

Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind Quarterly Meeting Minutes
Embassy Suites by Hilton Miami International Airport
3974 NW South River Drive, Miami, FL 33142
February 19, 2026

Council Members Present

- Doug Ingram
- Jorge Hernandez
- Robert Doyle
- Arthur Moody
- Paul Edwards
- Misty Porter
- Denise Valkema

Council Members attended Virtually

- Donte Mickens
- Ciawanda McDonald

Council Members Absent

- Patricia Lipovsky

Council Staff

Latoya Mitchell & Alexandra Diggs

Chair Jorge Hernandez called the meeting to order with introductions and Pledge of Allegiance led by Doug Ingram.

Adoption of Agenda

Doug Ingram made a motion to adopt the agenda as amended. Denise Valkema seconded the motion.

Approval of October 2025 Meeting Minutes

Paul Edwards made a motion to accept October 2025 meeting minutes as amended. Robert Kelly mentioned his name missing for in person attendance in October. Denise Valkema seconded the motion. The motion was passed.

Director's Report

Interim Director Trina Travis presented her report to the Council:

- Agency Bills
 - HB 1279/SB1052/SB7038-Consumer Disclosure for Blind Related Services-Requires individuals or business offering fee-based services to disclose in writing about equivalent or similar services before entering a contract with the blind or visually impaired individual. Bill requires it in writing before accepting payment.
 - If HB 1279 passes, anyone in violation of the bill will be considered participating in unfair or deceptive trade practices.
 - The law allows the department to develop rules during this process.
 - SB7092/HB897-Language submitted by FASB, lack of movement, but will continue to monitor for movement.
- Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA)
 - Building the framework for MOU. Mississippi State does not have the compacity this cycle. Seeking Florida institutions-Florida Atlantic University (FAU), University of North Florida (UNF) (Institute of Education), & University of Florida.
- Innovation Projects: Two projects were approved and received award letters.
 - Miami Lighthouse for \$30,000 to provide employee training, support and education to recruit and retain blind and visually impaired workers.
 - Conklin Davis for \$32,748 for instruction and digital content creation.
 - Projects started in October 2025 and end this year.
- Strategic Plan
 - Sharing for public comments in three weeks or so.
- 85th Anniversary
 - Monthly Newsletters to share milestones
 - Multiple events in multiple districts to highlight achievements made by the Division.
 - A proclamation is routing for approval
 - Official grand opening for CTTC sometime later in the year.
 - Establishing an RFQ to solicit bids for communication projects.

DBS Employment Report

Marian Rezkallah, Program Administrator, presented the report for Quarter 2.

Quarter Performance Outcomes:

- 327 new clients served Q2.
- 405 closed cases of which 180 were successful.
- The rehabilitation rate for closed cases was 53%.
- 159 cases were unsuccessful closures after receiving services.
- The average hourly wage is \$22.79
- The highest wage is \$89.00
- The lowest wage is \$11.00

A full detailed report has been provided to the Council.

State Plan Updates

Marian Rezkallah presented updates on the State Plan.

- Completed and submitted the State Plan to CareerSource Florida.
- The plan went out for public comment on January 30, 2026
- Due for feedback on March 1, 2026
- Met with CareerSource in December to update the Division on federal guidance regarding the ATS (American Talent Strategy)
 - Strengthen the workforce nationwide and rest on five pillars
 - Five Pillars: Industry-Driven Strategies, Worker Mobility, Integrated Systems, and Accountability and Flexibility and Innovation.
- Aligning DBS goals and strategies with these pillars
- Received guidance from CareerSource on the state plan and required last minutes edits per Governor Office and due no later than April 30th.
- No further edits needed after submission
- Portal is open and will update based on public comments

Client Satisfaction Survey 2025-2026 Quarter 1-2 Survey Results

Dr. Minna Jia presented.

- Survey Population: July 2025-Dec. 2025 407 clients.
- Successful closures: 170
- Among 116 respondents, 107DBS clients received services from both DBS and local providers.
- Top services from DBS: 64% assistive tech, 40% medical services, and 33% independent living.

- DBS overall satisfaction: 89%.
- Local service providers' overall satisfaction: 95%.

The Council heard letters from clients about people who made an impact during their service experience.

The Council inquired about survey results being reviewed and improvements being made. Director Doyle informed the Council that a team will be reviewing data in the following weeks to discuss and offer solutions to the concerns at hand.

