New Mexico Commission for the Blind

State Rehabilitation Council

MINUTES (Draft)

Regular Meeting Held Virtually

September 14, 2021 - 9:00 AM

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Ms. Hayes at 9:04 AM.

2. Roll Call and Introduction of New Members

Present were Jim Babb, Bernadine Chavez, Katharine Chavez, Deborah Dominguez-Clark, Peggy Hayes, Paul Luttrell, Lila Mae Martinez, Daphne Mitchell, Paula Seanez, and Greg Trapp. Mario Hooee joined the meeting later. Craig Cooper, Kaity Ellis, and Yolanda Montoya-Cordova were absent.

3. Introduction of Guests and Staff

Guests present were Jim Salas, Deputy Director for Vocational Rehabilitation and Independent Living; Lucy Mallahan, Orientation Center Director; and Kelly Burma, Skills Center Coordinator and SRC Liaison. Diana Marquez was also present. Jeff Blair and Commissioner Urja Lansing joined the meeting later.

Mr. Trapp said he wanted to acknowledge Coby Livingstone, saying that she has resigned from the Council. Mr. Trapp thanked her for her service on the Council. Mr. Trapp said the SRC would need a new SILC representative to the Council.

4. Approval of changes to the order of the agenda and deletion of Agenda items

Vice-Chair Babb made a motion to approve the agenda, and Katharine Chavez seconded the motion. Mr. Trapp asked for authority to move agenda items that require a vote. The Chair asked for a roll call vote, and the agenda as modified was approved unanimously, with Jim Babb, Bernadine Chavez, Katharine Chavez, Deborah Dominguez-Clark, Peggy Hayes, Paul Luttrell, Lila Mae Martinez, and Paula Seanez all voting yes. Craig Cooper, Mario Hooee, Kaity Ellis, and Yolanda Montoya Cordova were absent for this vote. Daphne Mitchell and Greg Trapp are ex officio and did not vote.

5. Approval of Minutes of Regular Meeting of August 10, 2021

Vice-Chair Babb made a motion to approve the August minutes, and Paul Luttrell seconded the motion. Mr. Trapp also thanked Kaity Ellis for helping to put together the minutes. The Chair asked for a roll call vote, and the minutes as presented were approved unanimously, with Jim Babb, Bernadine Chavez, Katharine Chavez, Deborah Dominguez-Clark, Peggy Hayes, Paul Luttrell, Lila Mae Martinez, and Paula Seanez all voting yes. Craig Cooper, Mario Hooee, Kaity Elis, and Yolanda Montoya Cordova were absent for this vote. Daphne Mitchell and Greg Trapp are ex officio and did not vote.

Ms. Mallahan noted that Jeff Blair joined the meeting, and Mr. Trapp said Mr. Blair was a former Commissioner and welcomed Mr. Blair to the meeting.

6. Client Assistance Program Report, Bernadine Chavez

Ms. Chavez said CAP has received two calls since the August meeting, saying that the calls were more informational in nature. She said one of the callers had been referred by an ophthalmologist out of Las Cruces, adding that the ophthalmologist gave the patient a signature guide. Mr. Trapp said that was great feedback, and that the Commission sends the annual report to all ophthalmologists and optometrists in the state along with signature guides and that it is good to know that the outreach is working.

7. Section 121 Project Report, Paula Seanez

Ms. Seanez said the Navajo OSERS program has still not heard from RSA regarding its grant funds. She said this is very concerning since it is the middle of September and they have not received their grant award notification, even though it was submitted in April. She added that the Navajo Nation did receive notification for a 12-month no-cost extension, and that she was confident that they would receive a 5-year continuation award. She said tribes across the board have not received their notifications, and that the Native American VR technical assistance programs at Northern Arizona University and Southwest Indian College have also not received their notifications. Ms. Seanez said Jemez Pueblo is under an executive order, but expects all offices to be reopened on October 1. She said vaccinated tribal members could leave the Jemez pueblo at any time, and that unvaccinated persons could only leave on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays. She said Jemez serves other pueblos, and has been conducting outreach. Reporting on Laguna Acoma Connections, Ms. Seanez said that executive orders are also in place, and that offices are open by appointment only. She said most sessions at Laguna Acoma Connections are being held virtually.

8. Workforce Board Report, Yolanda Montoya-Cordova

Ms. Montoya Cordova was not present, so this item was skipped.

9. Chair Report, Peggy Hayes

Ms. Hayes said she did not have anything to report.

10. Director’s Report, Greg Trapp

a. Major Trends and Developments, Greg Trapp

Mr. Trapp reported that this was an especially important meeting because it includes items related to the State Plan, the Annual Report, and Pre-ETS forecasting, saying that he appreciates all who were able to join the meeting.

