

Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired
Public Meeting, Saturday, May 04, 2024, 9:00 a.m.
LaQuinta by Wyndham, 2600 Eagles Wings PLC.
North Platte, Nebraska

Minutes

Call to Order. Welcome and introductions. Announcement concerning public comment periods, meeting agendas, open meeting act, proof of publication, recordings and other logistics.

Brent Heyen, Chairperson of the Board of Commissioners, called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. The meeting began with introductions.

Commissioners present: Brent Heyen, Chairperson, Lincoln; Cheryl Livingston, Vice Chairperson and Designee of the National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska, Lincoln; Mark Bulger, Designee of the American Council of the Blind of Nebraska, Omaha; Linda Mentink, Executive Secretary, Columbus; Miguel Rocha, Scottsbluff.

Staff present: Carlos Serván, Executive Director; Erin Brandyberry, Deputy Director of Services; Tammie Dunn, Deputy Director of Finance; Kathy Stephens, Administrative Specialist.

Public present: No one from the public was in attendance.

The Notice of the Meeting was published in the Lincoln Journal Star, the State Government Calendar, NCBVI Website, NFB Newsline® and Radio Talking Book. The Notice was also sent to ACBN, NFBN, and the NCBVI List Serve.

Approval of the February 3, 2024 public meeting minutes.

Commissioner Livingston moved to approve the Minutes of the February 3, 2024 Commission Meeting as posted on our website. Commissioner Bulger seconded the motion.

Roll call: Ayes: Bulger, Mentink, Heyen, Livingston, Rocha

Nayes:

Motion Carried

Report from the Commissioners

Commissioner Mark Bulger

Mark reported that he serves as President for the Omaha Association of the Blind (OAB), and he attends their monthly meetings. They are in their 101st year. The OAB offers a social component, an informative component, and they may work on and advocate for anything that is Omaha related. Mark stated that in the 1960's the OAB was given a large donation with the mission to do something worthwhile for the city of Omaha. They set out a project to build an apartment building which was supposed to help blind people. Subsequently, it went to house all disabled people and elderly people. The apartment building has 42 units and it is affordable, accessible housing for primarily low income people. Currently, there are no blind people living in the units, but it still

serves a valuable purpose. Recently, the apartments changed property management which has been an interesting process.

Mark noted that he also serves as the immediate past president of the American Council of the Blind of Nebraska (ACBN). They just held their one-day state convention which was in Bellevue, Nebraska. Mark stated that the convention was well attended, and they had over 15 exhibitors and a number of speakers. Mark stated that they thank NCBVI's support, and he hopes that everyone learned some things and had a good time.

Mark stated that he is looking forward to attending the Silver Summit as a vendor for the ACBN and as a NCBVI commissioner.

Commissioner Miguel Rocha

Miguel reported that he attended National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska (NFBN) Board meetings and the At-Large Chapter meetings. He also attended the NFBN State convention in Gering. Miguel stated that he is still attending UNO for his degree in Management and Information Systems. Miguel noted that the Spring semester will end in a couple of weeks, and he should be completed in December 2024.

Commission Chair Brent Heyen

Brent reported that he works as an interim hotel manager where he demonstrates the abilities of a blind person every day in the work he performs, and he sets a good example of what a blind person can do. For the past seven months he has been the interim manager of the Staybridge Suites. He has transferred within the company, and he is now working as a front office manager for the Fairfield Inn. He is helping out at his job wherever he is needed.

Commission Vice Chair Cheryl Livingston

Cheryl reported that she is the designee of the NFBN on the Board. She continues to serve as the treasurer of the Senior Division of the NFBN. She also continues to serve as the treasurer of the NFBN and she has served in that position since 1988. She is also secretary of the Lincoln Chapter of the NFBN and she is now serving her second term.

Cheryl reported that the NFBN held their state convention in Gering from April 11 to April 14. Cheryl noted that the convention was very good and well attended. Cheryl worked at the registration table for a lot of the time. Cheryl noted that the banquet was excellent.

Cheryl reported that an election of officers was held at this year's convention. The NFBN officers are as follows:

NFBN Officers: President, Jamie Richey; First Vice President, Christine Boone; Second Vice President, Bob Burns; Secretary Linda Mentink, Treasurer, Cheryl Livingston.

