and limited. And there is some

 18 historical context to that where native speakers

 19 have been exploited for their skills, for their

 20 speaking skills, and not been compensated. So we

 21 have been working with the Governor's office on

 22 this very thing.

 23 Moving to facilities. So interviews

 24 begin next week for a new facilities supervisor and

 25 we welcomed Patrick Lang as our new mailroom

 57

 1 coordinator. Because of some unavoidable delays

 2 the installation of new equipment in our conference

 3 rooms had to be delayed from December to January.

 4 We had already moved this meeting to virtual before

 5 we learned there was going to be a delay, so there

 6 wasn't enough notice to bring it back to hybrid and

 7 order food.

 8 A small team from Vocational

 9 Rehabilitation Services are looking to sublease

 10 some space over in our administrative services

 11 area. If it all works out they would move in

 12 around October 2024. And specifically this team is

 13 their deaf and hard of hearing team which would be

 14 great to partner with our DeafBlind team.

 15 We are in the process of receiving

 16 revised and updated quotes for the cafeteria

 17 remodel since the feds have officially approved our

 18 establishment activities we can now finally move

 19 forward and once we get that sent off, our next

 20 phase is the program services remodel. This will

 21 involve taking down a number of cubes and adding

 22 modular offices that staff can check out and use.

 23 It will also include adding more storage for the

 24 Senior Services Unit which are in desperate need

 25 for all of their consumables.

 58

 1 And shifting gears to program

 2 services, starting with the Business Enterprise

 3 Program. The BEP is working with its elected

 4 committee of Blind vendors to update its policy and

 5 procedure manual. We hope to have this ratified by

 6 the end of 2024.

 7 The BEP worked with its elected

 8 committee to provide another $3,000 of vacation

 9 payment to each operator for the 2023/2024 state

 10 fiscal year. The BEP disbursed $130,000 in support

 11 funds to operators the last fiscal year. Staff are

 12 working collaboratively on collecting information

 13 for our annual federal report which is due on the

 14 29th.

 15 And something that was both exciting

 16 and disappointing at the same time was that the BEP

 17 was working with one of our operators on a possible

 18 bid for a military dining contract in the State of

 19 Wisconsin. So unfortunately despite our best

 20 efforts the time it was going to take to get a

 21 special account through the feds it did not match

 22 with when the bid was due. The process to get this

 23 sam.gov account takes weeks to months and we only

 24 had three days left for the bid. This would have

 25 actually been a first for the Randolph Sheppard

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 1 community, one state bidding on an opportunity in

 2 another state. Wisconsin was not able to provide a

 3 bid during the cycle and they supported us in our

 4 efforts to create the opportunity for the operator.

 5 However, even though the timing didn't work out for

 6 this opportunity, we now know what we need to do.

 7 So if this happens again we will be ready to pounce

 8 on it.

 9 And the BEP is working with one of its

 10 operators on potentially creating a commissary

 11 business at two of the Department of Human Services

 12 state MSOPs, not entirely sure what MSOP stands

 13 for. This service is currently under contract with

 14 a third-party vendor until 2026, but we are going

 15 to hopefully exercise our priority when that

 16 contract expires.

 17 Corbb, do you want me to pause?

 18 MR. O'CONNOR: You read my mind. Are

 19 there any questions up to this point in Natasha's

 20 report?

 21 (No response.)

 22 MS. JERDE: On to the Senior Services

 23 Unit. Jessica Kopp and Melanie Dailey are in their

 24 second week of Adjustment to Blindness training.

 25 They are the two newest staff to join us. They

 60

 1 should be ready to be independent in the field by

 2 early February after the low vision training and

 3 job shadowing.

 4 These two positions are brand new

 5 additions, all because of the increase in

 6 appropriation that we got. One will be serving the

 7 Rochester area which is really a high referral

 8 area.

 9 We finished the year serving 3,617

 10 seniors and 79 independent living customers. And

 11 the Mayo collaboration is still having some growing

 12 pains after Vivien Yip left Mayo, that and the

 13 other doctor is retiring in the spring. So we may

 14 have to regroup and re-evaluate without having two

 15 in-house champions. But Jessica, our new staff, is

 16 an occupational therapist and she will be assigned

 17 Mayo and has a chance to revive things. And in

 18 Bri's stead, Ed is working through the process of

 19 getting four new drivers hired.

 20 And onto Workforce Development Unit.

 21 Some Pre-ETS and transition quick hits. We hosted

 22 a virtual college 101 program on Monday, December 4

 23 and had over 37 people registered. Our transition

 24 coordinator and Work Opportunities Navigator have

 25 started to reach out to students for summer

 61

 1 internship opportunities.

 2 And in January we will hold a virtual

 3 meeting for those students interested in attending

 4 a first gen program. This is a program designed

 5 for students who are the first generation in their

 6 family to attend college. And actually our

 7 counselor Kate created this whole program herself.

 8 And we will be partnering with

 9 Wilderness Inquiry again in February to offer a

 10 winter activity to students, more info to come.

 11 And we are planning with people from

 12 the U of M for a Tools for School Day which will

 13 focus on assistive technology learning and Skills.

 14 And a quick data snapshot for Workforce

 15 Development. Since October 1 we have received 92

 16 applications for services. We are officially at

 17 702 open cases. The last time we had hit the seven

 18 hundreds was pre-COVID, we had been hovering around

 19 the 580s, mid 600s, so we finally broke the

 20 barrier. We have 12 people in application status,

 21 25 successful closures, 37 unsuccessful. And our

 22 average caseload size right now is 44 individuals

 23 per counselor.

 24 Onto Communication Center updates.

 25 Starting with audio services, audio services

 62

 1 reports 656,000 accesses to the NFB newsline since

 2 July 1 -- no, actually since October 1. Wait, no,

 3 this was federal fiscal year '23, so this was from

 4 October 1 last year through September 30. So they

 5 had over 656,000 NFB accesses, almost 4,000 pieces

 6 of equipment were circulated, almost 35,000 pages

 7 were recorded, over 12,000 pages were

 8 redistributed, 110 print pages were put into E-text

 9 or large print and over 100,000 pages were

 10 structured for recording for both audio and Radio

 11 Talking Book.

 12 As mentioned, Lisa, Anna and I

 13 presented at the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council.

 14 We shared the work we had been doing to increase

 15 access to materials in the Dakota and

 16 Anishinaabemowen languages and we are continuing to

 17 support the language revitalization efforts that

 18 are happening here in Minnesota. Part of that is

 19 there is a list of books for students in the

 20 schools to read to learn more about their culture

 21 and to learn more about the languages of their

 22 families. And so we are looking at transcribing

 23 those books into audio format so children and young

 24 adults who have disabilities can access those same

 25 materials as their peers.

