

**RESPONSE TO THE EXECUTIVE BOARD
OF THE
NYS OFFICE OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES
COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND AND
VISUALLY HANDICAPPED**

December 2012

**RESPONSE TO THE EXECUTIVE BOARD OF THE
COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY HANDICAPPED
2011 REPORT**

INTRODUCTION

The Executive Board (EB) of the New York State Commission for the Blind and Visually Handicapped (CBVH) was created by the New York State Legislature in 2007 to examine services provided to legally blind or visually impaired New Yorkers by CBVH and other state agencies and to make recommendations to improve services where needed. The members of the EB are appointed by the Governor and Legislature.

This report is submitted in satisfaction of CBVH's obligation, pursuant to the Unconsolidated Laws §8701-c, to issue an annual report to the Governor, Temporary President of the Senate, Speaker of the Assembly, Senate Finance Committee and Assembly Ways and Means Committee, which contains an evaluation of the current status of any Executive Board recommendations implemented by CBVH and their impact on services and programs for blind and visually impaired persons.

The Executive Board's third report was issued on January 23, 2012, and reiterated its concern about issues discussed in previous reports, namely: the Business Enterprise Program Expansion created by Chapter 532 of the Laws of 2010, Infant / Early Childhood Development, Childhood Rehabilitation Services, and Rehabilitation Services to Older New Yorkers Experiencing Vision Loss. The report also included justification, and a call to the Legislature for funding, of a statistically valid study of the state population that examines in more detail the incidence of blindness and visual impairment in the state.

The report responds to each of these areas and provides an update on recommendations proposed in previous reports. Recommendations made by the Executive Board are in plain or un-bolded print. The CBVH responses are **bolded**.

BUSINESS ENTERPRISE PROGRAM

BOARD RECOMMENDATION: We reiterate our recommendation that a more aggressive plan be developed to address the serious under-employment rate in the blind community, by assuring that the Commission is provided by the Legislature with sufficient resources, authority and, if necessary, more specific numeric goals to more aggressively implement expansion of the Business Enterprise Program.

CBVH RESPONSE:

The CBVH Business Enterprise Program (BEP) continues to make strides in implementing Chapter 532 of the Laws of 2010.

- **Draft Regulations have been developed and are currently under review by the U.S. Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration.**
- **BEP staff are benchmarking Business Enterprise Programs around the country as they work to upgrade the current management database.**
- **Contacts and discussions regarding new opportunities have occurred with the following entities:**
 - **SUNY Stony Brook**
 - **SUNY Cortland**
 - **SUNY Buffalo**
 - **SUNY Binghamton**
 - **Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority**
 - **NYS Thruway Authority maintenance locations and headquarters**
 - **Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA)**
 - **New York State Olympic Regional Development Authority (ORDA)**
- **A database has been developed to track all newly covered entities and is updated regularly.**

The new opportunities explored so far have existing contracts with other retail companies and are bound by those contracts until they expire. The State University of New York Central Administration has given assurances that CBVH will be provided notification of the expiration of these contracts within two years of the expiration of those contracts. Similarly, the New York State Thruway Authority and MTA will forward any upcoming opportunities to CBVH.

In addition to investigating opportunities related to the recent legislation, the BEP has negotiated with the city of Syracuse and will assume control of vending machines currently operated by the city. Discussions were also held with military operations in Buffalo and Central New York.

A standardized training program for BEP managers has been finalized and is being implemented statewide. BEP is working closely with CBVH program members to incorporate computer training into the curriculum.

INFANT / EARLY CHILDHOOD VISION SCREENING

BOARD RECOMMENDATION: The Board reiterates the need to establish an infant / early childhood vision screening program modeled on the infant hearing screening program established pursuant to Section 2500-g of the Public Health Law.

CBVH RESPONSE:

CBVH recommends the Executive Board establish dialogue with the New York State Legislature on this issue.

CHILDHOOD REHABILITATION SERVICES

BOARD RECOMMENDATION: The Board reiterates its 2010 recommendations and strongly encourages the Legislature to initiate legislative action during 2012 by holding hearings on the rehabilitation/education needs of blind and visually impaired children throughout the state.

