

## **MINUTES:**

**September 12, 2016**

**Members Present:** Donald Deignan – Chairperson GAC; Elizabeth Graves – GAC Member / SRC member; John Pimental – Vice President of NFB of RI / GAC Member; Barbara Walsh – GAC Member; Ralph Iannitelli – GAC Member; Carmen Boucher – DOH / SILC representative; Regina Connor – pending GAC Member, NFB member;

**Members Not Present:** Graciela Pires – President NFB of RI / GAC Member; Donna Elliott – GAC Member / NFB of RI

**Staff Present:** Laurie DiOrio – Administrator SBVI; Rebecca Cloutier – Case Aide SBVI; Jane Cannata – Sr. Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor; Sandy Pritko SS / IL Supervisor

**Staff Not Present:** Melanie Sbardella – Assistant Administrator SBVI / BEP Program Administrator / Acting VR Supervisor

**Guest:** Rui Cabral – President Greater Providence Chapter NFB / PR Handler for NFB, Vincent DeJesus – invited guest, Barbara Henry – NFB Member, Fredericka Athanas – Member NFB / IL Client

## **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

**Meeting for GAC started at 4:12 PM on 9/12/16. Approval of the minutes for June 13, 2016 was the first item on the agenda. John Pimental made a motion for the minutes to be approved and it was seconded by Liz Graves. Minutes were approved unanimously.**

**Chair Deignan moved to table normal agenda and speak to recent DHS reorganization which has impacted ORS/SBVI-**

## **MATTER OF INTEREST – DHS REORGANIZATION –**

**Laurie DiOrio Administrator**

- **DHS is implementing the Bridges/UHIP integrated computer system – which will automate eligibility program (SNAP, Child Care, Long Term Care, Cash Assistance)**
- **Based on this implementation DHS has proposed a business redesign to reorganize staff in field services and has eliminated 70+ Social Caseworker I, Social Caseworker II, Social Caseworker Supervisor positions as well as Regional Supervisors (union 580 positions)**
- **As a result 4 out of the 5 SBVI Social Services / Independent Living / Children's Unit SWIs have been laid off – a tremendous amount of institutional knowledge will be lost -One individual who has more than 20 years' experience but due to position upgrade 2 years ago has very little seniority (so she is also being laid off)The positions that have been eliminated have are not specifically funded by the state – there is minimal state dollars spent on this unit**
- **SBVI will be functioning with 1 Supervisor and 1 Social Caseworker in the Social Services Unit until positions are re-filled and we are not clear whether there may be an effort to reconstitute positions in a new position title- but Administration has advised that the positions will eventually be re- staffed.**
- **Ron and Laurie advocated to Director and Deputy Director for these positions to be left intact since this – leaves SBVI in a tight position and since SBVI does not interact with the new UHIP program or field offices- we aren't clear why our staff have been impacted. Laurie**

**believes that it was an unanticipated consequence of reorganization and unintended to deconstruct an entire unit**

- **Mr. Cabral (NFB) indicated that all public information suggests that the positions will not be refilled or be reconstituted in another fashion.**

- **Majority of the Board is fully behind making this a public issue – if subject is not kept “top of mind” it can become a passing thought – one article has already been published and a radio appearance is in the works – RI Public Radio, Providence Journal does have interest, RI Future article published 9/1/16 – Providence Journal article will come under UHIP Fallout due to conflicting stories**

- **Positions may be left empty for a long period of time and NFB is concerned as to staffing – as far as NFB is concerned, SBVI is not the enemy and everyone is on the same page**

- **Advocacy is important and essential – change should be brought to the attention of the decision makers**

- **Learning curve is steep and costly in terms of to the public at large – typically a stipend available to help individuals in low income to assist in purchase of technology**

- **Ms. Athanas expressed her concerned for the loss of knowledge in the field – there will be no knowledgeable staff above the new incoming workers to assist in learning**

- **Ms. Graves asked about how the existing programs will be continued with the existing cuts**

- **Dr. Deignan indicated in a global sense there was an answer – replacement of the individuals that have been laid off with the**

**institution of a computer system – wider caseload are not skilled in the use of computers or computer literate – question was raised to a news radio individual and there was no real solution or answer to this question**

- **It was noted that Rep. Eileen Naughton spear-headed campaigns for advocacy in this area previously – this is an issue that needs to be brought to her attention or her successors attention – she has been an ally to many underserved and downtrodden populations**

- **Blindness and visual impairment is a low incidence, high cost, highly specialized disability and it needs very capable people with institutional knowledge built up over a long period of time**

- **Ms. Henry indicated that parents may get overwhelmed and stressed out due to children's conditions – very concerned with children's services – concerns are for safety – children's services may fall through the cracks due to lack of knowledge on the parents' side**

- **New staffing may not know how to handle IEPs, no knowledge of different services available – services still need to be available in a timely manner**

- **Caseloads in total (ILOB/IL/CS) is over 600 individuals – client cases will be band-aided and based on emergent cases first – clients will have to be “wait-listed” in order to handle all cases – volume is extremely high**

- **Handling of new staff – possibility of a training program for “school book” knowledge and then emergence in program**

- **Members asked who to contact to advocate to- Ms. DiOrio suggested contact can be made with Secretary Roberts or Director**

**Melba DePina – should they choose to**

- **Chair Deignan indicated that once the primaries are over individuals around the table may want to contact their legislature and representatives in order to identify the situation to the necessary individuals – if there is more information that comes from the executive offices Laurie will disseminate the information to the G.A.C.**
- **The next meeting of the G. A. C. will be on 12/12/16 with the statement that another meeting can be called at the request of the Chair- given the current environment**
- **Motion to adjourn was made by Ralph Iannitelli and Seconded by Barbara Walsh. Committee Approved unanimously – meeting adjourned at 5:20 PM.**
- **RISILC report will be attached to this report as it was not reported**