 Mr. Trapp said the Legislative Finance Committee hearing was set for the afternoon of September 22, and that it was unusually early this year. He said it was set for Room 307 of the Roundhouse, meaning that it will be in person.

Mr. Trapp said October 15 has been declared White Cane Safety Day by Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham. He said the Governor each year issues a proclamation declaring October 15 as White Cane Safety Day. Mr. Trapp said the Commission drafts the proclamation, and he thanked the Governor for issuing the proclamation. He said that even in 2021 blind persons are still being denied access to places of public accommodation, saying that just this week he had received a call from a person denied access to a store. He added that space tourism would also now be covered under the transportation provisions of the White Cane Act. Mr. Trapp asked Ms. Burma to read the proclamation for 2021, which she proceeded to do (see attached proclamation).

Ms. Chavez said DRNM recently received a call from a person denied the use of a white cane at a hospital, saying that DRNM was able to get it resolved. Ms. Chavez expressed disappointment that a hospital would deny a person the ability to use a white cane. Mr. Trapp thanked Ms. Chavez for her advocacy on behalf of that individual.

b. Administration and Finance, Kevin Romero

Mr. Trapp reported for Mr. Romero. Mr. Trapp began by reporting on the trial Monitoring, saying The Commission has almost wrapped up the mock monitoring process. He said the agency used Seymour Levy to conduct the monitoring, saying he is a former Deputy Assistant Regional Commissioner with the Rehabilitation Services Administration. Mr. Trapp said Mr. Levy applies the federal Monitoring and Technical Assistance Guidelines, saying that Mr. Levy looks at the Commission’s finances, contracts, reports, and cooperative agreements. He said Mr. Levy made a full report to a meeting of the Commission board On August 26. Mr. Trapp said he wants the agency to be transparent and accountable, and that he thinks it is critical to have a person with an outside perspective to look at the agency books and records. Mr. Trapp said a status conference was held with Mr. Levy on September 8, and that items to be improved and corrected were identified at that time. Mr. Trapp reported that none of the items Mr. Levy found were material or would result in a cost disallowance, and that they were all minor. Mr. Trapp said Mr. Levy found that the newer contracts were in better compliance and had all of the required language contained in the Uniform Guidance that had been revised in November. Mr. Trapp said the trial monitoring helps prepare the agency for the actual federal monitoring.

Mr. Trapp reported on the reallotment process, saying that each July and August VR agencies that cannot use all of their federal VR funds relinquish it to the federal government which reallots it to agencies that are able to use the realloted funds. He said 22 VR agencies relinquished a total of $298,000,000 in FFY 2021 VR funds. Mr. Trapp said 21 VR agencies requested a total of $121,000,000 in reallotment funds, and about $177,000,000 was left unclaimed. Mr. Trapp said the federal government can use this unclaimed funding to issue grants. He said that historically there was a shortfall of funds to be realloted, but that the pandemic has created a situation in which VR agencies are not able to use all of their allotted federal funding. Mr. Trapp said the Commission was in that position, relinquishing $1,400,000 in federal funding. Mr. Trapp said the Commission approached the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to see if it was able to utilize the funds. He said the Commission also offered to put up the state match, but that DVR was unable to use the funds. Mr. Trapp said funds that cannot be used can be relinquished, transferred, or lapsed back to the federal treasury. He said lapsing funds is the worst option, and that it indicates that good fiscal controls are not in place. He said federal funds should not be lapsed, or at an agency should at least not lapse a significant amount of federal funds. He said another advantage of relinquishing the federal funds is that it reduces the Pre-Employment Transition Services requirement, and that by relinquishing the 1.4 million the Commission reduced its Pre-ETS obligation by $210,000. He said relinquishing the funds is definitely the best thing to do, and that it makes the funds available to other agencies.

Ms. Hayes asked if by relinquishing the funds the Commission would get less money in the next year or otherwise be punished. Mr. Trapp said she asked a great question that was also complex. Mr. Trapp said that by relinquishing funds the potential for a Maintenance of Effort penalty is raised, and he described the MOE requirement saying the agency must spend as much in non-federal share this year as it spent two years ago, and that by relinquishing funds it means that the agency may not have spent as much in non-federal share. He said the Commission could handle any MOE penalty, and that it would also potentially have a MOE penalty if it had also lapsed the funds. He said that relinquishing funds is definitely the best thing to do, and the grant amount will not be reduced. He said the grant amount normally goes up each year, and that this year there should be a significant increase because of the high rate of inflation. Mr. Trapp added that the Commission is still serving all eligible individuals, and that the Commission is not under an Order of Selection. He concluded by saying the relinquishment is a reflection of the pandemic.

