

**Statutory Council on Blindness Meeting
December 6, 2011, 10:00 a.m.
Clarion Suites, Madison**

PRESENT: Eleanor Loomans, Chair; Jimmie Davison; Bill Gallik, Vice-Chair (Teleconference); John Hartman; Joseph Leonard; Bruce Parkinson; and Roberto Torrez

STAFF: Linda Huffer and Mary Gorman

ABSENT: Marti Sopher and Ed Weiss

Chair Loomans opened the meeting at 10:10 a.m. She asked members to introduce themselves to new members and explain briefly what they have done on the Council and what they would like to see happen.

Chair Loomans requested approval of the September meeting minutes.

A motion was made by Bruce Parkinson to approve the September meeting minutes; Bill Gallik seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Chair Loomans requested approval of the minutes from the Nominating Committee and the two Executive Committee Meetings (October 11 and November 22, 2011)

A motion was made by Bill Gallik to approve the Nominating and Executive Committee meeting minutes; seconded by Roberto Torrez. Motion passed unanimously.

Chair Loomans described the Council to new members. The purpose of the Council is to advise state agencies on matters involving the blind and visually impaired citizens of Wisconsin. Seven of the nine members need to be blind or visually impaired as set forth in Wisconsin state statutes. Among the three new members, two are completing unfinished terms, Davison and Sopher. Joe Leonard is serving a full 3-year term.

Chair Loomans previously sent the legislative proposal to Council members along with the form to forward to legislators for submission to the Legislative Council requesting the study of blind services throughout

Wisconsin. Roberto Torrez explained that Rep Jeffrey Mursau (R) is expected to lead the effort in the Assembly.

Bill Gallik stated that Minnesota would cut rehabilitation training to four weeks. With only one state agency that oversees services, the legislature is expected to pass this change in two weeks. Wisconsin has cut back to one week of adult rehabilitation services. Three separate agencies provide services to the blind and visually impaired in Wisconsin: Department of Public Instruction, Department of Workforce Development, and Department of Health Services.

Linda Huffer explained the legislative study committee process. Legislators from the study committee will gather information from other states as well as the primary providers in Wisconsin, such as Vision Forward Association, the Wisconsin Council of the Blind and Visually Impaired and the State Office for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Hopefully, some members of the Statutory Council on Blindness would join the legislative committee as well. Following legislative research, the committee would present three options to the Council on Blindness. Bill thought the worst scenario could be a limited two-week rehabilitation program which would still be some improvement over the one-week that exists now. He thought the closing of North Central Technical Institute might also help to justify the need for services in Wisconsin.

Joe Leonard requested whether the Council on Blindness should approach Vision Forward Association (formerly Badger Association). Input from private organizations may be appreciated by legislators would as they have demonstrated rehabilitation models within their communities. Both Ed Weiss and Joe Leonard have contacts at Vision Forward Association. Roberto noted that the Wisconsin Council of the Blind knows about the Council on Blindness' efforts to initiate a legislative study and will, hopefully, support the Council's work.

The Instructional Media Access Bill (Braille Bill) addresses the needs of students who are blind and visually impaired and do not have access to reading materials. Federal mandates require that K-12 materials must be provided in an alternate format, whether Braille, digital, audio, or large print. However, there is no law beyond high school to address the textbooks needed for students in technical schools or colleges. John Hartman indicated that this bill should not be a financial burden to publishers since

the material is already in digital format. There was a question on whether the bill's language included non-text graphics. Access was to be provided in an agreed upon format. The bill, which was introduced in September, is expected to come to the floor by early January. The publishers have retained their attorneys. The bill is different than it was the first time and some objections should be addressed. John mentioned he has had no problem with publishers when requesting digital copy. He suspects there are larger ramifications. Joe believes the work is perceived as a potential burden for the publisher to accomplish. The words "a mutually agreed upon format" are broad language. Roberto advises not paying too much attention to what the publisher might say but keep focused on the students' needs. The Council on Blindness can join the Wisconsin Council in their effort to be the voice of the students. Linda noted that this time there is more support from both Democrats and Republicans.

Sub Committee Assignments

Chair Loomans mentioned the work on various sub-committees over the past two years: transportation, employment, and public information & accessibility. She asked that the new members select a committee for small group discussion in the afternoon. The discussion time was split so that members who served on two committees could meet with both.

White Cane Safety

Bruce Parkinson brought a Two Rivers city proclamation recognizing October 15 as White Cane Safety Day. Linda Huffer read it aloud to the Council. The governor also signed the State White Cane Safety Day Proclamation. John had posted the White Cane proclamation on websites and did some individual presentations in the community as well. Bruce wore sweat shirts promoting white cane safety. T-shirts were made some time ago to capture general public attention inscribed with the message: "White Cane Safety, close your eyes; now cross the street" President Obama's proclamation on Disability Awareness month in October was distributed to Council members. The Pedestrian Safety Act was signed in January, 2010. The auto industry must comply with a request that highbred and electric vehicles have some type of sound identifier.

DVR Report – Kim Pomeroy

The report was submitted electronically to Council members a couple days before the meeting; however, Kim Pomeroy was not available for this meeting. The OBVI office will follow up with Ms. Pomeroy. Bruce stated it

would be advantageous for Kim to attend future meetings so she can respond to questions.

OBVI Report – Linda Huffer

The new rehabilitation staff hired for the Rhinelander office is James Unger who worked at NTC. He will begin work January 3. Rehabilitation Specialist Tim Panula is retiring from the Superior office soon. By January, the OBVI will contract with providers to serve those territories not covered. Seventy-five percent of consumers believe it is cheaper to provide services in the home rather than a nursing home. There are 13.75 rehabilitation staff for the whole state of Wisconsin. The federal report was just submitted. Macular Degeneration is the top cause of vision loss among older adults.

Elections

Discussion was held regarding timing of election. There was consensus to hold officer elections at the September 2012 meeting. Current officers will maintain their positions until such time. Discussion ensued regarding meeting minutes. John Hartman volunteered to take minutes at regular council meetings until elections occur.

Sub-Committees

New members selected subcommittees to work with in the afternoon.

Public Awareness (Information) – Ed, Bruce, Eleanor, Jimmie, and Linda
Employment – Roberto, Bill, John, and Joe
Transportation – Roberto, Bill, John, and Joe

Bill proposed making Employment a subcommittee of Public Awareness. He did not view the council as having much influence within the business community or DVR. Instead, they can build awareness among employers. Roberto thought that employment is an independent issue. For this meeting and further discussion, the Employment Committee was kept a separate sub-committee.

Following sub-committee discussions, Linda Huffer asked the council to consider the traditional legislative days in March. What is the council and sub-committees thinking about doing at that time?

Roberto mentioned meeting with the Legislative Transportation Committee. Members agreed it is important to build advocates face to face as well as going to meetings with a purpose in what is wanted and a proposal on how it may be accomplished.

Linda suggested talking with the Department of Transportation (DOT) first to determine what funding may be available and then proceed to legislators. If the DOT likes the idea, they might assist with the proposal.

Roberto suggested scheduling a legislative day after contacting the DOT. There is also the proposal to study blind services in Wisconsin. The council has until January 1 to see how the legislature is moving on the proposal and will know if they need to keep the proposal moving in March. It was proposed that the March meeting could be moved to an April date when the weather might be better for travel. No meeting dates were scheduled at this meeting. Chair Loomans reminded council members that the by-laws will need to be reviewed in 2012.

A motion was made by Bill Gallik to adjourn; seconded by John Hartman. Meeting adjourned at 3:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Mary Gorman