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 1 And we recently recorded and uploaded

 2 to BARD three brochures in Spanish from the

 3 National Eye Institute. It was El Glaucoma, Las

 4 Cararatas and La Retino-- I can't speak Spanish,

 5 but it was about diabetic retinopathy and we give a

 6 huge thanks to our volunteer and retired Spanish

 7 instructor Andrea Bell for helping us with this.

 8 We welcomed award winning author,

 9 educator and motivational speaker Dr. Artika Tyner

 10 to record her children's book "Justice Makes a

 11 Difference." Dr. Tyner is the associate vice

 12 president for diversity and inclusion at the

 13 University of St. Thomas. She is committed to

 14 training students to serve as social engineers who

 15 create new inroads to justice and freedom.

 16 Now I will do a quick pause.

 17 MS. BEILKE: Natasha, this is Jennifer

 18 Beilke.

 19 MS. JERDE: Hi Jennifer.

 20 MS. BEILKE: The piece you mentioned

 21 about the MSOP, was that -- that was through DHS,

 22 Department of Human Services, is that correct?

 23 MS. JERDE: Yes.

 24 MS. BEILKE: It's Minnesota Sex

 25 Offender program.

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 1 MS. JERDE: Yes, thank you, that's

 2 right. Yeah, one in St. Peter and I don't recall

 3 where the other site is.

 4 MS. BEILKE: Moose Lake.

 5 MS. JERDE: Yes, Moose Lake, thank

 6 you.

 7 MS. BEILKE: I looked that up, I

 8 didn't know that off the top of my head, so I

 9 looked that up.

 10 MS. JERDE: Okay, thank you.

 11 MR. O'CONNOR: Other questions up to

 12 this point in the report?

 13 (No response.)

 14 MR. O'CONNOR: All right.

 15 MS. JERDE: Okay. Onto Radio Talking

 16 Book. Our long time intermittent broadcaster,

 17 MaryBeth Redmond, has transitioned to full-time

 18 broadcasting. She and Michael Le Fleur will rotate

 19 as the a.m. broadcaster with Michael taking the

 20 lead Sunday through Thursday and MaryBeth

 21 broadcasting Fridays and Saturdays. We also hired

 22 and have been training Hope Boos, a new

 23 intermittent broadcaster and excellent reader.

 24 And in engineering we have placed just

 25 over 1,000 audio books on BARD. The Braille and

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 1 Talking Book Library has placed over 300 more

 2 Minnesota-related books there.

 3 We are close to releasing new versions

 4 of our IOS and Android apps. We have discovered a

 5 few glitches through testing so need to fix them

 6 prior to release and with software.

 7 And ending my report are some staff

 8 updates. So since we are at the end of the year I

 9 thought it fitting to include all of the staff that

 10 we have brought on since January 1. We have

 11 welcomed 19 new staff, bringing our entire staffing

 12 level to 150 people, give or take one or two. At

 13 least nine of those positions were not backfills at

 14 all, but instead newly added positions made

 15 possible by a healthy budget and an increase in our

 16 appropriation.

 17 So the complete list is as follows:

 18 We welcomed Alexis Robinson as our brand new job

 19 coach. We welcomed Ray McCoy as our project

 20 coordinator for the Employment Reasonable

 21 Accommodation Fund, brand new. We welcomed Beth

 22 Hatfield as a new driver; Brandon Herring as a

 23 broadcaster at Radio Talking Book. Brynn Lee

 24 returned to us, she formerly worked for us in the

 25 past, she is an assistive technology trainer at

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 1 Senior Services Unit.

 2 We welcomed Cheryl Lavrenz, a VR Tech

 3 in the Workforce Development Unit; Darcy Koecher,

 4 who is our new account technician for the Employer

 5 Reasonable Accommodation Fund, brand new; Debra

 6 Jensen-Hobson is a VR tech in the Workforce

 7 Development Unit; Evan Gardner, a brand new

 8 position as a low vision assistive tech trainer;

 9 Jennifer Fischer is a new VR tech; Jennifer

 10 Pelletier is our brand new orientation and mobility

 11 instructor; Jessica Kopp is our brand new senior

 12 services counselor.

 13 We welcome Lisa Rodgers who is our new

 14 outreach coordinator; Melanie Dailey is another new

 15 senior services counselor. Michelle Gip is one of

 16 our brand new orientation and mobility instructors;

 17 Patrick Lang is our new mailroom coordinator. We

 18 hired Steven Bakke and Tom Conry as broadcasters

 19 with Radio Talking Book and we welcomed Woinitu

 20 Estifanos as our assistant to fiscal coordinator.

 21 Some of these positions were because a

 22 few staff took promotional opportunities with SSB.

 23 We had Brent Benson and Jeremy Hoke, Brent

 24 transitioned from VR tech to job coach and Jeremy

 25 Hoke transitioned from mailroom to be a VR tech.

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 1 And of course most recently Susan has left her

 2 position as the program administrator and is now an

 3 assistant contact specialist. We will eventually

 4 be filling her position, as I had mentioned.

 5 And we also have a few more positions

 6 coming down the pike that have not yet ben posted,

 7 but they are floating in the HR pool. We are

 8 hiring a second data analyst. We also created a

 9 very unique position called the multiple systems

 10 and pathways navigator. This is a pre-employment

 11 transition services position to help students with

 12 the most significant of disabilities navigate

 13 county services and all of those other complex

 14 systems that it takes a multitude of people how to

 15 figures out how to navigate. So this person would

 16 be dedicated just for that.

 17 We are also looking at a part-time

 18 account tech to support Kara in the Business

 19 Enterprise Program and we are looking at creating a

 20 lead VR tech role to help train our other VR techs.

 21 So that concludes my Director's report

 22 for this council meeting. Any other questions?

 23 (No response.)

 24 MR. O'DAY: This is Michael, I have a

 25 question.

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 1 MR. O'CONNOR: Michael.

 2 MR. O'DAY: I wanted to know, I

 3 remember last time when you reported, I guess in

 4 October, you had mentioned that the Reasonable

 5 Accommodation Fund position or that program had

 6 just kind of gotten off the ground and that I think

 7 one person had requested funding through the

 8 Reasonable Accommodation Program. I was wondering

 9 has that kind of gotten more off the ground yet,

 10 are there more people requesting funding through

 11 the Accommodation Program. Could you talk a little

 12 bit about that?

 13 MS. JERDE: Of course. So this is

 14 Tasha. So we have processed one so far. We have

 15 had over 100 contacts from employers learning more

 16 about the program. There's a -- we have had a few,

 17 I think we have had about seven applications that

 18 are in the process of being refunded, but I don't

 19 think they have officially gone through yet. We've

 20 had a few that were kind of scams, they were just

 21 trying to get money through the program and we have

 22 a bunch that are coming down the pike. We've had

 23 some really unique requests from employers all

 24 throughout the state and Ray probably attends one

 25 to three business-related events a day.