A full detailed report has been provided to the Council.

Miami-Dade Department of Transportation & Public Works (DTPW)

Nathaniel Surrancy, Department of Public Works Manager, presented report.

- One department with two departments: Miami-Dade Transit & Public Works Department.
- Agency consist of 3000 employees.
- Commission on Disabilities (13th districts- two people appointed to serve by the mayor along with 13 chairs).
- Sidewalk major concerns in Miami (1983 lawsuit due to out of commissioned sidewalk).
- Survey every sidewalk is up to code.
- The 10th largest transit in the Country & largest in Florida .
- Modes of Transportation: Metro Bus, Metro Rail, Metro Movers & Paratransit Operations Special Transportation Services.
- Renovated South Dade Bus Station (Two express lines).
- 800 Buses in Miami-Dade County.
- Make sure systems are ADA compliant.

The Council inquired about applying for Paratransit.

Miami-Dade College: Registered Apprenticeship Program

Christina Johnson, Apprenticeship Services Manager, presented report.

- Sponsor of registered apprenticeship programs.
- Provide classroom training for individuals interested.
- Five components of the Registered Apprenticeship: Business Involvement, Structured on-the-job-training, Related Instruction, Rewards for Skill Gains and National Occupational Credentials.

- MDC has twenty-three registered programs & credited by Department of Education.
- Earn full time wages (Earn & learn system).

Bascom Palmer Eye Institute

Maria E. Henao, LCSW, Director of Social Services presented a report.

- Bascom Palmer Eye Institute is the world-renowned ophthalmology department at University of Miami Miller School of Medicine and part of UHealth-University of Miami Health System.
- Ranked #1 by U.S. News & World Report twenty-four times.
- Bascom-Palmer specializes in cornea, retina, glaucoma, neuro-ophthalmology, oculoplastics, ocular oncology, pediatric ophthalmology and uveitis.
- Bascom-Palmer receives 600 plus applications annually for 8 residency positions that feature 22 residents per year & 38 fellows per year.
- Bascom-Palmer alumni are 1,415 with 52 graduates becoming ophthalmology department chairs worldwide.
- Main campus in Miami and five satellite offices: Palm Beach Gardens, Plantation, Naples, Coral Gables and North Miami.
- Child-life specialist to help children pre-op and post-op to provide necessary resources.

Council Member Recognition & Support

Paul drafted a letter to recognize Robert Doyle accomplishments and dedication to the Division of Blind Services. Paul Edwards made the motion. Robert Kelly seconded the motion. Paul made a motion to support HB1279. Robert Kelly seconded the motion. Motion carried

Employer Recognition

Pamela Ortiz, District Administrator, District 12, Andaz Miami Hotel recognized.

District 12 Administrator Report

Pamela Ortiz, District Administrator, presented.

- District 12 has twenty-two professionals FY'24-25.
- Population is 2.8 million.
- District 12 serves two counties: Miami-Dade & Monroe County.
- Successfully placed 184 participants in employment status.

- Average annual income of 184 participants is \$33,859.00.

District 12 identified the following factors to increase productivity for VR: Increase monthly outreach events, fill vacant vocational rehabilitation counselor position, increase the number of participants in TAP. Continue to strengthen relationships with previous employers.

A full detailed report has been provided to the Council.

Miami Lighthouse

Carole Brady-Simmons, COMS, Chief Program Officer, presented the report.

- Provided service to 35,000 participants to provide comprehensive eye care to children in the public school system.
- 1930 founded 96-year Anniversary for Miami Lighthouse.
- Received grant to create new program
- Many program-130 provided services for blind babies this year.
- Started third grade school.
- Year-round braille class.
- Music program for sixth through twelfth grade.
- Job Readiness-ten client in call center course at the end of May.
- Summer Camps starting soon.
- High School Student-Pre-Employment Transition Program & High School high tech program.
- Blind Soccer is a new initiative started by employee.
- CVI Initiative is a collaboration with medical partners in the Miami area to create universal dilatated medical diagnosis so that the doctors follow a protocol that doctors follow.
- Validated assessment tool the OT can use for assessment that it comes out the same.

A full detailed report has been provided to the Council.

Florida Agency Serving the Blind

Lisa Howards, Chief Executive Officer, presented the report.

