

**BayLines**

**Spring/Summer, 2017**

***BayLines***



**Bay State  
Council of the Blind**

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### **BSCB E-mail Lists:**

BSCB-L is an open e-mail list for discussion of topics of interest to BSCB members and friends. To subscribe, send e-mail to [bscb-l-subscribe@acblists.org](mailto:bscb-l-subscribe@acblists.org).

BSCB-ANNOUNCE is a moderated one-way e-mail list used to disseminate pertinent announcements to members and friends of the Bay State Council of the Blind. To subscribe, send an e-mail request to: [bscb-announce-subscribe@acblists.org](mailto:bscb-announce-subscribe@acblists.org).

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## **BSCB President's Message: In Your Name by Brian Charlson**

Each year, at the Bay State Council of the Blind convention, members elect members of the BSCB Board. In some years, we elect officers and at other times, we elect board members. These men and women serve the organization by establishing priorities, implementing resolutions, and speaking in the name of the membership between conventions.

In addition to those elected to represent BSCB's members, individuals are appointed to serve on committees, either as general members or as committee chairs. These committees conduct the day-to-day business of the organization, including publishing the newsletters, managing the web site, organizing the fall and spring meetings, and much more.

Prior to the ACB Annual Conference and Convention, the BSCB Board elects a delegate, alternate delegate, and representative to the Nominating Committee. These individuals have very specific duties at the convention, including casting the BSCB delegate votes during any roll call vote during the general sessions, holding a caucus where candidates answer questions from those present, and taking part in the closed session of the Nominating Committee where one representative from each affiliate votes for a single candidate for each open office.

From time to time, the BSCB President is asked to appoint a BSCB member to represent the organization on public or private boards or committees such as the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind, Rehabilitation Council, and the Perkins Library Consumer Advisory Board. The President may also be called upon to speak in the name of the organization when there is

insufficient time for the Board to meet to go over a particular issue or action.

It has always been my intent, in as much as it is possible, to appoint a wide variety of members to these positions, including those who serve on the BSCB Board, people who live outside the Boston area, young people, and people who have shown real passion for a particular subject or issue. It is also my intent to, as long as it does not create conflict, move people around between these important tasks and to assure that there is always someone in the wings to take someone else's place upon need.

If you are interested in becoming active as a leader in the Bay State Council of the Blind, as a member of a committee, a representative on a board or council or in running for office, please get in touch with a member of the BSCB Board. We will find a place for you to work. We will give you the support it takes to do an excellent job. We will mentor you as necessary.

We, together, can make the BSCB stronger in all ways. You can be a part of that effort.

## **Highlights from the 2017 BSCB Convention by Bob Hachey**

The 2017 BSCB convention was held at the Burlington Marriott Hotel on the weekend of Saturday, March 25. The Friday afternoon session began with a lively presentation on chair yoga by Ann Knocke. I was expecting a description of chair yoga and some of its elements, but it was also an interactive session in which we had the opportunity to experience Yoga. Ann did an excellent job of describing the various poses and making sure that

we knew how to perform them. If anyone wants a link to the audio file of this presentation, please contact me.

We then heard from Chris Peralta of MAB Community Services who described what it was like to be an occupational therapist. Chris has worked as both an occupational therapist and a rehabilitation teacher for Perkins and the Mass Eye and Ear. She also worked for the Veterans Administration for a short time. She has worked with a wide variety of populations from deaf-blind children and adults with head injuries to elders who are losing their vision. She is now both an occupational therapist and a trainer of occupational therapists. An occupational therapist teaches people to learn how to do ordinary tasks in a different way to compensate for a disability such as loss of vision. Chris told us about how MAB occupational therapists visit the homes of persons experiencing vision loss throughout the state. Chris's relaxed and outgoing style, along with her healthy sense of humor, were in evidence during her presentation.

Our next presenters were DeAnn Elliott and Steve Dresser who told us a bit about blogging. DeAnn has been writing blogs for the Carroll Center for over 3 years. She has also contributed blog posts to other organizations. Blog is an abbreviation for web log. Blogs are written on an extremely wide variety of subjects, almost anything you can imagine. It is estimated that a new blog is posted on the internet every two seconds. Blogs are usually updated on a regular basis and can be archived. Most blogs are brief opinion pieces. DeAnn encouraged all of us to blog on issues about which we are passionate. There are two categories of blogs: those you create yourself and those you contribute to others who have created the blog. The advantage to creating your own blog is that you have full control over its contents. The disadvantage is that you will very likely have only a small number of readers when you're starting out. You must market your blog.