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 1 We were actually just at the U of M on

 2 Wednesday for it's called the U Rock Conference,

 3 but it's for small businesses kind of in the North

 4 Loup of Minneapolis and there was over 100 people

 5 there so we were able to share about the program at

 6 that venue. So it's picking up speed, we are

 7 hoping next quarter we are going to have dozens of

 8 applications.

 9 MR. O'DAY: That's great, yeah. Thank

 10 you so much.

 11 MS. JERDE: You are welcome.

 12 MR. O'CONNOR: Other questions for

 13 Natasha?

 14 MR. HART: Rocky Hart.

 15 MR. O'CONNOR: Go ahead, Rocky.

 16 MR. HART: Yeah, just to clarify. I

 17 heard that the outreach coordinator position is

 18 currently available, is that correct, or is that

 19 currently held by Lisa Larges?

 20 MS. JERDE: This is Tasha. So Lisa

 21 Rodgers who is currently here today filled that

 22 position, so we now have team Lisa.

 23 MR. HART: Okay.

 24 MR. O'CONNOR: Other questions or

 25 comments on Natasha's report?

 70

 1 (No response.)

 2 MR. O'CONNOR: One question that I

 3 have for you, Natasha, is about the South Dakota

 4 training program. Curious what types of needs from

 5 that geographic area did you have that weren't able

 6 to be served with other programs in the state?

 7 MS. JERDE: This is Natasha. Jennifer

 8 might have some more detailed information on that,

 9 but I do know there was one individual who lived on

 10 the border who specifically -- that is where they

 11 were able to attend transportation wise, but

 12 Jennifer I will turn it to you for some more

 13 specifics.

 14 MS. BEILKE: Sure, this is Jennifer.

 15 As Natasha was saying, we are looking at a

 16 situation where -- well, let's speak

 17 hypothetically. So we have a customer who lives

 18 geographically closer to that area due to multiple

 19 issues, multiple disabilities, needs to be close to

 20 home or, you know, needs to have either services in

 21 their own home so they would need providers to come

 22 to them. And they need basically the equivalent of

 23 a full-time comprehensive program which means they,

 24 you know, need training in all of the areas.

 25 And, you know, we are looking six to

 71

 1 nine months, you know, a commitment of, you know,

 2 at least, you know, in each area, Braille, rehab

 3 teaching, O & M, you know, in all the areas in

 4 their own home and, you know, like two hours a day

 5 in each subject or the equivalent of like an

 6 eight-hour day, five days a week.

 7 And, you know, I mean really with our

 8 itinerant providers I don't know of one itinerant

 9 provider that can provide all of those areas of

 10 training or who could really make that commitment,

 11 you know, that type of commitment. But we have to

 12 find out if that is a possibility before we could

 13 potentially use a provider like, you know, seek to

 14 do a certain type of contract with South Dakota.

 15 So there is a process we have to

 16 follow to see really if it is feasible, if there

 17 is, you know, if there is a possibility that there

 18 is providers in Minnesota that can meet the needs

 19 of a customer who has some pretty specific needs.

 20 So does that --

 21 MR. O'CONNOR: It does, thank you very

 22 much.

 23 MS. BEILKE: Sure.

 24 Kim is your hand up? No, that's my

 25 own mouse, excuse me, sorry. I will turn it back

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 1 to over to Natasha or Corbb.

 2 MR. O'CONNOR: Thank you.

 3 Are there other questions or comments

 4 for Natasha's report?

 5 (No response.)

 6 MR. O'CONNOR: Natasha, I will applaud

 7 your ability to stay centered in frame on script

 8 while the dog is looks like wandering every single

 9 room in your house during that report.

 10 MS. JERDE: Yes, I have a dog who

 11 always uses the best time to want to go outside and

 12 then scratches the door furiously.

 13 MR. O'CONNOR: I am impressed.

 14 Hearing no other discussion we will move on and

 15 that's for us to take a ten-minute break. How do

 16 you all feel, is there any objection to making that

 17 a five-minute break this evening?

 18 (No response.)

 19 MR. O'CONNOR: Hearing nobody

 20 objecting to a five-minute break, let's all come

 21 back at 7:21.

 22 And Jan, I saw your message in the

 23 chat.

 24 MS. BAILEY: Somebody will help Judy?

 25 MR. O'CONNOR: We are working on it.

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 1 (Break taken from 7:15 to 7:22 p.m.)

 2 MR. O'CONNOR: Welcome back everybody.

 3 Kim, are you ready to work your magic again?

 4 COURT REPORTER: Yes, I am. Thank

 5 you.

 6 MR. O'CONNOR: Thank you, I should

 7 have checked at the beginning and I didn't so thank

 8 you for being on time.

 9 The next item on our agenda is a

 10 report from those who attended the fall CSAVR and

 11 NCSAB conferences. Ryan Strunk, I know you were

 12 one of those, at least one of those attendees.

 13 Would you like to share a few words and then we

 14 will go to anyone else that attended.

 15 MR. STRUNK: I absolutely would. So

 16 the first thing that I want to throw out there is a

 17 genuine appreciation to everybody from SSB. You

 18 know, this was my first time being at the

 19 conference and so just a tremendous community of

 20 people, going out to dinners, exploring Savannah

 21 and we saw a murder museum that was kind of

 22 terrifying, but also helping me to understand the

 23 ropes of the conference and just being a great

 24 support system. So I genuinely appreciate that.

 25 As far as the conference goes there

 74

 1 are a couple of things that I want to make mention

 2 of. The first of these is that I know in the

 3 Federation we have spent quite a bit of time

 4 working on sort of upward mobility and figuring out

 5 once you get into the workforce how do you take

 6 those next steps upward on the career ladder.

 7 There is a group of people at Drake

 8 University who are specifically looking into this

 9 in an academic fashion and drawing some

 10 correlations backed up by quite a lot of data that

 11 say, for example, the higher up the corporate

 12 ladder you get the fewer people identify you as

 13 having a disability.

 14 And there is an interesting thing that

 15 they are still digging into which is a question of

 16 is disability something that people are more likely

 17 to hide at the top of the corporate ladder or is it

 18 something -- or the career ladder in general or is

 19 it that particularly in larger organizations the

 20 thing that makes it so that you can advance is

 21 grinding in a way that can be particularly

 22 difficult for people with certain types of

 23 disabilities. So, for example, if you want to make

 24 it in a giant corporate firm and the requirement to

 25 making it in a big law firm like that is to work 70

 75

 1 hours a week, but you have a condition that causes

 2 chronic fatigue, for example, or something like MS

 3 that makes it very hard for you to work 70 hours a

 4 week, do you then get passed up for promotions and

 5 other opportunities? So they are continuing to do

 6 that work and I think it's going to be work that

 7 will be good for us to follow up on.

 8 I also heard some great presentations

 9 about the work that folks are doing in transition

 10 spaces and some really great advice just on making

 11 sure that we stay current and that we stay good

 12 listeners and we recognize that as we get older and

 13 work with youth, the things that we used to find

 14 cool or even the ways that we engage with the world

 15 are going to be far different than other people do.