Board members Nancy Coffman, Geralyn Konruff, Karen Lemmon, Maura Loberg, Rachna Marsh, and Kimberly Scherbarth.

Cheryl reported that she also attended the NCBVI State Staff meeting in March. Cheryl stated she thought it was an excellent meeting and she thoroughly enjoyed it.

Commission Executive Secretary Linda Mentink

Since our last meeting, Linda has attended two Alumni Association of the Wisconsin School for the Blind and Visually Impaired board meetings, three lunches with members of the disbanded National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska (NFBN) Columbus Area Chapter, two NFBN Board meetings, two NFBN Senior Division meetings, three NFBN Historians Committee meetings, the NCBVI State Staff meeting, the NFBN state convention (at which she was elected Affiliate Secretary and re-elected Senior Division Secretary, and a Friends of NCBVI meeting. The State Staff meeting was a great experience. She enjoyed meeting and interacting with many of the staff and listening to and learning from all the presentations.

Friends continues to work on getting grants and building their website. There are currently seven members on the Friends Board. Barbara Loos will be stepping down at the end of the year. They'd really like to have ten members, so they are open to any suggestions of people they can contact.

Report from the Executive Director

I. Administration

During the last quarter, I attended the following meetings and activities:

Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC): The Nebraska Department of Education. Special Education reported on their different services and how they help students with disabilities to go to school. They also talked about the process on how they address concerns from advocates.

NCSAB monthly meetings:

At the first quarterly meeting with RSA and the Commissioner, Dante Allen, RSA listened to the concerns and questions from different state directors and the NCSAB consultant. The focus was on Randolph-Sheppard and several blind vendors were present. The next meeting was during the Spring NCSAB conference where Commissioner Allen listened and said he will look at the reduction of paperwork issue. His background is communication; thus, he wants VR agencies to tell the successful stories of what we all do.

We also worked on putting together the agenda items for the 2024 Spring conference. The Spring conference was April 10-12 in Bethesda, Maryland. One of the main concerns brought up during the conference was that Congress is only approving flat funding for RSA, meaning that we are not getting the 8% increase the President and the HELP Committee recommended. They are also recommending not to increase the budget next year. For NCBVI, this means we will get \$240,000 less than expected this year from the Federal government, and for FY-2025 \$95,000 less than originally planned. In other words, by FY-2025, we will get around \$335,000 less than expected. Congress and the President are making this decision because, for the last several years, many states have been sending unused funds back to the Federal government. NCSAB and CSAVR started to put efforts on persuading Congress to give the states the cost-of-living adjustment for 2025. Other areas covered in the conference were OIB, Pre-ETS, employment, artificial

intelligence, and Randolph-Sheppard. On April 29, another conference call with RSA took place to address more issues regarding Randolph-Sheppard.

ADA Task Force: The only item was to educate other state agencies about the new Department of Justice (DOJ) interpretation of Title II of the ADA regulation, which now includes digital accessibility as part of the section. DOJ is giving two to three years to private and public agencies to comply with this interpretation. The length of time to comply will depend on the size of each agency.

Star Tran monthly meetings: We approved the new temporary location for the Downtown Transfer Center to L Street and 11th. The one right now is being demolished. They also gave an up-date on the new paratransit vans being delivered, bus stop Improvement, and the Multimodal Transportation Center up-date. The Lincoln Police Department provided some training on safety protocols.

Attended the Friends quarterly meeting where we talked about needing support for SSP and OIB technology.

At the Boards and Commissions meeting: We had presentations from the Ombudsmen office on conflict of interest.

I attended the NFBN and ACBN state conventions and presented about NCBVI services and the importance of our partnership. Several NCBVI staff and clients also attended the state conventions.

I was appointed to the Olmstead Advisory Board. The first meeting was held in April and the focus was to go over preliminary results from a survey. We are talking about expanding this survey with more questions and sending it to more people.

We started a support service provider (SSP) pilot project for deaf-blind Nebraskans. This will help them to be independent and feel more integrated in society. VANCRO is managing this project, and so far, we have 13 deaf-blind consumers registered.