Mr. Trapp reported on the FY21 Audit, saying it is confidential by state law until it is released by the Auditor. He said the agency was progressing on the audit, and that the agency expects to submit the audit on time. He said the audit is due on November 1. Mr. Trapp said the Office of the State Auditor is again doing the audit. He said that the last audit did not have any findings. Mr. Trapp said that for the current budget The commission has utilized about $2.4 million out of its $13 million budget, which is about 18.7 percent and that the agency monitors things closely to make sure it finishes within the allotted budget.

Mr. Trapp reported on human resources, saying The commission currently has 21 vacant positions. He said 11 of these were Exempt Other positions and 10 were classified positions, which he said equates to a 23.2% vacancy rate. He said the commission is actively recruiting to fill five of the positions; three in Albuquerque, one in Las Cruces, and one in Las Vegas. He said the commission will have a 17.7% vacancy rate when the positions are filled.

c. Independent Living and Vocational Rehabilitation, Jim Salas

Mr. Salas reported on staffing, saying the Las Vegas VR counselor position is vacant, and that the technology position in Las Cruces is also vacant. He said that interviews for the technology position are being conducted, and that the agency has some good candidates. He said he is still working to fill the vacant BEP Business Consultant position. He said that a Blindness Skills Instructor in Albuquerque is vacant, and that the agency recently had a resignation of one of the Blindness Skills Instructors in Las Cruces. He said the agency has a list for the Albuquerque position and is working to fill both positions.

Mr. Salas reported on the Business Enterprise Program, saying that the agency is working to distribute the Financial Relief and Restoration Act payments to cover the losses suffered by vendors as a result of the pandemic, saying that the amount allocated to New Mexico was $215,297. He said the agency has submitted its required spending plan, and that the plan was approved by RSA in June. He said that Diana Martinez is working to gather the required documentation from the vendors showing their losses. Mr. Salas emphasized that the payments only cover losses from calendar year 2020. Mr. Salas updated the Council on the Kirtland contract, saying it was signed about a week ago. Mr. Salas also discussed opportunities related to micro-markets, describing them as a convenience store without a cashier. He said the first micro-market was just activated at the TSA offices at the airport. He said that there will be a second micro-market at the National Nuclear Security Administration, which he said is in a brand new building that is just outside the Eubank gate at Kirtland Air Force Base. He said this second micro-market has just been put out to bid.

Mr. Salas concluded by saying there were no changes to the employment numbers that he provided at the August meeting, and that he would have an employment update at the next Council meeting.

d. Orientation Center, Lucy Mallahan

Ms. Mallahan said the Center currently has four students, saying that some students have decided to delay receipt of in-person services. She said the Center would be offering remote instruction to these individuals. she said that a Blindness Skills Instructor position was open for the industrial arts teacher, and that the position is posted. Ms. Mallahan said the Center did have a positive case, and that it was reported as required. She said testing was conducted at the Center for all employees and students using a rapid SARS-COV-2 test. She said this testing revealed an additional asymptomatic case. She said that quarantine procedures were put in place as a result of the positive cases, and that the Center has now returned to normal operations. Ms. Mallahan described the COVID protocols that are in place at the Center, including that seminars and morning meetings are now being held over Zoom. Ms. Mallahan reported on an executive order recently issued by Governor Lujan Grisham requiring that all employees of congregate care facilities be vaccinated or provide documentation of a medical condition or sincerely held religious belief that would prevent the employee from being vaccinated. She said the Commission was a 1A priority agency and that a large number of employees had already been vaccinated. She said the employees who are exempted from vaccination must now submit weekly test results.

Ms. Hayes asked if all students were required to be vaccinated before they could attend the Center, and Ms. Mallahan responded that the students were required to be vaccinated.

e. Skills Center, Kelly Burma

Ms. Burma said the Skills Center is transitioning from the summer to the fall program. She said the Skills Center is currently serving two Pre-ETS students and one adult student, and that two more adult students will be added next week. Ms. Burma also described the COVID safety protocols that are in place at the Skills Center. Ms. Burma reported that the first in-person Creating Options meeting was held in October, saying that it was a hybrid with both in-person and remote participation. She said that all in-person participants were screened for COVID. Ms. Burma reported on the Technology for Children program, saying that three children had been served since the start of the state fiscal year. She said that one child was provided a Braille embosser. Ms. Burma and Mr. Trapp talked about the number of children and adults who have been blinded as a result of gunshot wounds, and Mr. Trapp said the number has gone up from two or three percent to about three or four percent of cases. He said it is really tragic, and especially in the case of these younger children.

Mr. Trapp said he had one other item to report on, specifically Newsline. Mr. Trapp said the local Newsline system is in the process of adding the Navajo Times to the local Newsline system. He said he is also in discussion with NFB-Newsline to add Navajo Times to the NFB-Newsline system, and that the Commission will be using state funds to pay for adding the Navajo Times to NFB-Newsline. He said that NFB-Newsline is also planning on adding Indian Country Online to NFB-Newsline.