 16 And one of the best ways to keep transition-age

 17 students involved is to meet them where they are

 18 and then provide guidance. It seems like a no

 19 brainer, but it was a really cool presentation

 20 nonetheless.

 21 The other thing that I want to say is

 22 that I had the opportunity to attend the conference

 23 that was the gathering of councils for State

 24 Rehabilitation Agencies. This is the -- you may

 25 remember the folks that came a few months ago and

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 1 spoke with our organization, that spoke with our

 2 Council here.

 3 One of the things that I was

 4 particularly struck by with regard to the NCSRC

 5 is -- well, I am going to say there are two things

 6 that I was struck by. The first of these is that,

 7 as was pointed out several months ago, their

 8 website is not great in terms of accessibility and

 9 there was some mention made of the fact that

 10 perhaps we ought to wait until they have actually

 11 done what needs to be done before giving tacit

 12 approval of what they've done by joining the

 13 organization.

 14 And I think one of the things that I

 15 was particularly struck by with regard to that at

 16 this convention or this meeting is that -- they did

 17 a whole presentation on the website and it was very

 18 obvious that their website was the way it was not

 19 because of any willful ignorance, but because of

 20 just some genuine lack of understanding not only

 21 about accessibility but about web design in

 22 general. As an example of this, they were demoing

 23 the website and somebody from the audience asked

 24 about a map they had on their website that showed

 25 the states with councils, the states with councils

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 1 that have joined, the states with councils that

 2 have not joined, the states with more than one

 3 council and the entire map was nothing but color

 4 codes. And there are so many things that are wrong

 5 with that, right, you cannot use color alone,

 6 that's an accessibility violation. The map itself

 7 was not accessible to a screen reader and that's an

 8 accessibility violation. And yet when the

 9 individual said well, what do all the colors mean

 10 on this map? And the facilitators went you know, I

 11 actually don't know, I think green are the ones

 12 where one or both organizations joined and blue are

 13 the ones where they don't have any and somebody

 14 said what about yellow? Oh, we have yellow on the

 15 map? I guess I forgot we had yellow on the map,

 16 I'm not sure what that means.

 17 So there are definitely places that we

 18 encounter in the world where things are

 19 inaccessible because they opt actively not to do

 20 them. It strikes me that this is an organization

 21 that is not doing the things because they genuinely

 22 don't know how.

 23 But the other thing, and the reason I

 24 bring that up, is because I think it's also worth

 25 noting that this is an organization that continues

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 1 to become more and more active in the advocacy and

 2 legal spaces. They are giving advice to their

 3 individual councils not only on how to educate and

 4 advocate, and they specifically draw the

 5 distinction between lobbying and education. And so

 6 they are giving direction on how to do that. They

 7 are also giving direction on specific things that

 8 need to be -- or pieces of legislation at the

 9 various councils to advocate for.

 10 And, in fact, they are tying that

 11 altogether at the conference in March by having a

 12 day where they take all of the attendees to the

 13 Capitol. They do a big seminar on how to advocate

 14 first, and then they take all the attendees to the

 15 Capitol and they actually have them meet with their

 16 Representatives and Congress people or their, I'm

 17 sorry, their Representatives and their Senators.

 18 It strikes me that this is a thing

 19 where if major legislative policy is being

 20 advocated for by a certain group, that is a thing

 21 that I definitely want to make sure that we are at

 22 the very least aware of. Because it's obvious that

 23 it is a growing organization and it is an

 24 organization that is using its size and its scope

 25 to do things and to change policy.

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 1 Those are probably the biggest things

 2 that I have, but I genuinely appreciate the Council

 3 for giving me the opportunity to participate. It

 4 was a tremendous experience. After eight days I

 5 was very glad to be home, only to turn around and

 6 go to another two days of convention, but I am well

 7 recovered now and have a lot of notes to draw from

 8 and it was a great experience. So thank you.

 9 MR. O'CONNOR: Thank you, Ryan.

 10 Ryan, were you the only one from the

 11 Council who made it this year or were there others?

 12 MR. STRUNK: I was, yes.

 13 MR. O'CONNOR: Okay, thank you.

 14 Any questions or feedback to or about

 15 Ryan's presentation?

 16 MR. STRUNK: I didn't know I was going

 17 to get feedback on my presentation, I would have

 18 stretched myself a little bit further and used my

 19 gestures.

 20 (No response.)

 21 MR. O'CONNOR: You know what I mean.

 22 All right. Well, thank you very much,

 23 Ryan, I appreciate you going. I appreciate the

 24 heads up that you have for us, particularly around

 25 the NCSRC's work, the legislative advocacy work,

 80

 1 and around your understanding and your experience

 2 with their lack of understanding or lack of

 3 awareness about accessibility.

 4 Certainly I know we've had a

 5 discussion at this Council about joining that

 6 organization and being part of it and while we are

 7 not taking that up this evening I would encourage

 8 if anybody has opinions about it, maybe we need to

 9 have that discussion anew in light of what Ryan has

 10 shared. Please reach out to me in the next few

 11 weeks as we start to plan our February meeting

 12 agenda.

 13 MS. BEILKE: Corbb.

 14 MR. O'CONNOR: Who's that?

 15 MS. BEILKE: This is Jennifer. Rocky

 16 has his hand up.

 17 MR. HART: Thank you very much. I

 18 just would echo what you were saying and thank you

 19 very much, Ryan, for your presentation on the NCSRC

 20 because I remember this discussion came up and I,

 21 in particular, had some concerns around the

 22 accessibility issues. What I will say is if there

 23 is a way, even if we don't join the Council, if

 24 there is a way that we can maybe work with them to

 25 try to influence their work, the work that they do,

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 1 I think it would be a great benefit to us.

 2 Also, as you said, making sure that we

 3 are aware of any legislative initiatives that they

 4 might take up. My position on the issue of should

 5 we join has not changed, but I appreciate your

 6 presentation and as well as your presentation on

 7 the NCSAB.

 8 MR. STRUNK: Always easier to make

 9 change from inside the house.

 10 MR. HART: Absolutely, thank you.

 11 MS. BEILKE: Corbb, if you are talking

 12 you are on mute.

 13 MR. O'CONNOR: You know, normally I

 14 get an alert that I am being a fool, but I did not.

 15 MS. BEILKE: You are talking to

 16 yourself is what I mean.

 17 MR. O'CONNOR: That's right, thank you

 18 very much.

 19 Okay. So Rocky, I was saying thank

 20 you for that and I was saying that the next item on

 21 our agenda is the report from our Annual Work Plan

 22 Task Force. Ryan Haenze is the chairperson of that

 23 task force and I don't believe that Ryan has made

 24 it in. I wonder if there is somebody else who

 25 served on that task force that would like to speak

 82

 1 to the changes and the document that was sent out

 2 for our review and approval?