Tactile Images-3-D Works met with different museums. This is to bring accessibility to the blind in art and science. There will be around 103 weeks of exposition within four museums. In addition, the Pershing mural is being remodeled and their team has approached Tactile Images-3-D Works and me to ask for advice and partner together on making the mural accessible.

We have renewed different Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with several public schools, American Job Centers, and more.

The Business Office:

- The Business Office has assessed the current budget in response to the notification of flat funding for the Vocational Rehabilitation Grant (VR) for this federal fiscal year and the next. We have identified flexibility within this year's budget, as we are still utilizing funds from the prior fiscal year.
- Our team is engaged in efforts to refine the Internal Budget Projection for FFY 2024.
- Timely Submission of RSA-17 and Streamlining Contract Processes.

Technology:

- Submitted a ticket with Administrative Services for some accessibility issues we found with the State's Workday portal.
- -Ordered new computer equipment for staff and will be swapping out their old computers.
- -Ordered new pc monitors for NBE to be used with the micro markets.
- -Updated the lease and had new multifunction copiers installed for Lincoln and Omaha office.

Kathy Stephens:

Completed registration information and hotel reservations for staff and clients to attend the NFBN and ACBN State conventions. Also, completed registrations, flight arrangements and hotel arrangements for staff attending the NCSAB Spring conference. Made hotel and flight reservations for staff attending the CSUN Conference in San Diego and the Knowledge is Sweet Conference in St. Louis.

Attended an Independent Agency meeting on February 6, March 6 and April 3. The first meeting was a presentation by Senator Arch about legislation that would affect agency/board/commission operations and meetings. The second meeting was a presentation by Dave Hunter, the Executive Director of the Accountability and Disclosure Commission. He talked to us about conflicts of interest and statements of financial interest. The third meeting was a presentation by Jay Sloan, Director of Operations for Tyler Nebraska. He spoke to us about the IT services that Tyler Nebraska provides to many Nebraska State agencies.

Working with staff on keeping up maintenance for NCBVI state leased vehicles.

II. Human Resources

Staff Up-Date:

In the Omaha District: Candice Dollar will complete her training on May 13, 2024, and will start working in the field. We still have one orientation counselor position vacant.

In the North Platte District: We hired Josh Golden and he started his Center training the first week of April. Grace Garza finished her training and is now working in the field as a VR counselor. We have made an offer to a candidate for the VR counselor position, and we are in the process of doing a background check. We still have an orientation counselor vacant in the North Platte District.

In the Training Center: We hired Hannah Dakan, who started Center training on April 22. She was doing her internship to become a certified teacher for the blind. Sarah Vrana will finish her certification for O&M by the middle of May.

The Lincoln District, Training Center, and NBE are all now fully staffed.

In Administration: We have one position being advertised. This is for the front desk.

Director Serván noted that the positions that the strategic and succession planning committee recommended are being posted one at the time with State Personnel. At this point we submitted the support staff position for Omaha and the HR/policy/PR position to State Personnel.

Training Opportunities:

We had our State Staff meeting at the end of March. Commissioners Mentink and Livingston also attended. Adelmo Vigil, President of the National Blindness Professional Certification Board provided the training. We are all thankful for the snacks provided by the Friends.

Cristal Dimas and Tim Jefferson attended their first National Rehabilitation Leadership Institute (NRLI) training in February.

We plan to send Tammie Dunn and Pam Rademacher to the next NRLI cohort. Meanwhile, Tammie completed a leadership certificate with the state, and Pam took her first class for the leadership certificate training.

Tim Jefferson, Pam Rademacher, Tammie Dunn, and I attended the Spring NCSAB conference in Bethesda.

Hugh Phan, Charles Andersen, and Mickie Saltzman attended the CSUN conference in March. This is the largest conference on accessible technology.

Several staff members attended the ACBN and NFBN state conventions in April.

Gracie Swim and Kaytlyn Hilligas went to the Nebraska Transition: Partnerships for Progress. They also attended Knowledge is Sweet Diabetes National Seminar in St. Louis in April.

Gracie completed the following trainings: I've Been Diagnosed with Glaucoma. Now What, Overcoming Burnout, Empowering Youth in Vocational Rehabilitation, and Nebraska Transition Partnerships for Progress and Indigenous Disability History.