You must also handle all of the technical aspects of creating a blog and its website. The advantage of contributing your thoughts to existing blogs is that there is usually a ready audience for your message and you don't have to worry about the technical issues. Steve went into some of the technical aspects of blogging. One can subscribe to a blog through RSS (Really Simple Syndication). In the early days of the internet, creating a blog was much more work than it is now. Software such as WordPress has simplified the process considerably. The blogger uses key words to help draw readers to the blog. One of the blogs that DeAnn contributed to the Carroll Center was about web accessibility for the blind and visually impaired. This blog was published in the Wall Street Journal.

Our final presenters for Friday were Emily Buresh and Jerry Berrier who introduced us to social media. They focused on Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn. Social media helps to connect people all over the world. One can do things like find members of their high school graduation class or connect with others in their field of work or study. Jerry uses Facebook regularly. It has become a very popular way to communicate and it provides entertainment. He told us that the mobile site, [www.m.facebook.com](http://www.m.facebook.com) is easier to use with a screen reader. The mobile site has much less clutter than the standard site. Jerry says that Facebook is improving in terms of accessibility with labeled headings. However, he also said that some changes that Facebook makes decreases accessibility. You can read news feeds, which contain information posted by others. You can add or delete friends on Facebook. You have access to the news feeds of all of your friends. Emily warned us that a few Facebook members are there to steal identities. It is best to be sure you know someone before you accept him or her as a Facebook friend. Jerry has found long lost friends as a result of using Facebook. You also have the ability to send private messages to

other Facebook members. Twitter is a more text based social medium where members communicate in 140 characters or less. Twitter is often used to spread breaking news stories. LinkedIn is a social medium for job seekers. Jerry told us that LinkedIn is only marginally accessible. Jerry recommended that anyone wanting to use Twitter should use an interface such as TW Blue or Easy Chirp. He next told us how to avoid security issues. Websites that use the beginning HTTPS usually have enhanced security. One can also use ad blockers to eliminate unwanted ads. Jerry has read that Google is less secure than other search engines such as Duckduckgo. Jerry also suggested using a password manager, which makes it more difficult for others to obtain your passwords. Emily advised us to be careful when choosing a password. Don't use something obvious like your birthday. She also advised us to change passwords occasionally. I have noticed that many sites require that passwords contain small and capital letters, at least one numeral, and one symbol.

The Saturday session opened with a President's Report given by Brian Charlson. Brian began by thanking the board and committee chairs for all the work they've done in the past year. Next, he told us about the work being done to make Mass Eye and Ear more accessible. An agreement is in place that will improve the experience of Mass Eye and Ear patients. Anyone having either positive or negative experiences with Mass Eye and Ear is invited to contact either DeAnn Elliot or myself. BSCB sent seven members to the ACB legislative seminar in February. Brian also pointed out that we are well represented on the boards and staff of providers of blindness services in Massachusetts. He then yielded the balance of his time to Rick Morin who updated us on transportation issues. The MBTA was considering eliminating commuter rail services on weekends, as well as the RIDE's premium service area in efforts to close budget shortfalls. Rick thanked all of us for our advocacy efforts to save these services.



(Editor's Note: Thanks in part to the advocacy of BSCB members and others, commuter rail service on weekends and the RIDE premium area will not be cut in the next fiscal year.)

Our next presenter was Anthony Stephens, ACB's Director of Advocacy and Governmental Affairs. He updated us on goings on at the ACB National Office. He told us how Washington DC has become a much more lively place since January 20 of this year. He pointed out that the First Amendment to the Constitution gives all citizens the right and the duty to redress grievances with the government. He also praised BSCB for sending the largest state delegation to the ACB legislative seminar. He then spoke of the importance of cutting through the noise in DC in order to protect programs that serve our members such as the Helen Keller National Center. He asked us to advocate with our members of Congress to oppose HR 620, the ADA Education Reform and Notifications Act of 2017. If passed, this bill would install roadblocks for anyone who is experiencing violations of the ADA. To sign a petition opposing this bill, go to <https://www.change.org/p/dara-baldwin-don-t-tread-on-my-ada-oppose-ada-education-reform-act-of-2017-h-r-620>. Next, Stephens spoke a bit about the Work Force Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) which is the law that regulates vocational rehabilitation (VR) services. WIOA requires that agencies serving persons with disabilities put more emphasis on services to younger people. This requirement will place limitations on services for the rest of us. WIOA also eliminated the homemaker option that allowed those not yet ready for work to be served using VR funds. Finally, Stephens invited all of us to contact him if we need assistance with advocacy issues. He can be reached via email at [astephens@acb.org](mailto:astephens@acb.org) or via phone at 202-467-5081.

