

Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind Quarterly Meeting Minutes
Holiday Inn Tallahassee E Capitol-Universities
2003 Apalachee Pkwy., Tallahassee, Fl 32301
January 30, 2025

Council Members Present

- Doug Ingram
- Jorge Hernandez
- Misty Porter
- Robert Doyle
- Robert Kelly
- Paul Edwards
- Donte Mickens
- Denise Valkema

Council Members attended Virtually

- Arthur Moody
- Patricia Lipovsky
- Ciawanda McDonald

Council Members Absent

- Sead Bekric

Council Staff

- Brandis Hall

Chairperson Doug Ingram called the meeting to order with introductions and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Adoption of Agenda

Denise Valkema motioned to adopt the amended agenda, seconded by Robert Kelly; motion carried.

Approval of November 2024 Meeting Minutes

Robert Kelly motioned to accept the November minutes, seconded by Denise Valkema; motion carried.

Director's Report

Director Doyle presented his report to the Council:

- Staffing Update
 - New Division employees acknowledged.
 - Two additional contact managers hired, totaling four, all are Certified Contract Managers.
- Contracts
 - Implemented a three-year cycle with additional renewals available.
 - FSJC services ceased until a short-term contract was executed.
 - Tampa Lighthouse for Rehabilitation Engineering to continue services. Requesting a settlement agreement for gap period.
 - Spring contracts requested for execution by July 1, with the intention of three-year cycles and 60-day Department review.
 - Innovation Project on hold with seven proposals received. Will resume review process in March.
 - Developing a method for analyzing financial statements.
- Library
 - 96.7% Library satisfaction, up from 93% last year.
 - 96.37% Library Services increased from 94%.
 - Ninety-five percent Library Material Delivery, up from 91% a year ago.
 - Eighty-eight percent Reader Service Response time increased from 86%.
 - Implementing a new live support process (Reader Advisor) for calls.
 - Ninety-two percent satisfaction with newsletter content, up from 53%.
- CTTC & Apprenticeship Program
 - Web Accessibility program trains participants for community jobs.
 - CompTIA Program offers multiple certifications, starting with hardware.
 - Recruiting a Bureau Chief for the Career, Technology Training Center
- Legislative
 - LBR- request for additional funds for match and drawdown, approved by the State Board of Education.
 - Expect the Governor's Recommended Budget soon.
 - Request for legislative review and approval of Background Check-Clearinghouse.

- Federal Funding Freeze
 - Rescinded with the President reviewing expenditures for policy alignment.
- Updates to Monitoring
 - 10 Policies, with nine highlighted by RSA.
 - Compliance issues regarding cooperation and service reapplication.
 - Fiscal Operations-sixty-eight pages in draft status.
 - To clarify monitoring, fiscal will require collaborative efforts.
 - Recalculate Fiscal reports, ensuring we can confirm report closures by the middle of state fiscal year.
 - RSA re-bidding technical assistance centers must occur every five years.
 - Failure to Cooperate is undergoing revision and is in draft status.
 - The policy mandating Social Security Numbers is under revision, in draft status, emphasizing the requirement but allowing flexibility.
 - Informed Choice is undergoing revisions and in draft status.
 - Post-Employment Policy-RSA wants to leave the case open to receive post-employment services.
- Re-Appointments
 - It is possible to see vacant seats filled soon.
 - The number of applications currently pending is uncertain.

DBS Employment Report

Bridget Giles, Bureau Chief, presented the report for Quarter 2.

Quarter Performance Outcomes:

- 3,880 clients served.
- 376 closed cases, 157 successful (53% rehabilitation rate).
- The rehabilitation rate for closed cases was 53%.
- 120 unsuccessful closures post-services.
- Average hourly wage: \$19.46 (highest: \$50.00, lowest: \$10.00)

Bureau Chief Giles noted a decrease in the unsuccessful closure rate due to improved communication, more client and face-to-face meetings, VR training, and policy reviews. Plans include hiring a policy person and filling a quality assurance position.

A full detailed report was provided to the Council.

Client Satisfaction Survey

Dr. Minna Jia presented the 2024 Client Satisfaction Survey results, which included 132 clients surveyed from July 1 to September 30, 2024.

Key findings:

- Forty-five respondents, with forty-three receiving services from both DBS and local providers.
- Forty-four percent sought employment through DBS.
- Overall satisfaction: DBS at 77%, local providers at 83%.

The Council asked about data review and improvements. Director Doyle confirmed a team will analyze the data soon to address concerns.

A full detailed report was provided to the Council.

Employer Recognition

Wayne Jennings, District Administrator, recognized Target T32273, with an acceptance letter read by Danille Byrd.

District 2 Administrator Report

Wayne Jennings, District Administrator, presented.

- Total of six full-time employees, including two blind employees.
- Two vacancies (combined RT/Staff Assistant & HSPC II-IL) with active interviews for RT/Staff Assistant.
- Consistent office performance with fifty placements over five years (116%).
- SFY 2023-2024 goal of 68 VR successful closures met.
- Decline noted in Taylor County due to hurricanes and job closures.
- Only two counselor positions due to low client numbers.
- Hourly wage increased from \$13.74 to \$17.50 an hour.

A full detailed report was provided to the Council.

Lighthouse of the Big Bend

Tina Torrence, President, presented.

- Fully Staffed: 4 TVI, 2COMS, 1VRT and 1 MSW.
- Client satisfaction is a priority.
- Created a community space for clients-make it a center.
- Expanded programs (Cooking, O&M & Braille) and classes.
- Serving eleven counties in the Big Bend Region.