Sarah Vrana, the new Cane Travel Instructor, attended ten weeks of immersion training at the Louisiana Center for the Blind from January 7 through March 15. She is also attending online classes through Louisiana Tech University to earn a Graduate Certificate in Orientation and Mobility.

Pam Rademacher completed the low vision basics class offered through Eschenbach in early April.

Kaytlyn has been attending the Inclusive Education Lay Advocacy Program which is a 4-week program.

III. Field Services

Winnerfest was held in Lincoln in mid-March. The students were able to tour the American Job Center, UNL and NCBVI for the NBE program.

The Lincoln district continue to have GATE teaching programs.

Counselors continue to attend IEPs and network with the public and private schools in Nebraska to enhance services to blind students.

Some of the schools we networked with are the Columbus Career Expo at CHS for Juniors and Seniors in high school. South Sioux City School, Madison High School, Columbus High School, Norfolk High School, Fremont High School, Victorian Inn, Randolph Elementary, ESU7, Norfolk Public Schools, NCECBVI, Brady public schools, Kearney public schools, Lexington public schools, Alma public schools, Kenesaw public schools and Central Valley schools, Gibbon schools, Grand Island Senior High, Kearney public schools, Valentine High School, Chadron State College, Chadron Primary School, Chadron Middle School, ESU 13, Crawford, Hemingford, Scottsbluff High School and Westmoor Elementary.

Kimberly attended ESU 10 Transition Agency Fair that was held in Kearney. Cristal and Kimberly participated in ESU 9 Transition Fair that was held in Grand Island.

Our field staff participated in several presentations and networking events.

In the Lincoln District:

Held a booth at the Lincoln Children's Museum,

Participated with and held a booth for the Disabilities in Disasters Preparedness Workshop in Tecumseh,

Held a booth at the Transition Conference held at the Innovation Campus,

Held a booth at the O'Neil Community Center Event.

Held a table at Lincoln Public Schools at the Career Academy,

Attended the EmployLNK monthly Meeting via Zoom,

Kaytlyn spends Wednesdays at the American Job Center in Lincoln

Presented to the American Job Center Forum

Attended the Circle for Diversity and Inclusion Monthly Meeting,

Attended the Lincoln Commission on Human Rights Annual Civil Rights Conference,

Connected with St. Matthews church in Lincoln,

Attended Employ Columbus,

Presented to Norfolk Family Collaboration,

Attended a Nursing Career Expo at NECC Lifelong Learning Center,

Presented at Community Food Access in Columbus, the CFP Community Collaborative, the Early Childhood Springtacular event, Pholman Ag Complex, NECC with Early Development Network, Sixpence, Madison House in Norfolk and at the Community evening Event.

Amy serves on the Disability Pride committee. She also serves as treasurer of the NFB Blind Rehabilitation Professionals Division. She is also participating in developing a training program for Vocational Rehabilitation.

In the Omaha District:

The Omaha staff toured North Point to discuss opportunities for future Disability Awareness presentations to their staff.

met with the Dynamic Workforce Youth program with HWS.

Presented to one of the Lions club chapters.

Mickie Saltzman, Alex France, and Kelly Coleman have continued their collaboration with Disability Support Services at all three campuses of MCC to enhance the support for NCBVI clients.

In the North Platte District:

Consulted and networked with Midwest Theatre, Adam's Market, Imperial Manner, Stone Hearth Estates, Fresh Garden Market, Dollar General, Sun Theatre, Homestead Senior Living, Get 'N Go, Blueprint Engines, Advance Auto, Dismas Charities, Nebraska VR and the Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

Kimberly represented NCBVI at Employ Kearney and Grand Island, as well as Project Search in Kearney and Grand Island.

Cristal attended the Greater Nebraska Workforce Board meeting in Hastings. Kimberly represented NCBVI at the Agrability Council Meeting.

Client Statistics:

Number of Clients in All Statuses Served at the end of the Period:

OIB clients was 582.

IL clients under 55 was 86.

VR clients was 460.

We had consumers obtain jobs as:

Business Operations Specialist, Postsecondary Teacher, Elementary Teacher, Janitor/Cleaner (2), Landscaping/Grounds keeping, Massage Therapist, Mental Health Counselors, Project Management Specialist, Psychiatric Technician, Randolph-Sheppard Vendor, and Teaching Assistant.