In response to a question from Mr. Babb, Mr. Trapp said the local Newsline has removed an access code that had been used by multiple users and that users are now required to have a unique code. He said the change was made so that the number of users could be better tracked. Ms. Hayes asked how word of the change is being provided, and Mr. Babb described the announcement that is on Newsline that makes users aware of the change.

Ms. Seanez said it was good to hear that the Native American publications would be added, and she asked how information would be distributed. Mr. Trapp said he wanted to work with Ms. Seanez to get the word out, and to also try to work with the Navajo Times. He said the Farmington office would also help to get the word out. Ms. Hayes suggested putting the word out through the NFB listserve. Ms. Seanez also offered to help with publicity. Mr. Salas added that the Newsline qualifications included persons with a print disability.

11. Unfinished Business

a. Update on Orientation Center Apartment Construction, Lucy Mallahan

Ms. Mallahan reported that construction of the apartment continues, and that the elevation of the property has been raised. She said the apartment should be turnkey ready by the end of February. Ms. Mallahan reported that Facilities Management Division is working to integrate the alarm and security system across the campus. She said the alarm panel will be in the administration building, and will show the status of all buildings. She said a second panel would be in the dorm.

b. Report on Community Rehabilitation Program Portion of Comprehensive Statewide Assessment Survey, Paul Luttrell

Mr. Trapp began by thanking Paul Luttrell for his work on the survey. Mr. Trapp described community rehabilitation programs, saying that they are entities such as Adelante, Tresco, and Liferoots. Mr. Trapp said the Commission is required as a part of the state plan to consider the need to expand, improve, and establish community rehabilitation programs.

Mr. Luttrell thanked Ms. Burma for sending out the survey report. Mr. Luttrell read his survey report (attached) to the Council.

Mr. Trapp thanked Mr. Luttrell for helping with the survey, saying that Mr. Luttrell was the community rehabilitation program representative on the Council. Mr. Trapp also thanked Ms. Hayes for joining the discussion that took place at the September 1 meeting of the New Mexico Council for Purchasing from Persons with Disabilities. Mr. Trapp said the Council for Purchasing is part of the state use program, and that the state plan requires that the agency show how it coordinates with the state use program. Mr. Trapp said he is secretary of the Council for Purchasing, and that the Council for Purchasing distributes state contracts to persons with disabilities, including persons who are blind. Mr. Trapp said the September 1 meeting included numerous CRP representatives, and that it afforded an excellent opportunity to gather comments.

Mr. Luttrell agreed that the meeting was very helpful, and Ms. Hayes said that she also agreed, saying that it was very interesting.

c. Report on Comprehensive Statewide Assessment, Greg Trapp, Jim Salas, and Kelly Burma

Mr. Trapp said the Council approved at its March meeting the process for conducting the Comprehensive Statewide Assessment. He said the process included conducting public meetings. He said a public meeting was held on August 27 in conjunction with the state convention of the National Federation of the Blind. Mr. Trapp said another part of the comprehensive assessment process included the holding of meetings with key stakeholders. Mr. Trapp said it was great that Deborah Dominguez-Clark was a Council member because she is a key stakeholder. Mr. Trapp said the Commission met on August 23 with Patty Beecher, the Superintendent of the New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. He said that Julie Johnson from NMSBVI also attended the meeting. He said the meeting included a discussion of the impact of the pandemic on special education, saying that the Commission would have to help mitigate a lapse in the provision of special education. He said one of the items discussed was a news report that said that New Mexico was one of two states that did not have a shortage of special education teachers. Mr. Trapp said Ms. Beecher agreed that New Mexico did in fact have a shortage of special education teachers, and in particular a shortage of teachers of the blind and visually impaired and also orientation & mobility specialists. He said that they checked, and Albuquerque Public Schools was recruiting for about 70 special education teachers.

Ms. Burma commented on the NMSBVI meeting, saying NMSBVI is seeing a growth in the number of blind children age birth to three, and that as these children age into special education and Commission services that these children will need more academic services as compared to blind children in prior years.

Mr. Trapp said the meeting with NMSBVI also included discussion as to whether there would be any regression of students as a result of the pandemic, and that Ms. Beecher and Ms. Johnson did not think there would be any regression. Mr. Trapp said he was still concerned about the potential for regression. He said that all agreed that the Commission would need to provide additional supports and services to students who did not get instruction as a result of the pandemic.