 3 MR. STRUNK: This is Ryan Strunk.

 4 DR. CORRIE: Yes, Ryan.

 5 MR. STRUNK: I would just say I

 6 appreciate, first of all, props to Jennifer Beilke

 7 who jumped in and did some last minute transcript

 8 and editing work while we were in the midst of

 9 things.

 10 Primarily the changes are cosmetic in

 11 nature. Every year we want to make sure that we

 12 provide the latest sort of years and updates in

 13 that regard. So when we say this is a three-year

 14 process and this is year one, well now it says this

 15 is a three-year process and this is year two.

 16 The other thing we did is moved a

 17 couple of things around in the beginning of the

 18 year just to make sure that action items are timely

 19 in nature. But I think, you know, that no one will

 20 find drastic changes or really anything that

 21 impacts the day-to-day, just making sure that

 22 everything is modern and up to date.

 23 MR. STRUNK: Once again, Corbb, you

 24 may be talking to yourself.

 25 MR. O'CONNOR: No, I was waiting to

 83

 1 see if there was further discussion or anyone

 2 wanted to jump in with comments on that.

 3 (No response.)

 4 MR. O'CONNOR: Hearing none -- oh, I

 5 heard someone.

 6 MR. HART: Yeah, this is Rocky. I

 7 just wanted to echo, to me everything we showed I

 8 think was pragmatic in nature, although I think

 9 Judy, who was also on the task force, had some

 10 proposals for change, I'm not sure if you want to

 11 address those at all, Judy?

 12 MS. SANDERS: Hi. I don't remember

 13 what they were, sorry. I wasn't expecting to -- I

 14 think it's okay, I don't think there was

 15 anything -- do you remember what you are referring

 16 to?

 17 MR. HART: I actually don't. I just

 18 remember that you had -- there was something I

 19 think it had to do with the meeting times or just

 20 the review of the budget or something like that

 21 that was being moved around. Most of it, as Ryan

 22 shared, was pragmatic.

 23 MS. SANDERS: Yeah, if there was you

 24 are right, it was logistic and not substantive, so

 25 we would have just fixed it if it was a date or

 84

 1 something like that. I'm sorry, I don't remember,

 2 it didn't stick with me.

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

 4 MS. SANDERS: I think it's okay.

 5 MR. O'CONNOR: Yeah, thanks, Judy.

 6 Thanks, Rocky.

 7 MR. HART: The one that's sort of more

 8 substantive but maybe less consequential change was

 9 we generally find that our May meeting is quieter

 10 with business and so we added a note in May for the

 11 chair to work with SSB to identify guest speaker or

 12 professional development task force for

 13 presentation for the June meeting. We sometimes

 14 have had recipients of VR come in and tell us about

 15 their experiences and things that we should know.

 16 And then the only other change I saw was about

 17 switching the review of the new member orientation

 18 materials to be an every other year project.

 19 MR. O'CONNOR: Any further discussion

 20 or perhaps a motion to approve our work plan?

 21 MS. SANDERS: This is Judy, I will

 22 move to approve the work plan.

 23 MR. O'CONNOR: Thank you, Judy. Is

 24 there a second?

 25 MR. HEINL: Tom Heinl, I will second.

 85

 1 MR. O'CONNOR: Tom Heinl seconds,

 2 thank you very much. I will pause one more time

 3 for any discussion, otherwise I will very slowly

 4 suggest we move to a vote.

 5 (No response.)

 6 Hearing none, Frank Eller.

 7 MR. ELLER: Frank Eller, yes.

 8 MS. FLAX: Samantha Flax, yes.

 9 MR. HEINL: Tom Heinl, yes.

 10 MR. O'CONNOR: Rob Hobson.

 11 MR. HOBSON: Rob Hobson, pass.

 12 MS. MARTINEZ: Catalina, yes.

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

 14 MR. O'CONNOR: Judy Sanders.

 15 MS. SANDERS: I am waiting for

 16 Jennifer.

 17 MR. O'CONNOR: Jennifer voted yes in

 18 the chat, sorry.

 19 Judy votes yes as well.

 20 MR. STRUNK: And Ryan Strunk votes

 21 yes.

 22 MR. O'CONNOR: And Corbb O'Connor

 23 votes yes. Excellent. Thank you very much

 24 everyone and thank you to the committee who put

 25 that work plan together.

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 1 I will say again, the chair, whoever

 2 the chair is, benefits greatly from having a

 3 prioritized list of what should happen each month

 4 to keep us on track.

 5 Our last point on the agenda before we

 6 move to public comment would be a report from our

 7 various committees. Do we have a representative

 8 from the State Rehab Council to give a report this

 9 evening?

 10 (No response.)

 11 MR. O'CONNOR: Then we will go to Judy

 12 and the State Independent Living Council.

 13 MS. SANDERS: Okay. We have been

 14 working hard to revise our policies, policy manual

 15 actually, and we are about to finish it up and then

 16 start reviewing it in January, I believe. I don't

 17 think we are going to do it in December, well, we

 18 might. And so that's the main thing that we have

 19 been working on.

 20 We are also recruiting, we are trying.

 21 And thanks to Rocky Hart who demonstrated an

 22 interest, they are starting to urge people who

 23 might want to volunteer for committees to then get

 24 to know the Council better and decide if they want

 25 to be a part of it. So those are the main things

 87

 1 that they are working on.

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

 3 I am going to assume that if people

 4 have comments you will jump in after the committees

 5 present and we will save a few seconds.

 6 Communication Center, Steve.

 7 MR. JACOBSON: The Communication

 8 Center Committee, we had a meeting on November 29

 9 so you don't have the minutes yet in your packet so

 10 I will just briefly say it was our first meeting of

 11 the year and we had several new members so we got a

 12 nice overview of what each section of the

 13 Communication Center does and had some pretty good

 14 discussion on topics we want to undertake, with

 15 input both from the committee and from staff

 16 members as to what would be helpful.

 17 We are planning to have our next

 18 Communication Center Advisory Committee on

 19 January 17, Wednesday at 2:00 p.m. and we plan to

 20 take a look at what's coming out on the new Radio

 21 Talking Book apps and what suggestions there might

 22 be for enhancements to those apps.

 23 As most of you know, the Radio Talking

 24 Book no longer involves a radio, it's on apps and

 25 smart speakers, so the whole issue of what we want

 88

 1 in apps has become very important for that program.

 2 So that's it for now unless there is any questions.

 3 MR. O'CONNOR: Thank you, Steve. The

 4 next committee -- did I hear someone seeking the

 5 floor?

 6 (No response.)

 7 MR. O'CONNOR: No, okay. The next

 8 committee was the committee formerly known as

 9 Vendor Outcomes and Measures and is now the Partner

 10 Outcomes and Measures in line with our naming of

 11 those organizations. Judy.