IV. Training Center

We are planning the 50th anniversary celebration of the Nebraska Center for the Blind and it's scheduled for October 15, 2024, in Lincoln. The celebration will take place in Lincoln and will include speakers and a tour of the Center. It will be open to the public, and we hope the Board of Commissioners can attend. More details will be provided in the future.

We currently have eight people attending training: five VR consumers and three staff trainees.

This quarter, we had one consumer tour, and two 3-day stays. A tour was also provided to students, staff, and parents of Red Oak Christian School. Two 3-day stays are scheduled in May for new high school graduates. They plan to attend WAGES before beginning Center training in the fall.

The Continental Commons Building, where the Center student apartments are located, conducted the annual fire alarm and elevator tests in April.

Center staff had the opportunity to collaborate virtually on March 1 with some of their colleagues from across the country to share ideas. Since we are such a small Center, this is a valuable opportunity to develop a professional network and continue to improve service delivery by

gathering ideas from other states. Center staff also participated in a continuous improvement workshop with Adelmo Vigil, the president of NBPCB.

The storage area used by NBE at the end of the Center hallway, affectionately referred to as “the cage,” will get a makeover and be transformed into a larger student lounge and multipurpose room for the Center. The flooring will be replaced, walls painted, and new furniture ordered.

NBE hopes to bring back functional vending machines to use when training new NBE vendors, which will also make drinks available for Center students and NCBVI staff.

Representatives from the National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska, as well as the American Council of the Blind of Nebraska, presented to Center students regarding the role of consumer organizations. Center students will be given the opportunity to attend a national convention of their choosing.

The Center also hosted the first ever Nebraska Cane Walk, a collaboration between NCBVI and ESU-3. Blind students between the ages of 5-21 were invited to Lincoln on April 24 to participate in a series of skill-building exercises using sleep shades and canes to build self-confidence and be exposed to NCBVI's philosophy. NCBVI staff volunteered to work with students at various stations in and around the building. Only six students registered this year, but we hope to repeat this event and increase participation in the future.

Filming of a promotional video of the Center is planned for this year. Currently we are going through the process of requesting proposals to select a vendor.

V. Nebraska Business Enterprise

VENDING SITE UPDATE

Micro Markets

As of the writing of this report NBE still is waiting on installs of micro markets at two DHHS locations in the Omaha/Bellevue area, and one at the NDE building in the Lincoln area. Several setbacks with installing internet at these locations have caused the delay. Those issues have now been resolved and installation should be happening very soon.

NBE is also preparing to install another new micro market in Hastings at the DHHS office.

The micro market that was installed at the STRATCOM facility on Offutt AFB continues to go very well. A second micro market adjacent to the cafeteria is scheduled to go in sometime this fall after the building completes a renovation project.

Vending Sites

NBE installed and placed a Vendor at the Beatrice State Developmental Center. This site is going very well and the Vendor, who is new to the program, is very happy with their new venture.

A new vending site has launched at the Lincoln USDA office. This site is going well considering the building is not yet fully staffed.

Upcoming Sites

NBE is preparing for new sites at a federal site in Omaha that should be in place by this fall.

Also in the works is the combining of two federal sites in the Lincoln area. Both sites to be combined are currently serviced by the same Vendor. Once combined, the site will operate as a micro market.

Changes are coming to the cafeteria operation at the STRATCOM facility. NBE is working closely with the government to remodel some aspects of the current space to make it more friendly to the customers. This work is scheduled to be completed this fall. Changes currently in the plan, in addition to a very well-appointed micro market, include a permanent salad bar area and online ordering for customers.

NBE Licensed Vendors

There are currently twelve Licensed Vendors in the NBE program and five operating sites as Trainees. In addition, at least one current NCBVI VR client is showing interest in the NBE program.

Vending Site Complaints

The only major complaint received by NBE in this past quarter involved some machines being under-stocked and under-serviced. This situation was addressed and ultimately the decision was reached by both NBE and the location to remove services from the location. While NBE always prefers to not give up sites; in the long-term this was the best decision for both parties.