Mr. Trapp said the Comprehensive Statewide Assessment includes an examination of the literature and demographic data, and that the Council did review some of the literature and demographic data at the August 10 meeting. He said that some of this information was included in the agency strategic plan. He said the rate of diabetes continues to increase, and that younger individuals and children are coming down with new cases of diabetes at a rate that has increased by fifty percent. He said gestational diabetes has increased significantly. Mr. Trapp said that there is a report showing that 14 percent of persons hospitalized with COVID have new cases of diabetes, and some who are not hospitalized are also coming down with diabetes. He said that this will translate into more cases of persons who are blind as a result of diabetic retinopathy. Mr. Trapp said there will also be more persons with additional disabilities who need more intensive services.

Mr. Trapp said the Commission is able to serve all individuals, and is not under an order of selection. He said that the agency will be able to serve all blind individuals residing in the state for the foreseeable future. Mr. Trapp said the agency is also seeing more individuals who are working later in life. He said this is significant because the agency needs to serve an aging workforce and that these individuals may not have the computer skills needed to function in today’s economy. Mr. Trapp reported on the opposite side of the issue, specifically the young persons with failure to launch who are not becoming employed until their late 20s and early 30s. Mr. Trapp said that telework was also an area to be addressed, and that according to a recent Harris poll 37 percent of Americans did not want to return to a five-day work week of in-office work. Mr. Trapp said the pandemic has changed what the workplace looks like. He said that about half of active job seekers report wanting to be fully remote. Mr. Trapp said that telework provides both a challenge and an opportunity, but that the Commission must also prepare these individuals with the high levels of computer skills needed to function in a telework environment.

Ms. Dominguez-Clark responded to the report of an alleged special education teacher shortage, saying she did not know where they got their data. She said the state has a desperate need for teachers. She said there were 54,000 licensed teachers, with 8,000 of those being special education teachers. She said the real issue was that the teachers were not willing to teach special education. She said that there were things in place to address the issue, and she described some of the solutions that are currently being worked on to increase the number of teachers.

12. New Business

a. Status of Pre-Employment Transition Services, Update and Forecast of Ability to Provide Required Services, Greg Trapp, Jim Salas, and Daphne Mitchell

Mr. Trapp said that every year the Commission goes through a process of forecasting whether or not the Commission has the ability to provide the five required Pre-Employment Transition Services, and therefore whether the Commission can provide the nine authorized Pre-ETS services.

Ms. Mitchell updated the Council on the Pre-ETS services provided. She described the REC5 and NMSBVI contracts and activities under those contracts. She said the REC5 contract needed to be updated. She said that they were in the process of setting up a webinar to educate families and students on how Social Security benefits work.

Ms. Burma emphasized the importance of the forecasting process and the ability to provide the authorized services. She described the Pre-ETS activities being provided by the Skills Center.

Mr. Salas said there were 63 individuals who were between the ages of 14 to 21, and that five of these individuals were not participating in an educational training program. He said that this left 58 consumers who were coded as students under Pre-ETS. He said that there were three students coded as elementary, 41 coded as secondary, and two in high school transition programs, one in a career technical program, and eleven in post-secondary programs. Mr. Salas said the Commission had $770,000 in the 15 percent Pre-ETS reserve funds.

Mr. Trapp noted that the $1.4 million that was relinquished was for FFY21, and that the agency would have the whole grant available for FFY22. He said the experience of the agency is that it takes the whole two-year period of performance to spend the full amount of the Pre-ETS reserve. He said that this means that funds are carried over and spent in the following fiscal year. Mr. Trapp said the state economy is doing well, that the agency does not anticipate any federal cuts, and that the VR counselor positions are largely filled. Mr. Trapp concluded by saying that looking at the number of students, the number of counselors, looking at the Pre-ETS reserve amount, and projecting the state budget situation, that he can very safely forecast that the agency has the adequate resources to provide all of the required Pre-ETS services.

b. Discussion of Ability to Provide the Full Range of Vocational Rehabilitation Services to all Eligible Individuals, Greg Trapp, Jim Salas, Daphne Mitchell, and Kevin Romero

Mr. Trapp said the agency is annually required to determine whether it has the ability to provide the full range of vocational rehabilitation services to all eligible individuals residing in the state. He said the agency must adopt an Order of Selection if it is not able to provide the full range of vocational rehabilitation services. He said the agency must look at financial and staffing resources and determine whether it can serve all consumers. Mr. Trapp said the Commission relinquished funds this year, and that the agency was unable to spend this money largely due to the pandemic. He said the Commission was still serving all eligible individuals. Mr. Trapp repeated that the state had a healthy budget, and that the agency is requesting a small increase. He said he anticipates that the Commission will be able to draw down all of its federal VR grant, and that he is hoping to fill the eighth counselor position. Mr. Trapp said he is also looking at moving the vacant counselor position to Santa Fe, which would make filling it easier. He said the Commission had seven VR counselors and one part-time counselor. Mr. Trapp said that given all of this that he can very safely say that the agency can serve all eligible individuals residing in the state and provide them with the full range of VR services, and that the agency will not need to implement an Order of Selection.