Our next presenter was MCB Commissioner Paul Saner. He began with a brief budget update. Governor Baker has proposed

a budget increase for new entrants into the Turning 22 program, which serves multiply disabled blind persons. Next, he told us about some of the limitations caused by WIOA. Fifteen percent of VR funds must be reserved for persons under age 22 who are in college or high school. Those funds may not be used to purchase computers or provide transportation for the MCB counselors and rehabilitation teachers to travel to the homes of their clients.

MCB is trying to get Medicaid to fund rehabilitation services for elders losing their vision. MCB is now working more closely with senior centers to provide assistive technology training to elders and others who are not in the VR program. MCB is also trying to offer more services to those who have experienced vision loss but are not legally blind.

Our Saturday afternoon session began with a presentation from BSCB President Brian Charlson, whose topic was the World Blind Union (WBU). WBU has members from many nations. ACB holds two positions in the WBU, currently held by ACB President Kim Charlson and former ACB President Mitch Pomerantz. Brian pointed out how bad some blind folks have it in other part of the world. There are actually still places where if you give birth to a blind child, you're supposed to put the child out on a hillside to die. Unemployment for blind Americans is around 70 percent; in some nations, it's more like 99 percent. Blind American children are entitled to a free public education. In some other nations, blind children are kept out of schools. Brian briefly described how the Carroll Center has educated folks who are now providing training throughout the world. WBU membership includes both consumer driven organizations such as ACB and NFB, and provider organizations such as the National Library Service and the American Foundation for the Blind. Brian urged us to think about blind persons when we hear of events that take place in other nations.

Our next presenter was Venkatesh Chari, CEO of Orbit Research. Orbit is an assistive technology company on the cutting edge. Orbit is the maker of the iBill money identifier, which is offered free to blind Americans by the Bureau of Engraving and printing. Orbit also produces a popular Texas Instruments scientific calculator with speech. Orbit will soon be producing the Orbit Reader, a low-cost braille display. Venkatesh described the mission of Orbit research as “disruptive innovation, limitless possibilities.” Orbit seeks to produce high-performance assistive technology at a relatively low cost. Venkatesh is first and foremost an electrical engineer. He wants Orbit to work on challenges ranging from indoor navigation to accessible graphical displays. Orbit’s first product was a talking scientific calculator. This calculator provides more functionality at one-third the cost of other similar calculators. Their next product was a talking graphing calculator. Orbit has just begun shipping the Orbit Reader 20, which is a 20-cell display that will cost less than \$500.00. This will be easily the most affordable braille display on the market. This display will serve three functions; a stand-alone reader, a note taker, and braille access for computers and SMART phones. The Orbit Reader is being sold by Orbit Research, APH, and NFB.

Our next presenter was Kim Charlson, Director of the Perkins Library, who gave us her annual update of library services. The Perkins Library is one of the largest NLS distributors in the nation; Perkins distributed 545,000 books to its 23,877 patrons. NLS has around 193,000 titles in its collection. Kim let us know that there is a new catalog of DVD movies with description, which contains 100 new selections. Library patrons may be put on a list to receive DVD catalog updates. Similarly, patrons may request to be placed on a list to receive notices of upcoming live describe performances throughout the state. The Perkins Library now has portable equipment, which allows descriptions to be provided in any theatrical setting. Last year, the Perkins and Worcester

Talking Book libraries sustained a one-percent budget cut. Kim is hopeful that this cut will be restored in this year's budget. Very soon, the Perkins library will begin a pilot project wherein Orbit Reader 20 braille displays will be distributed to 200 braille readers. Participants will be expected to read available braille books and provide feedback to Perkins regarding use of the device. The pilot is scheduled to begin in mid-summer. Any interested braille reading library patrons should contact Kim. In August 2017, the Library will begin offering free access to Book Share, an online library containing over 500,000 electronic book titles. This is a much larger collection than the NLS collection, which contains fewer than 200,000 titles. The Library now has a new drop-in center for reading and help with assistive technology as it relates to reading. Kim informed us regarding a new scholarship to be offered to teachers of the blind and visually impaired. The Wilson Reading System is a popular method of teaching reading to students with learning and cognitive disabilities. Roz Rowley, longtime BSCB member and dedicated Perkins teacher of blind students for 45 years, adapted the Wilson System to make it accessible for blind persons. This scholarship created in memory of Roz will provide teachers of the visually impaired training and certification in the use of the Wilson Reading System. Anyone wishing to make donations to this scholarship should make checks payable to Perkins School for the Blind and put Wilson Scholarship in the memo.