The commissioners thanked Director Serván for his report, and they had a few questions.

Commissioner Livingston asked Director Serván about the email he sent out regarding the Executive Order issued by Governor Pillen to slash nearly 1,000 vacant state positions that have been vacant for 90 days or more, while preserving certain critical positions. She asked if this will adversely affect NCBVI's ability to fill its current vacant positions and to fill any new positions that come along.

Director Serván stated that this is a concern for NCBVI and many state agencies. Agencies will be receiving more information on this next week via a Zoom meeting. Director Serván noted that he will be advocating for NCBVI because our agency receives federal funding. We will argue that NCBVI needs to continue to provide services in order to receive federal funds.

Erin Brandyberry added that in terms of the timelines of NCBVI's current open positions, by the time this goes into effect on June 1, the only position that may go past this 90-day time period is our open VR counselor position in Omaha. Erin noted that she and Tim have interviews scheduled for Tuesday of next week and hoping for a second interview on Friday to keep it moving along.

Commissioner Rocha asked Carlos to expand on what the NCBVI team learned when they visited and had conversations with other state VR agencies.

Director Serván noted that while NCBVI is a very good agency, we don't know everything. So, the idea is to exchange ideas on how other VR agencies do things. It's a learning and teaching experience and it refines what NCBVI is doing.

Erin noted that she and Jessica Bartenbach went to Ruston, LA to visit the Louisiana Center for the Blind. Erin noted that sometimes what comes out of these types of things is some perspective of where our strengths are as well. Erin added that there are also some logistical things that are shared and both agencies receive good input on what works well and what does not work so well.

Commissioner Rocha asked if the remodel of the Stratcom cafeteria was through NBE or if it is through Offutt, or both. Director Serván noted that the remodel is mainly through Offutt. Every few years Offutt gets a new commander, and the new General wants to make upgrades to the cafeteria. The only expenditure for NBE is the micro-market.

Commissioner Bulger stated that he has noticed that NCBVI counselors do a lot of networking. He asked what the purpose of the networking is and how does NCBVI measure the outcome of it.

Director Serván stated that as our staff network, they are educating folks about the services NCBVI provides. So, when there is an opportunity for a blind individual to get an internship or employment, we have that contact. We find that when we advocate about the services we provide, it is easier to place a client. We do not see the results of the networking right away, but as we are known in the community it is easier for us place clients. Also, Director Serván stated that one of the reasons he loves his job is that no two days are the same. Blind people are people, but they each have different needs such as housing, mental health, adoption, custody issues, etc., and NCBVI is not an expert in all those areas so networking helps us identify those areas so we can better guide our clients to solve those issues. The way we measure success is by getting good jobs for our clients and solving any issues they have.

Commissioner Bulger thanked Carlos for his response.

Erin Brandyberry added that one of the reasons we choose to use the word networking is because it applies to all NCBVI's programs and not just VR. Networking also includes the OIB and IL programs. NCBVI also has a lot of cross-over between our programs. Also, NCBVI does try to do some job sharing in regards to having staff who enjoy networking and getting good results do most of the networking.

Regarding the negotiation of the bid for the Stratcom cafeteria, Commissioner Rocha asked if the Randolph-Sheppard operator to be operating the cafeteria in the negotiation. Director Serván stated that Rachetta is the Randolph-Sheppard operator. Rachetta was at the cafeteria before, and then her husband had some health issues so she had to leave to take care of him. Rachetta is now back at the cafeteria and she has reclaimed her position as the Randolph-Sheppard operator. The expectation is that she will be the blind licensee at the cafeteria.

Commissioner Rocha asked if the payment of 11% to NBE is something that has happened yet. Director Serván stated that the set-aside is 8%. This is something that needs to be negotiated with the vendor because they need to be able to show that they can run the cafeteria. At this time, the vendor is not able to run the cafeteria. If the vendor is not able to run the cafeteria, they will receive a flat salary per year and they will need to determine how they will pay the 8% to set-aside. This needs to be negotiated with the subcontractors. This is in the plans because we have not yet renewed the contract with the subcontractors because we need to renew the contract with the cafeteria first.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Newsline® Update – by Jamie K. Richey

I'm Back! From 2007 to 2017 I served as the Nebraska NFB-Newsline® Outreach Coordinator. Now seven years, and two coordinators later I'm here to give you this quarter's report until another coordinator can be found.