Mr. Babb asked if there was any effort by CSAVR to get a waiver of the 15 percent Pre-ETS requirement. Mr. Trapp said he had hoped that a waiver of the Pre-ETS requirement would have been given or that an extension of the period of performance would have been granted. He said he thought the $298 million that was relinquished and $177 million that was unclaimed would help Congress see the need for such relief.

c. Approval of Goals and Priorities, Greg Trapp and Kelly Burma

Mr. Trapp emphasized the importance of the goals and priorities. Mr. Trapp said the draft goals and priorities were sent out to the Council, and said the goals and priorities had been discussed during the August 10 meeting. Mr. Trapp noted the difficulties of conducting meetings through Zoom, and said he failed to review goal and priority “N” during the August 10 meeting. Mr. Trapp said he is proposing that three goals and priorities be removed as they dealt with administrative functions, and he summarized the goals and priorities to be removed. He said that while these will be dropped, the Commission will still be working on the issues contained in the dropped goals and priorities. Mr. Trapp asked Ms. Burma to read proposed Goal and priority A, which she proceeded to do. The proposed goal and priority dealt with the recruitment, hiring, and retention of qualified vocational rehabilitation counselors. Mr. Trapp said the only change to this goal and priority was the adding of language saying that the recruitment, hiring, and retention would be done in an inclusive and culturally competent fashion, which was done as a result of comments made during the August meeting.

(It was then noted that a quorum had been lost, and the meeting paused while efforts were made to obtain a quorum)

Mr. Trapp asked Ms. Burma to read goal and priority “N.” Ms. Burma read the goal and priority, which dealt with the use of the Skills Center to help remediate or mitigate the results of the pandemic and to take advantage of new telework opportunities.

Ms. Burma noted that Mr. Mario Hooee had joined the meeting, restoring a quorum.

Mr. Trapp summarized the meeting discussions, and had Ms. Burma reread goal and priority “A.”

 Ms. Burma read goal and priority “A,” and when she finished Ms. Mallahan noted that Ms. Martinez had joined the meeting. Ms. Burma proceeded to reread goal and priority “N.”

Ms. Bernadine Chavez suggested that goal and priority “A” be revised to be more clear, saying it reads like the agency was going to mitigate issues created by the pandemic. She recommended saying that the Commission would provide services that persons were not able to get as a result of the pandemic. Mr. Trapp suggested adding the word “training” after “skills.” Mr. Trapp said that goal and priority “N” would also have the same issue. Mr. Trapp recommended approving the goals and priorities as submitted, and that the executive committee be authorized to modify the goals and priorities to make it clear that what was being mitigated were deficiencies in skills that could not be taught as a result of the pandemic.

Ms. Bernadine Chavez moved to approve the goals and priorities, with the executive committee being authorized to clarify the language in the goals and priorities.

, saying that the agency would provide additional training to compensate for training that could not be taught during the pandemic. Ms. Seanez seconded the motion. The Chair asked for a roll call vote, and the motion was approved unanimously, with Jim Babb, Bernadine Chavez, Katharine Chavez, Deborah Dominguez-Clark, Peggy Hayes, Mario Hooee, Paul Luttrell, Lila Mae Martinez, and Paula Seanez all voting yes. Craig Cooper, Kaity Ellis, and Yolanda Montoya Cordova were absent for this vote. Daphne Mitchell and Greg Trapp are ex officio and did not vote.

d. Approval of Council Input to Combined State Plan, Greg Trapp and Jim Salas

Mr. Salas said the Council input from the initial submission was sent out to the Council. He said that the issue is what different input does the Council have. Mr. Trapp described the kind of input that the Council could provide, such as disagreeing with an Order of Selection should the agency have an Order of Selection. He said the input could also include the more recent consumer satisfaction survey and goals and priorities. Mr. Trapp said this was another item that could be referred to the executive committee for final revision. He said this would be an easier item if the Council and Commission were in disagreement. Mr. Trapp proposed to update the current Council input to reflect the activities taken to modify the Combined State Plan, consumer satisfaction survey, goals and priorities, and public meetings.