 12 MS. SANDERS: Hello. Yes, I noticed

 13 that on the list we are still -- that's in the work

 14 plan it still calls us the Vendors, Outcomes

 15 Committee and I didn't even think about that when

 16 we were talking about it.

 17 And so I wonder if somebody wants to

 18 mute if they are talking to their dog or something,

 19 maybe people want to mute, okay.

 20 So anyway, this committee, whatever we

 21 are calling ourselves, this Community Partners

 22 Outlook, we've met and we have a recommendation to

 23 make and I am going to read it to you. The problem

 24 that we are trying to solve is how we can get a

 25 higher percentage of people to participate on the

 89

 1 survey that is given to everyone who leaves a

 2 program, a vendor program that we were a part of.

 3 And so we came up with some suggestions and I am

 4 going to read that and then see if anybody has any

 5 questions. And if anybody who is on the committee

 6 with me wants to add something else, please feel

 7 free to do that.

 8 So we started with an introduction.

 9 The Community Partners Measures and Outcomes

 10 Committee of the State rehabilitation Council for

 11 the Blind has enacted a comprehensive review of the

 12 current survey responses -- response rates among

 13 State Services for the Blind customers. Our goal

 14 was to address the issues of the response rates and

 15 provide recommendations to enhance the

 16 effectiveness of post training surveys.

 17 The committee gathered detailed

 18 information from the SSB director and key staff

 19 familiar with survey delivery methods. We

 20 appreciate the cooperation and insight provided

 21 throughout this process.

 22 Recommendations: Data -- the first

 23 one is on data collection enhancement. So here is

 24 the recommendation for it. Update Workforce One,

 25 that's the system where they do the record keeping

 90

 1 for everything in the Workforce Development Unit,

 2 so update the Workforce One to include preferred

 3 language and reading medium information during the

 4 intakes.

 5 Here is the rationale. What this is

 6 saying is we want each client whose involved in

 7 this possible survey or any survey, we want to know

 8 how do they want to read their survey so that we

 9 are not sending out a survey that's not accessible

 10 to them.

 11 Okay, so here is the rationale. Lack

 12 of language and reading medium preferences in

 13 current intake processes hinders effective

 14 communication and survey delivery. We commend SSB

 15 for taking this action on this recommendation as

 16 the next step. So what we are saying is that SSB

 17 is making a real effort to establish what

 18 everybody's reading preference is.

 19 As the next step it is crucial to

 20 update existing customer records to include this

 21 information, ensuring comprehensive coverage beyond

 22 new intakes and promoting better accessibility and

 23 inclusivity in survey administration.

 24 Survey delivery method is the next

 25 one, here is the recommendation. Return to

 91

 1 delivering surveys via phone, alongside electronic

 2 survey methods as historic data indicates higher

 3 response rates when this method was employed. The

 4 rationale: While budgetary constraints led to the

 5 cessation of phone surveys, current circumstances

 6 allow for reconsideration. We recommend SSB

 7 consider a contract with a service provider for

 8 phone surveys, acknowledging that all customers may

 9 possess the skills or resources to complete

 10 electronic surveys.

 11 Survey timing and automation is the

 12 next one. Consult with a professional consultant

 13 to improve current survey delivery processes. The

 14 rationale: The current manual batch system results

 15 in inconsistent survey timing ranging from a week

 16 to three months after training completion. Seeking

 17 external expertise to automate the process would

 18 ensure surveys are consistently sent two weeks

 19 post-training allowing for more reliable and timely

 20 data. Conclusion: The SRCB's community partners

 21 Measures and Outcomes Committee believes that

 22 implementing these recommendations will

 23 significantly enhance the survey response rates

 24 among SSB customers by leveraging phone surveys,

 25 automating survey, delivery process and updating

 92

 1 data collection methods SSB can gather more

 2 statistically significant and meaningful data,

 3 ultimately improving the evaluation and training of

 4 training outcomes.

 5 We appreciate the opportunity to --

 6 well, what we are trying to do is to contribute to

 7 the enhancement of the SSB survey processes and be

 8 available for further collaboration and support

 9 during the implementation of these recommendations.

 10 So what we want to do is ask the

 11 Council if the Council thinks these recommendations

 12 should be passed onto SSB we would like a vote to

 13 do that tonight if we could get it. The committee

 14 has made the suggestions, but we can't carry it

 15 further to SSB if the Council doesn't approve it.

 16 If anybody has any questions?

 17 MR. O'CONNOR: Would someone make a

 18 motion that we adopt those recommendations as a

 19 council?

 20 MS. SANDERS: Yes, I am.

 21 MR. O'CONNOR: Judy has moved that we

 22 make a --

 23 MR. HOBSON: Rob Hobson, second.

 24 MR. O'CONNOR: With a second from Rob

 25 Hobson. Is there discussion?

 93

 1 (No response.)

 2 MR. O'CONNOR: Hearing no discussion,

 3 we can certainly vote on those recommendations.

 4 Frank Eller.

 5 MR. ELLER: Frank Eller, yes.

 6 MR. O'CONNOR: Frank Eller votes yes.

 7 Samantha.

 8 MS. FLAX: Yes.

 9 MR. O'CONNOR: Votes yes.

 10 Tom Heinl.

 11 MR. HEINL: Yes.

 12 MR. O'CONNOR: Tom Heinl votes yes.

 13 Rob Hobson.

 14 MR. HOBSON: Rob Hobson, pass.

 15 MR. O'CONNOR: Catalina.

 16 MS. MARTINEZ: Yes.

 17 MR. O'CONNOR: Catalina votes yes.

 18 MR. O'DAY: Michael O'Day votes yes.

 19 MR. O'CONNOR: Jennifer Points.

 20 MS. SANDERS: Judy Sanders, yes.

 21 MR. O'CONNOR: There is Jennifer

 22 Points voting yes.

 23 Judy Sanders voted yes. Ryan Strunk

 24 votes yes. And Corbb O'Connor votes yes. They are

 25 adopted. Thank you Community Partner Outcomes &

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 1 Measures Committee.

 2 MS. SANDERS: Thank you everybody.

 3 THE COURT: Jennifer, next up is the

 4 Customer Satisfaction Goals and Priorities.

 5 MS. DUNNAM: Nothing further, sir,

 6 you've heard plenty enough from me. More than

 7 enough. Thank you.

 8 MR. O'CONNOR: Thank you very much.

 9 The DeafBlind Committee, our chair is

 10 not here, is there someone on the committee that

 11 wishes to make a report beyond the report that was

 12 already submitted?

 13 MR. HART: Rocky Hart.

 14 MR. O'CONNOR: Yes, Rocky.

 15 MR. HART: Thank you very much. The

 16 last DeafBlind Committee meeting was held on

 17 October 10, we'll have our next one coming up

 18 January 9 and the main priorities that we are

 19 focusing on right now, there is a couple of things.