CBVH RESPONSE:

CBVH supports the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) from the National Agenda for the Education of Children and Youths with Visual Impairments and is committed to working with legally blind children at a young age to provide services to help them compete among sighted peers now and in the future. Services are designed to supplement the services received by the student at the school.

CBVH's Children's Consultants and Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors work closely with Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVI's) and encourage staff at the school to implement the ECC. CBVH is not responsible for educational programs, but empowers students and parents by providing information and teaching them to advocate for an appropriate educational program that meets the child's needs.

REHABILITATION SERVICES TO OLDER NEW YORKERS EXPERIENCING VISION LOSS

BOARD RECOMMENDATION: The Legislature should convene hearings to examine the rehabilitation needs of older New Yorkers experiencing vision loss with the goals of:

- A. Determining the magnitude of the problem and rehabilitation needs of this population.
- B. As an aspect of this examination the Legislature should direct the appropriate state department/agency to undertake a statistically valid statewide survey of New Yorkers over age 55 to determine the prevalence of legal blindness, severe vision loss, and the prevalence of medical condition in this population reasonably likely to lead to severe vision loss and/or blindness and provide financial support to cover the costs of this study
- C. As an aspect of these hearings, the legislature should examine the fiscal and programmatic resources currently available within the state to provide for these rehabilitation needs and determine how these resources and program can be more effectively coordinated to provide appropriate and adequate services to this population of New Yorkers.

CBVH RESPONSE:

The Executive Board should establish a dialogue with the New York State Legislature on these issues.

OVERVIEW OF PROGRESS ON RECOMMENDATIONS IN PRIOR REPORTS

Staff Training

We met with the orientation and mobility/vision rehabilitation therapy staff, the district managers and field supervisors to benchmark best practices and obtain feedback on future needs. We are reviewing their recommendations and will revise the New Employee Orientation protocol to allow for more thorough and consistent training statewide.

We co-sponsored the Vision Rehabilitation and Employment Institute in May with over 100 attendees. Workshops primarily focused on technology and employment related topics along with individual workshops on cultural competence and autism spectrum disorders.

CBVH staff attended the annual NYS Association of Persons in Supported Employment (APSE) conference, the annual NYS Association for the Education

and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER) conference, and numerous local workshops.

CBVH staff took advantage of the array of training opportunities offered by the Region 2 Technical Assistance and Continuing Education Center (TACE) at the University at Buffalo. Trainings included “The Path to Employment,” “Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD),” “Training Techniques in Employment Settings,” and “Autism,” among others.

The annual counselor meeting and training in November was cancelled due to Super Storm Sandy.

O&M/VRT TRAINING

Hunter College graduated six students last year and currently has 17 students enrolled in the two-year program.

A workgroup consisting of representatives from CBVH, not-for profit agencies for the blind and the University at Buffalo has been formed with the goal of establishing orientation and mobility and vision rehabilitation teacher training certificate programs within the Center for Rehabilitation Synergy at the University at Buffalo.

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Materials are available for marketing to employers, and have been distributed to some employers on a limited basis. The marketing committee is working with each district office to develop a targeted marketing approach for employers. The marketing committee is implementing phase 2 marketing strategies that will include outreach and marketing material created for the medical community, consumers and other stakeholders. Revisions to current materials are being made.

SERVICES TO UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS

The TACE Center from the University at Buffalo and CBVH held planning meetings at each CBVH district office in an effort to further define strategies to enhance outreach efforts in individual communities.

TECHNOLOGY POLICY

The Assistive Technology Workgroup continues to meet and has developed a draft policy for the purchase of communications devices such as smart phones and tablets.

The Assistive Technology Centers Request for Proposals were disseminated and new contracts will be awarded effective January 1, 2013.

Industries for the Blind

The Office of Children and Family Services and CBVH designated National Industries for the Blind (NIB) to administer the New York State Preferred Source Program for people who are blind. OCFS expects that NIB will use its expertise and experience in creating jobs throughout the country to bolster employment opportunities in New York State. The interim designation is for one year and became effective on December 1.

During this process, CBVH established a relationship with the NYS Office of General Services (OGS) which administers the preferred source program. OGS is embarking on new strategies such as the strategic sourcing initiative which will allow NYS agencies the opportunity to one stop shop when ordering materials and services. This relationship will allow CBVH and NIB opportunities for open communication on this and other important programs.