After doing some digging my last report was written in November 2017. At that time Nebraska NFB-Newsline® had 2,038 subscribers. We now have 2,272 subscribers across Nebraska which is only an increase of 234. I know that more than 234 people have received services from the Nebraska Commission for the Blind or learned of resources for the blind in Nebraska since then. This means we must do better about getting the word out about Newsline.

For those who may not know, here is a quick overview of Newsline. In Nebraska, NFB-Newsline® is available statewide, ensuring that individuals in both urban and rural areas have equal access to news and information. The service can be accessed through various platforms, including the phone, computer, Amazon Echo, and mobile devices, making it convenient for users to stay informed wherever they are. With over 500 publications, magazines, breaking news, emergency weather alerts, store circulars, and job and TV listings there is something for everyone on NFB-Newsline®.

In Nebraska quite a few subscribers still prefer to dial in to Newsline using either the toll-free or local numbers. In February, March and April subscribers read 10,145, 7,931, and 9,966 minutes, respectively. Between the three months subscribers spend an average of 14.82 minutes per call and 42.82 percent of those calls were made through a local number. With unlimited minutes on cell phones and unlimited long-distance calls available on most land lines, we need to encourage more people to use the local numbers. These local numbers cut down on cost, but it's hard to break old habits.

Content is also accessed online, through the iPhone mobile app, downloadable to a book player or through email. These methods are also popular in Nebraska with the most content read online. In total subscribers accessed Newsline through these methods 3,940 times in February, 7,273 times in March and 4,639 times in April. All content is also available through the Amazon Echo, but no data is available for this format.

Nebraska publications, which include the Omaha World Harold, the Lincoln Journal Star, and the Associated Press, are accessed the most with a total of 2,526 times in February, 2,863 in March and 2,264 times in April. The national publications are next up in the list with the most access in March and the least in February. Unfortunately, the international publications got the least amount of attention. The other content accessed the most to the least is as follows: breaking Newsline online, TV listings, Magazines, local weather and emergency alerts, and Nebraska local channels. No data is available for the job listings portion of Newsline.

The availability of NFB-Newsline® in Nebraska has had a significant impact on the blind and visually impaired community. By providing access to newspapers and magazines, the service empowers individuals to stay informed about current events, engage in discussions, and participate more actively in society. Additionally, NFB-Newsline® promotes independence and

autonomy by giving users the freedom to choose what they want to read and how they want to access the information. The Nebraska Commission for the Blind has supported NFB-Newsline since 2000 for which we are grateful. We must continue to work together to raise awareness about the service among potential users and expand the number of publications offered.

In the near future I plan to meet with the director and other key staff at the Commission for the Blind to collaborate together to expand Newsline in Nebraska! Together we can make NFB-Newsline® available to all on the phone, on the web, and on the go!

If you wish to have additional information included in future reports, or demonstrations of any of the services please don't hesitate to contact me. Thank you for your support and happy reading!

Client Assistance Program (CAP) Complaints or Issues

Director Serván reported that NCBVI had one CAP complaint during this quarter in the Omaha District. In this case, the client stated that NCBVI did not get back to them. Our staff followed up with a phone call to the client, but they did not respond.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Break

A break was taken at 10:07 a.m.
The meeting resumed at 10:25 a.m.

New Business

Discuss and act on the approval of The Executive Directors time certification.

Commissioner Bulger moved to continue with the current method being used for the Director to submit his Personnel Activity Report to the Board of Commissioners. The Director submits his Personnel Activity Report via email to the entire Board for their review. It is an automatic approval unless a question or concern is raised by a Commission Board member. This is the procedure that was recommended by State Personnel.

Commissioner Livingston seconded the motion.

Roll call: Ayes: Rocha, Bulger, Mentink, Heyen, Livingston

Nayes:

Motion Carried

Discuss and act on the approval of employee in-state and out-of-state travel

State law requires all travel of staff of state agencies to be pre-approved. This includes travel in-state and out-of-state. Currently for out-of-state travel all staff must complete a form that says where they are going, why they are going there, the cost, how it will be funded, etc. and this must be pre-approved by their immediate supervisor and by the executive director. This is done by all staff for out-of-state travel.