 20 First of all, and Susan can probably

 21 speak to this as well, we have a couple of websites

 22 that we were taking a look at, DeafBlind-related

 23 websites, and had some information available. And

 24 we as committee members were asked to review those

 25 to ensure that the language matched the preferences

 95

 1 of DeafBlind people. We also had a discussion

 2 about just the overall how do we reach out to

 3 DeafBlind people? How do we ensure that they are

 4 better able to receive services and how do we

 5 ensure that counselors are able to provide the best

 6 quality of services to DeafBlind consumers?

 7 Because there are and some reports

 8 have been received about how services could be

 9 better performed for DeafBlind, some of that

 10 includes better training, some of it also is going

 11 to necessarily include caseload adjustments so that

 12 counselors can focus more on DeafBlind clients.

 13 And so those are the main priorities

 14 that we had been focused on and anticipate we will

 15 be focusing on. We are also looking for possibly

 16 new committee members and others that might be

 17 interested in joining.

 18 So that is my report, at least the

 19 report, the abbreviated report. So I don't know if

 20 anyone else is here from the committee that wants

 21 to speak to anything. Thank you.

 22 MR. O'CONNOR: Thank you, Rocky, thank

 23 you very much. I will say that certainly our

 24 committee meetings remain open to the public. Our

 25 committee appointments are not made until next

 96

 1 August, that will be the Chair's responsibility

 2 with Council agreement.

 3 Our next committee is Employment.

 4 MS. FLAX: So the Employment --

 5 MR. O'CONNOR: Samantha, go ahead.

 6 MS. FLAX: So the Employment Committee

 7 has met once, we met on November 21. Because a lot

 8 of us were new we spent a lot of the time

 9 brainstorming what challenges we saw for employment

 10 and started to make a list. We talked a lot about

 11 the importance in diversifying what jobs are

 12 available, getting people experience. And at our

 13 next meeting, because a lot of people couldn't make

 14 that, it was rescheduled and I will be sending that

 15 out, we will be talking about what our scope is for

 16 the next few months and how we are going to achieve

 17 those goals of getting people more career

 18 experiences and training.

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

 20 Our next committee is the Diversity,

 21 Equity and Inclusion chaired by Briley O'Connor.

 22 Is there a report?

 23 MS. O'CONNOR: Hello. Yes, can you

 24 hear me?

 25 MR. O'CONNOR: Yes.

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 1 MS. O'CONNOR: Oh, okay. So no report

 2 beyond what was in your reports. Thank you so much

 3 for the people who helped get that together. I

 4 really appreciate that. The committee meeting will

 5 be scheduled for January and that will be sent out.

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

 7 The Statewide Comprehensive Needs

 8 Assessment is a task force chaired by Samantha

 9 Flax.

 10 MS. FLAX: Hello again, I'm back. So

 11 over the past few months we've been working on

 12 gathering data, gathering information for the

 13 report. We all looked at a draft and some of us

 14 helped compile some research that has been sent to

 15 Jennifer, so Jennifer I believe you've been the one

 16 working on it most recently so maybe you can give a

 17 most recent update for us, if you don't mind.

 18 MS. BEILKE: Yes, this is Jennifer. I

 19 can give an update and summary of the Needs

 20 Assessment. The last draft or summary that the

 21 committee looked at was mostly the, I'm trying to

 22 remember what I shared, I believe it was my first

 23 draft and my first kind of brainstorm of just the

 24 first couple sections. The section on Youth and

 25 Pre-ETS Services was being worked on primarily by

 98

 1 our staff, Sheila Koenig and Shane Desantis were

 2 really working on that section kind of

 3 independently, but I've done a lot of work on this,

 4 unfortunately there hasn't been time to send it

 5 back out to the committee.

 6 I am going to do a really brief

 7 summary of what is currently -- what our Needs

 8 Assessment is looking like, what's in there. I

 9 will tell everyone that the first draft of the

 10 entire Combined State Plan is due to the State

 11 tomorrow and so we will be uploading or, you know,

 12 sending that off to the State tomorrow.

 13 There is still plenty of time for us

 14 to work on it to make changes. It goes to the

 15 State for the first kind of -- all the sections are

 16 going to be sending in their first drafts and then

 17 the State is going to be kind of putting it

 18 together into like a nice format that's consistent

 19 and then it goes out to the public for that 30 day

 20 public comment period which will be January 15 to

 21 February 15. And we then are able to make any

 22 changes, you know, after that, before it ultimately

 23 gets uploaded and it has to be finalized. So we

 24 still have the February council meeting where we

 25 can approve our final version.

 99

 1 So real quick summary of our Needs

 2 Assessment. We have the first, number one, is VR

 3 needs, VR services needs of individuals with

 4 disabilities residing within the state including

 5 it's most significant disabilities, including the

 6 need for supported employment. This is a pretty

 7 brief section for us because as we talked about and

 8 heard Natasha talk about, we are declining

 9 supported employment funds from the feds.

 10 We served supported employment

 11 students and adults, we just don't draw down those

 12 supported employment funds. We use our regular

 13 dollars because we have plenty of regular dollars.

 14 It's difficult to actually use those supported

 15 employment funds, but I have just reported on the

 16 number of supported employment plans, the number of

 17 customers we have, so that's a brief section.

 18 The section on minorities and

 19 unserved/underserved. I have referenced the

 20 Department of Admin, Minnesota State Demographic

 21 Center which released the economic status of

 22 Minnesotans 2023 a chart book with data for

 23 Minnesota's largest cultural groups. It was a big

 24 report done in March of 2023, conveniently for us

 25 there is a lot of good information in there so we

 100

 1 referenced some information about the makeup of our

 2 population, the cultural groups, the top five. I

 3 put in there top five languages spoken in Minnesota

 4 other than English, I put in the prevalent rates

 5 with blindness, the breakdown by age.

 6 And then I referenced -- I learned

 7 that there had been Minnesota joint disparity

 8 studies and there's been a couple done 1999, 2009

 9 and 2017, and so we referenced that, talked about

 10 that. We put in the 2023 customer satisfaction

 11 survey demographic profile, so we referenced that

 12 information.

 13 And then we referenced -- we had our

 14 data analyst consultant did a, see if I can

 15 describe this accurately, he did an analysis for

 16 us, a series of T tests to determine the difference

 17 between groups statistically significant. And so

 18 he looked at some specific groups and did find

 19 there was some significance, so we talked about

 20 that.

 21 And then there's a section on new

 22 Americans -- really brief just a section on

 23 veterans. I pulled the number, we are currently

 24 serving only ten individuals that are identified as

 25 veterans. It could be a little bit higher, we

 101

 1 can't be certain that number is 100 percent

 2 accurate. The information is only as good as what

 3 is inputted, but still it shows that is not a

 4 significant number and I believe that we are

 5 adequately meeting their needs so it's not an unmet

 6 need.