- Sixteen agencies are members of FASB, fifteen of them serve children (CP).
- One agency does not serve children (Palm Beach fills the void).
- 15 contracts for 250 kids and room for many more children.
- 210 kids on active rosters after January.

- Funding is in the Governor's recommended budget.
- Client Safety and Quality Services Insured -looking to provide services and charge a fee but not accredited.
- Amend part of Chapter 14-set minimum requirements with agencies as sole provider-bill not moving within the legislator.
- DOE had similar language in bill & agency not interested in adding FASB to their bill.

Client Assistance Program Report

Arthur Moody provided a brief report.

- Flat funded for the year.
- Encourage the division to send individuals to CAP.
- One was a delay in services.
- Supervised referral.
- Communication issue and restored communication.

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Council Members Absent

- Patricia Lipovsky

Council Staff

- Alexandra Diggs
- LaToya Mitchell

1st Vice President Douglas Ingram called the meeting to order with introductions and Pledge of Allegiance led by Doug Ingram.

Agenda Items for May 2026

- Public Transit (Paratransit) Escambia Transit
- Legislative Report & DBS Budget
- RSA Report
- NCSRC Report
- Client Satisfaction Survey (CSS)
- Legislative Bill
- FASB

- CRP Reports (Independence for the Blind of West Florida IB West)
- VA Hospital Pensacola
- Emerald Coast
- District Report
- Florida Statewide Needs Assessment
- Workforce
- BEP Report

February 2026 Meeting

Doug motioned to have meeting in Jacksonville, Florida. Denise Valkema seconded the motion. Motion carried. Dates for meeting: February 17, 18,19, 2027.

Old Business/Unfinished Business

Paul Edwards drafted a letter to include the council in the selection of the next Division Director. Douglas Ingram made a motion to accept the letter about the advisory role. Denise Valkema seconded. Motioned carried.

Mr. Edwards drafted a letter expressing appreciation to former Division Director, Robert Doyle. Douglas Ingram motioned to accept the letter of appreciation. Donte Mickens seconded. Motion carried. Chair requested To Whom it may concern be removed and replace with: Commissioner, Chancellor and Governor Office.

Misty Porter urged updates to FRCB website and DBS website. Jorge mentioned the formatting and other issues with the website need to be fixed. Paul Edwards mentioned council information is incorrect. Misty Porter mentioned blog post on DBS website is outdated and requests more information with inclusion of CRPs events listed on DBS website. Misty also mentioned that the Facebook page needs more postings. BSF webpage needs updating and concerns will be mentioned at upcoming BSF general meeting by Jorge Hernandez.

Appointments & Reappointments

Everyone timed out. Attendance is mandatory. Paul mentioned that the bylaws mentioned attendance and removal for not attending.

New Business

Elections:

Robert Kelly nominated Jorge Hernandez for Chair. Donte Mickens nominated Misty Porter for Chair, she declined. Hernandez accepted the nomination. Jorge Hernandez was elected as chair with Douglas Ingram as first vice chair and second

vice chair. Paul made a motion to nominate Jorge Hernandez as chair. Denise Vakema seconded the motion. Motion carried.

Donte Mickens nominated Douglas Ingram for first vice chair. Doug Ingram accepted. Paul motioned to elect Doug Ingram by acclamation. Denise Valkma seconded. Motion carried.

Donte Mickens nominates Misty Porter as second vice chair. Misty Porter accepted the nomination. Douglas Ingram motion to elect Misty Porter by acclamation. Robert Kelly seconded. Motioned carried.

Committee Reports

Doug Ingram makes a motion to keep the chair committees as assigned. Paul Edwards seconded. Motion carried.

Client Satisfaction Survey (CSS)

Paul Edwards, Chair presented a report.

Paul reports that the committee will meet again in April to reexamine the survey to make changes. Must be client for six months and referred to the center.

Blind Service Foundation (BSF)

Paul Edwards, Chair presented a report.

Agreed to continue SET Program. DBS is matching the contributions. Setting rules. One request at a time. Meta is being considered. Committee collected video that can included in the 85th anniversary celebration.

Public Forum

Donte Mickens, Chair, presented a report.

Donte would like to schedule a meeting in March.

Employment Committee

Jorge Hernandez, chair, presented a report.

Stressed the importance of building relationships with employers in the community.

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