Supervisors manage in-state travel by getting itineraries from staff and reviewing them on an on-going basis. However, staff is not required to check with their supervisor every morning to get an okay for in-state travel as this would not be manageable. Discussion was held with Administrative Services to determine how the agency could comply with the law regarding in-state travel. Administrative Services recommended that each year the Board of Commissioners would have a motion to pre-approve travel that is related to the purpose of the staff person's position.

Commissioner Livingston moved that the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired Board of Commissioners approve all employee in-state business travel and/or out-of-state business travel within 60 miles of the border of Nebraska in any adjoining state, which relates directly to the provision of services to a client, i.e. employer visit, medical appointment, service referral, employment interview, etc. All other out-of-state business travel is approved if granted approval by the Executive Director of the agency. This motion is in effect until the next meeting of the Board of Commissioners after April 1, 2025.

Commissioner Mentink seconded the motion.

Roll call: Ayes: Rocha, Bulger, Mentink, Heyen, Livingston

Nayes:

Motion Carried

Vote to enter Executive Session to conduct the Executive Director Annual Evaluation

Commissioner Mentink moved to go into Executive Session at 10:28 a.m. to conduct the annual evaluation of the Executive Director.

Commissioner Livingston seconded the motion.

Roll call: Ayes: Rocha, Bulger, Mentink, Heyen, Livingston

Nayes:

Motion Carried

(Ref. Open Meeting Act; 84-1410. Closed session; (d) Evaluation of the job performance of a person when necessary to prevent needless injury to the reputation of a person and if such person has not requested a public meeting.)

Vote to leave Executive Session

Commissioner Rocha moved to come out of Executive Session at 10:53 a.m.

Commissioner Livingston seconded the motion.

Roll call: Ayes: Rocha, Bulger, Mentink, Heyen, Livingston

Nayes:

Motion Carried

Act on the retention of the Executive Director and his Salary

Commissioner Livingston moved to retain Carlos Serván as the Executive Director of NCBVI.

Commissioner Rocha seconded the motion.

Roll call: Ayes: Rocha, Bulger, Mentink, Heyen, Livingston

Nayes:
Motion Carried

Commissioner Bulger moved to give the Executive Director a 3% cost of living raise, and a 2.25% performance increase effective May 6, 2024. The 3% increase is retroactive to change to 5% if the July 1 cost of living rate is 5% for the rest of the state employees.

Commissioner Livingston seconded the motion.

Roll call: Ayes: Rocha, Bulger, Mentink, Heyen, Livingston
Nayes:
Motion Carried

Final Announcements

The next meeting of the NCBVI Board of Commissioners will be Friday, July 26, 2024, in Lincoln at a hotel in conjunction with the WAGES banquet. The Focus Topic will be AI and Accessible Devices.

Director Serván thanked the Commission Board for their confidence in him to serve as Executive Director for NCBVI. Director Serván confirmed that he and the NCBVI staff will continue to strive to run one of the best agencies for the blind in the country.

Commission Chair Heyen requested NCBVI support to attend the 2024 NFB National Convention in Orlando, Florida.

Commissioner Livingston moved to approve Commission Chair Heyen's request for NCBVI to support his attendance at the 2024 NFB National Convention.

Commissioner Bulger seconded the motion.

Roll call: Ayes: Rocha, Bulger, Mentink, Livingston
Nayes:
Abstain: Heyen
Motion Carried

Commission Vice Chair Livingston requested NCBVI support to attend the Fall NCSAB Conference in Seattle, Washington.

Commissioner Bulger moved to support Vice Chair Livingston's request to attend the Fall NCSAB Conference. Commissioner Rocha seconded the motion.

Roll call: Ayes: Rocha, Bulger, Mentink, Heyen, Livingston
Nayes:
Motion Carried

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 11:10 a.m.

If you have an item that you would like to have placed on the agenda of the July 26, 2024 Commission Board meeting, please email it to the NCBVI Commission Board at ncbvi.commission-board@nebraska.gov.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Stephens, Administrative Specialist

Brent Heyen, Commission Board Chair