 7 We pulled the number, we are serving

 8 49 individuals with another 26 categorized as

 9 having a dual sensory loss. Then I also referenced

 10 the 2021 Minnesota Commission of the Deaf,

 11 DeafBlind and hard of hearing, and the DeafBlind

 12 Needs Assessment for youth. So I summarized that

 13 and some of the findings from that.

 14 And then we talked about some of the

 15 ways that we are trying to meet the needs, well, we

 16 know we have a gap in working with DeafBlind and so

 17 some of the new contracts and services that we are

 18 trying to build up in working with DeafBlind.

 19 Again we referenced the lack of services for --

 20 with adult basic ed where we know there is a huge

 21 gap or a huge need for English learning and Braille

 22 and that's pretty much where we ended up.

 23 So we will be going out, everyone will

 24 get a copy of this, I imagine we will get the

 25 committee back together if the committee wants to

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 1 meet and go through it and add anything we can do

 2 that before the next council meeting. I am

 3 certainly open to that as well, so.

 4 MR. O'CONNOR: Thank you Sam and

 5 Jennifer. If there is -- if the committee hasn't

 6 seen this that's going in in its draft form, will

 7 there be an opportunity before the public comment

 8 period if the committee wanted to make any changes?

 9 MS. BEILKE: We can make any changes,

 10 but I don't believe that we will be able to make

 11 the changes in the version that's going out for

 12 public comment. I think it would be after it's

 13 gone out for public comment that we could make

 14 those changes. I could ask, I could certainly find

 15 out.

 16 MR. O'CONNOR: I think it would be

 17 helpful, I would find it helpful to know, you know,

 18 I suspect that there would be, from what you

 19 described, that the amount of change might be

 20 minimal, but I do think for the folks serving on

 21 that committee, I just want to make sure they have

 22 insight if possible before that goes out for public

 23 comment if that's doable.

 24 MS. BEILKE: Yes, I will ask.

 25 MR. O'CONNOR: Alternatively we could

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 1 see if stretching our submission to later in the

 2 day may give the committee enough time, or I would

 3 hate to say miss the deadline, but, you know, if

 4 the penalties aren't too severe maybe an extra day

 5 wouldn't be a big deal. So I leave that to you and

 6 the committee's discretion.

 7 Sam.

 8 MS. FLAX: I was just going to say

 9 Jennifer, if you could just send that out to myself

 10 and the rest of the committee this evening or even

 11 the first thing tomorrow so we could look at it

 12 right away, whether or not anything can be delayed,

 13 at least then we have it and we can look at the

 14 version that exists now.

 15 MS. BEILKE: That's fine. I'm still

 16 editing it right now, I'm still working on it as we

 17 speak because Natasha had gone through and edited

 18 the whole plan and I'm following behind making

 19 corrections and things as well, but absolutely I

 20 will send it out to the committee.

 21 MS. FLAX: Thank you.

 22 MR. O'CONNOR: Thank you very much.

 23 Any questions on what has been presented for the

 24 Needs Assessment?

 25 (No response.)

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 1 MR. O'CONNOR: Hearing none, two

 2 committees left to go and the next one is Senior

 3 Services, Judy.

 4 MS. SANDERS: Hi, this will be quick.

 5 We are still trying to find a venue for the

 6 Possibilities Fair that the NFB is helping SSB,

 7 working together, to make this possible.

 8 And so the only thing I would ask and

 9 don't do it during this meeting, just let me know,

 10 if you have any ideas of venues that we could use

 11 other than hotels which are exorbitantly expensive

 12 these days, please let us know. That's it.

 13 MR. O'CONNOR: Thank you, Judy, and

 14 Senior Services Committee.

 15 The final committee is the Transition

 16 Committee, Samantha.

 17 MS. FLAX: I'm back.

 18 MR. O'CONNOR: Yeah, go ahead.

 19 MS. FLAX: So the Transmission

 20 Committees has, I believe, met twice since our last

 21 meeting. Our meetings are every second Monday of

 22 the month at 4:30 p.m. so if anyone has any

 23 interest in joining us, please let me know.

 24 We have been talking about a few

 25 different things, focusing on looking into getting

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 1 students who are in high school the skills and

 2 information they need whether they are going into

 3 college or the workforce.

 4 One of the previous things that we

 5 talked about a lot in this council is that students

 6 don't seem to be prepared. So we are working on

 7 things that we can do, setting up mentoring, career

 8 fairs and programs, having some programing for

 9 students.

 10 And at our last meeting one of the

 11 things we discussed is how we can help use the

 12 summer transition program, to use that time to

 13 improve Blindness skills as well so we are

 14 hopefully having more Blind instructors and things

 15 like that. So that's where the committee is right

 16 now. We have been working a lot with change based

 17 on what's going on and helping as things come up.

 18 So that's my report for now.

 19 MR. O'CONNOR: Thank you, Transmission

 20 Committee and Sam.

 21 We will move to public comment in just

 22 a minute here. I will remind you all that our next

 23 meeting is February the 8th, but I have an

 24 announcement. We had this little contest and I

 25 promised candy to the committee chairs who got

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 1 their reports in in time.

 2 Now Judy already told you she got

 3 first place, this surprises hopefully nobody.

 4 Wendy DeVore in second place with the Transition

 5 Committee report and Sam Flax for a whole multitude

 6 of reports, as I mentioned up at the top. So

 7 candyland coming your way soon.

 8 Is there any public comment?

 9 (No response.)

 10 MR. O'CONNOR: Hearing no public

 11 comment I would entertain a motion to adjourn.

 12 MR. HOBSON: Motion to adjourn.

 13 MR. ELLER: Frank Eller, second.

 14 MR. O'CONNOR: So we have a Rob Hobson

 15 and Frank Eller motion to adjourn. And we will

 16 start the voting with Frank Eller.

 17 MR. ELLER: Frank Eller, yes.

 18 MS. FLAX: Samantha Flax, yes.

 19 MR. HEINL: Tom Heinl, yes.

 20 MR. HOBSON: Rob Hobson, pass.

 21 MS. MARTINEZ: Catalina Martinez, yes

 22 and goodbye.

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

 24 MR. O'CONNOR: Jennifer Points votes

 25 yes.

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 1 MS. SANDERS: Judy Sanders, yes.

 2 MR. O'CONNOR: Yep, gotcha.

 3 Ryan Strunk.

 4 MR. STRUNK: There we go, Ryan Strunk

 5 yes.

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

 7 yes. We are adjourned. See you in February.

 8 Thanks everyone.

 9 (Matter adjourned at 8:13 p.m.)

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 1 STATE OF MINNESOTA)

 2 ) ss.

 3 COUNTY OF HENNEPIN)

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 6

 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 107 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: December 19, 2023

 16

 17 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

 KIMBERLY K. EVAVOLD

 18 Court Reporter

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