Mr. Babb moved to approve the Council input to reflect the activities taken to modify the Combined State Plan, consumer satisfaction survey, goals and priorities, and public meetings, authorizing the executive committee to finalize the language. Mr. Hooee seconded the motion. Ms. Bernadine Chavez said she reviewed the proposed language and thought all of the Council input was included. The Chair asked for a roll call vote, and the motion was approved unanimously, with Jim Babb, Bernadine Chavez, Katharine Chavez, Deborah Dominguez-Clark, Peggy Hayes, Mario Hooee, Paul Luttrell, Lila Mae Martinez, and Paula Seanez all voting yes. Craig Cooper, Kaity Ellis, and Yolanda Montoya Cordova were absent for this vote. Daphne Mitchell and Greg Trapp are ex officio and did not vote.

e. Approval of State Rehabilitation Council Annual Report for 2021, Greg Trapp and Peggy Hayes

Mr. Trapp said the Council was being proactive in considering this issue early than normal. He said it was on the agenda in case the Council did not have a quorum at the December meeting. He said the annual report is sent to the Governor and to the Secretary of the Department of Education. Mr. Trapp said the Council has historically used a template that is updated each year. He said that last year the report included information on the pandemic. He said the report is due 90 days from the close of the federal fiscal year. Mr. Trapp said he is proposing for this year to update the template with the new employment and independent living numbers, to add a section on the consumer satisfaction survey, to add language on the pandemic, and to update the Council membership. Mr. Trapp said that photographs are not included with the official report that is submitted at the end of December because of time constraints, saying it is an electronic submission that meets the statutory requirement. Mr. Trapp said a printed report is created, and that the agency uses the state use program to print the report. He said the state use contract is with a person who is visually impaired. Mr. Trapp said for purposes of this meeting, it is the electronic version that is being approved.

Ms. Hayes asked whether the updated numbers were for the state or federal fiscal years, and Mr. Trapp said it was a federal report and therefore it was the federal fiscal year. Mr. Trapp said he does not have numbers to present because the federal fiscal year has not yet closed. He said the end of the federal fiscal year is on September 30. Mr. Salas said the numbers were normally available by the end of October. Mr. Trapp said the report would be presented to the Council at the December meeting for approval. He said in the event there is not a quorum at the December meeting, he is asking for approval to prepare the report as described and to authorize the executive committee to make the final changes consistent with the motion to approve the report.

Mr. Luttrell moved to approve the Council annual report as presented, and Mr. Babb seconded the motion. The Chair asked for a roll call vote, and the motion was approved unanimously, with Jim Babb, Bernadine Chavez, Katharine Chavez, Deborah Dominguez-Clark, Peggy Hayes, Mario Hooee, Paul Luttrell, Lila Mae Martinez, and Paula Seanez all voting yes. Craig Cooper, Kaity Ellis, and Yolanda Montoya Cordova were absent for this vote. Daphne Mitchell and Greg Trapp are ex officio and did not vote.

13. Council Open Discussion

Mr. Trapp said that October 15 was White Cane Safety Day, and Ms. Mallahan said there would not be the traditional white cane walk in Alamogordo due to the pandemic but that there is discussion about a virtual event. Ms. Burma said the West Mesa Chapter has activities planned for Blindness Achievement Month in October.

Mr. Trapp and Ms. Burma described a transportation planning grant initiative for Northern New Mexico. Ms. Burma said it was being submitted by the Non-Metro Agency on Aging, and she said she wrote a letter of support. She said it would be an on-demand service, and Mr. Trapp said that the goal was to have access within 30 minutes. There was further discussion on transportation issues.

Ms. Katharine Chavez asked about an individual who was blind and older and who had been referred to her who was looking for support groups and ways to be busy, and there was discussion about the NFB SAGE Division and a recent meeting with Art Schreiber. Mr. Trapp asked that Ms. Katharine Chavez and Mr. Salas connect to take a referral.

14. Audience and Public Comments

Ms. Urja Lansing thanked the Commission staff and SRC for their working serving the blind of New Mexico.

Ms. Diana Marquez asked how a person could be appointed to the SRC or Commission, and Mr. Trapp described how to apply for membership through the Governor’s web page. There was also discussion about Council meetings, and Mr. Trapp said meetings should be taking place statewide and he hoped in-person meetings could start to take place in the spring.

15. Date and Location of Next Meeting

Mr. Trapp said the December 9 meeting conflicts with the fall meeting of the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind, adding that he is on their executive committee and that he is working to get an item on the agenda dealing with training center safety. The Council set December 14 at 9:00 AM for the date of the next meeting.

16. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 1:22 PM.