Florida Agencies Serving the Blind (FASB)

Lisa Howard, Interim Chief Executive Officer, presented.

- Elected officers: R. Holloway, President, A. Pieriboni, VP, R. Garcia-Treasurer, Chantel, Secretary, T. Torrence, At-Large & L. Stella, At-Large.
- Lisa Howard will serve as executive director.

StarMetro Transportation

Kate Frizzell, Community Involvement Coordinator and Travel Trainer, presented.

- Ride Ready-Travel Training Program uses innovative training and travel partners to increase access and mobility.
- Training program offers three levels of training: Group visits, Hands on Familiarization and Individual Rider.
- Collaborates with various local programs, including LCS Schools and Tallahassee Senior Center.
- Provided training services to 1,000 people, with numbers now doubled.
- Features redesigned website and new booking tools.

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

Kelly Rogers, Division Director, presented.

- New Director of Vocational Rehabilitation.
- Experience with the Early Intervention Program (now Early Steps).
- 21 years at the Department of Health.
- Co-Chair of the State Advisory Council with Department of Education.
- SFY 23-24: 41.4% increase in individuals exiting competitive employment, up 3% from the previous year.
- Speed to Service improved: 2021-2024 reduced by 114 days (55%), averaging 16 weeks faster than three years ago.
- Plans to establish a community of practices for VR counselors and families.

Client Assistance Program Report

Arthur Moody provided a brief report.

- 109 unique service requests with seven service requests.
- Three cases of communication problems between counselors and clients.
- Two cases of service conflicts.
- One case regarding eligibility or application process.
- Service requests by District: D3 (5), D5 (1) and D9 (1).

Florida Rehabilitation Council

Doug Ingram, Chair, presented the report.

- The Council plans to attend the FRC meetings to reestablish partnership.
- Quarterly Meeting in Gainesville on March 11th.

Bruce Miles

- Recognizing Bruce Miles for his dedicated service of 40 years to the Council, he will continue to serve as treasurer until June 2025.

January 31, 2025

Council Members Present

- Doug Ingram
- Jorge Hernandez
- Misty Porter
- Robert Doyle
- Robert Kelly
- Donte Mickens
- Paul Edwards
- Denise Valkema

Council Members attending Virtually

- Arthur Moody
- Patricia Lipovsky

Council Members Absent

- Ciawanda McDonald
- Sead Bekric

Council Staff

- Brandis Hall

Committee Report

Paul Edwards presented the Tallahassee Day and Blind Service Foundation (BSF) updates.

- Tallahassee Day
 - February 19th: Scheduled visit to Florida Capitol.

- Next meeting on February 6th to finalize details.
- Council members will represent their organizations (NFB, BVA, FCB, FASB) independently.
- Will collaborate on legislative requests.
- Blind Service Foundation
 - SET operating with reduced funding compared to the previous year.
 - DBS contributes funds - totaling \$160,000 over the years.
 - BSF donated to the Division for the VR Training Banquet.
 - Dog Guides Posters available in Florida, courtesy of Bruce Miles.

Donte Mickens presented a Public Forum update.

- The Committee did not convene after the Jacksonville meeting prior to this assembly to provide recommendations for this forum.
- Proposed hosting the Public Forum at the local CRP in Ocala.
- Assign topic and request short Division presentation prior to Forum.
- Proposed serving light refreshments at the Forum.
- Exploring various ideas for Public Forum promotion, including social media.

Agenda Items for May 2025

- Policies
- CRP (Presentation)
- Standing Report from IL
- Transportation Disadvantage (Paratransit)
- Client Satisfaction Survey (Minna Ja)
- Subcommittee Reports (TLH Day & CSAVR/NCSRC Mtg.)
- CTTC Bureau Chief (Virtual-May) & (In-Person July)
- Gifts and Donations Innovation Project
- Legislative Report
- Gifts and Donations
- Creating an award in honor of Bruce Miles (Staff or Providers based on service to the council)

February 2026 Meeting

Paul Edwards motioned to have the February 2026 meeting in Bradenton/Sarasota/Palmetto/Key Largo/Gainesville (Unclear), seconded by Jorge Hernandez: motion carried.

Dates are February 18-20, 2026.

Old Business/Unfinished Business

Jorge Hernandez will represent the council at NCSRC in April, with Misty Porter as the alternate. Travel requires Department approval.

New Business

Paul Edwards expressed concerns regarding the consolidation of agencies serving people with disabilities into a single state agency and proposed a memo to maintain their separation. He drafted a resolution for the Council, to send to the Department. Paul Edwards made the motion, seconded by Jorge Hernandez, motion carried.

The Public Forum subcommittee scheduled their next meeting for February 13th at 11am.

Discussions/Elections

Paul Edwards nominated Jorge Hernandez as Chair, and Jorge Hernandez accepted. Denise Valkema made a motion that was seconded by Robert Kelly; motion carried.

Edwards nominated Doug Ingram as the 1st Vice Chair, and Doug Ingram accepted the nomination. Robert Kelly motioned, with Denise Valkema seconding; motion carried.

Mickens nominated Misty Porter for the role of 2nd Vice Chair. Misty Porter accepted. Denise Valkema made a motion that was seconded by Jorge Hernandez; motion carried.

The following members will be terming out in 2025: Donte Mickens, Arthur Moody, Ciawanda McDonald, Jorge Hernandez, and Patricia Lipovsky.

Donte proposed the creation of an award in honor of Bruce Miles to recognize his dedicated service to the Council, aimed at acknowledging DBS employees and staff.

Jorge Hernandez moved to adjourn the meeting, and Denise Valkema seconded the motion. The motion was carried, and the meeting was adjourned.