Approved and Electronically Signed this 14th Day of December, 2021

Peggy Hayes, Chair

State Rehabilitation Council

New Mexico Commission for the Blind

Attachment: 2021 White Cane Safety Day Proclamation

STATE OF NEW MEXICO EXECUTIVE OFFICE

SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO

WHEREAS, New Mexico enacted the white cane law in 1967, becoming the first state in the nation to adopt the model white cane law; and

WHEREAS, The White Cane Law, 28-7-1 NMSA (1978), declares that it is the policy of the State to encourage and enable persons who are blind or visually impaired to participate fully in the social and economic life of the state, and to engage in remunerative employment; and

WHEREAS, The White Cane Law gives persons who are blind or visually impaired the same rights as all citizens to the full and free use of the streets, highways, sidewalks, walkways, public buildings, public facilities and other public places; and

WHEREAS, The White Cane Law gives persons who are blind or visually impaired full and equal accommodations, advantages, facilities, and privileges of all common carriers, airplanes, motor vehicles, railroad trains, motor buses, streetcars, boats, any other public conveyances or modes of transportation, hotels, lodging places, places of public accommodation, amusement or resort, and any other places to which the general public is invited; and

WHEREAS, The White Cane Law requires that drivers shall take all necessary precautions to avoid injury to pedestrians who are using a white cane or a guide dog; and

WHEREAS, it is important for all New Mexicans to be aware of The White Cane Law; to be aware that persons who are blind or visually impaired use the white cane to travel on public streets, roads, and at places of public accommodation; to be aware that persons with disabilities have much to offer and that their energy, creativity, and hard work greatly strengthens our state and our economy; and to recognize that the white cane is an instrument of safety and independence for persons who are blind or visually impaired

NOW THEREFORE, I, Michelle Lujan Grisham, Governor of the State of New Mexico, do hereby proclaim October 15, 2021 as:

"White Cane Safety Day"

throughout the state of New Mexico.

Attest: Maggie Toulouse Oliver, Secretary of State

Done at the Executive Office this 1st day of September 2021. Witness my hand and the Great Seal of the State of New Mexico.

Michelle Lujan Grisham

Attachment: CRP Survey Report

 Report on Community Rehabilitation Portion of Comprehensive Statewide Assessment Survey

Sept. 13, 2021, by Paul Luttrell

SRC Members: To follow is a report I compiled at the request of Executive Director Greg Trapp.

Purpose of the Survey: A Statewide Assessment of Rehabilitation Needs of Individuals with Disabilities residing within the State and the need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs is conducted jointly by the agency and the State Rehabilitation Council every three years. For the 2021 assessment, it will utilize a variety of sources and methodologies for deriving information about:

1. The rehabilitation needs of individuals with the most significant disabilities and their need for supported employment;
2. Individuals with disabilities who are minorities and individuals with disabilities who have been unserved or underserved by the vocational rehabilitation program.
3. Individuals with disabilities served through components if the statewide workforce investment system other than the vocational rehabilitation program.
4. Additionally, it was requested to get input as to how the Commission and CRP’s might more closely work together to meet the needs of persons who are blind or visually impaired.

Actions taken for input: The following were contacted: a) the Association for Developmental Disabilities Community Providers (ADDCP), which has 24 members state-wide, b) Goodwill of New Mexico, c) Benefits Advisor of DVR who also works with the Social Security Ticket to Work Program. Finally, I very much appreciated that Mr. Trapp arranged for us to participate in a meeting of the New Mexico Council for Purchasing from Persons with Disabilities to get input from their membership.

Results of these Actions:

1. There is a great need for: transportation services, on-the-job training, job coaching, and job development to create “wrap around support” for individuals and families. Seeking out input from family members to obtain their perspective and ideas as well as participation to improve services is key.
2. Advertising within the CRP’s and other agencies to promote hiring of the visually impaired and blind in competitive positions. Adelante, specifically expressed interest in such hiring.
3. That rehabilitation counselors should continue to think long term, to consider career needs of individuals and not just looking for a quick closure to a job. Seeking out the supports for their clientele as mentioned in 1) above.
4. For those in supported employment, there is a continual need for long term supports including natural supports and the individual themselves becoming more independent as well as interdependent.
5. All stakeholders need to continue to work on their belief that persons with the most significant disabilities can work, contribute to society and become self-sufficient.
6. Remember that many folks with disabilities have their issues cycle and sometime it means accepting and working with someone going two steps forward and one step backwards. Again, thinking long term.
7. There is, frankly a negative view of State VR. There has been a history of changing of directors deputy directors, laws, regulations, inconsistent flow of dollars, etc., make it challenging to provide consistent and quality services. A change in attitude at all levels, starting at the top must occur to lead to more positive and constructive actions.
8. The statewide workforce investment system is fragmented and doesn’t seem to collaborate and work together. The components of the system: VR, American Job Centers, colleges/universities, provider agencies, employers, families and others need to learn to work together. A concrete example - National Disability Awareness Month is coming up in October and it would be great if all parties could come together and plan some activities that promote creative new ideas and approaches. We need to see ourselves as interdependent needing each other in order to succeed. To be fair, the pandemic has been a challenge, but we all need to find a way to work past this.
9. Expand the utilization of the Commission for the Blind as a training resource for community agencies, employers and others to connect those organizations to this great resource, which are individuals who are visually impaired or blind.