We next heard from Sengil Inkiála regarding the Blind Sail Program. He told us that the Carroll Center would no longer be able to sponsor this program, which offered opportunities for both competitive and recreational sailing by blind persons with sighted volunteer guides. Inky also told us that the Association of Blind Citizens is willing to continue to sponsor the competitive sailing program. For more information, contact Senegal (Inky) Inkiála at 617-626-7561.

Our Saturday afternoon concluded with the BSCB business meeting. We passed three resolutions dealing with the MCB budget, funding for special education, and healthcare disparities. The entire text of the resolutions will appear later in this issue of BayLines. Next, we dealt with amendments to the BSCB Constitution and Bylaws. We made a number of minor changes. One change of note was to add Conference and Convention, Transportation, and Finance as standing committees. Finally, BSCB elected the following members to the Board of Directors: Rose Miller, Jim Denham, Mary Haroyan, and Carey Scouler. Saturday concluded with the usual banquet and awards. We all enjoyed good food, fun, and fellowship.

The 2017 BSCB Outstanding Service award was presented to Venkatesh Chari, executive Director of Orbit Research. The Orbit reader 20 is a major breakthrough given that it is the most affordable braille display. Orbit continues to be at the forefront of assistive technology. Venkatesh hopes that Orbit will soon reach the Holy Grail, a full-page refreshable display. The Community Access award was presented to Vince Lombardi, Executive Director of the *Audio Journal*. The *Audio Journal* has provided audio description to theatre patrons in Central Massachusetts for 15 years. The *Audio Journal* worked first with the Foothills Theatre and now works with the Hanover Theatre. The *Audio Journal* also produces hardcopies of the programs in braille and large print. The *Audio Journal* has also made museums in Central Massachusetts more accessible. In addition, the *Audio Journal* provides access to the Talking Information Center and even has local programming. For more information on the *Audio Journal*, go to [audiojournal.net](http://audiojournal.net). Next, we surprised DeAnn Elliott with the Betty Gayzagian Award. DeAnn has advocated for the rights of persons who are blind or visually impaired at the local, state and national levels. The issues she has worked on range from taxi companies who discriminate against guide dog users and access

rights at medical facilities to health disparities, access to the secret ballot, and the MCB budget. DeAnn is presently chair of the BSCB Legislative Committee, and I must say she is doing a far better job than did I in terms of getting all committee members involved. DeAnn exhibits both a deep understanding of the issues for which we fight, and never-ending compassion for others. During her acceptance speech, I noticed that she was crying a bit; I cried too.

Our banquet speaker this year was Blair Wong, a blind optician. Wong is chair of the Opticianry [sic] Program at the Ben Franklin Institute of Technology, and Adjunct Professor at the New England College of Optometry. Blair had wanted to work in eye care since he was very young. At age 26, Blair and his brother Bruce learned that they had retinitis pigmentosa, which would eventually lead to blindness. At first, Blair refused to date because he did not want to be a burden to a future wife. Fortunately, his love for women overpowered these feelings. Blair spoke quite a bit about Jean, his wife of 24 years, and his son Evan. Blair has the kind of relationship with Evan that should be the envy of any father. They do all kinds of things together including hiking, mountain climbing, and playing catch. Blair and Evan both have a passion for baseball. Blair was a good pitcher on his high school baseball team. Every summer he and Evan test his remaining vision at a local tennis court where they place a pizza box up against a fence and Blair tries to hit the center of the box from 60 feet, 6 inches, the distance between the pitcher's mound and home plate on a major league baseball field. Blair hit the box last summer and hopes to do so again this year. Along with his teaching career, Blair also travels around the country and gives lectures on optometry and opticianry. He expressed gratitude for all of the teachers who taught him the skills of blindness. Next, he told us how the dedication of his ophthalmologist helped him in his education career. He also introduced us to a principle that he

says fits in well with BSCB. It is the SCIMP principle. S stands for failure, C for trepidation, I for dependence; M stands for award and recognition, and the P for negativity. Does this make Blair a bad speller? Not exactly! Learning from failure leads to success. Learning from trepidation leads to confidence. Learning from being dependent increases one's independence and interdependence. Learning from awards and recognition tells us of the monumental things we do. Learning from and controlling negativity helps one to be more positive. Blair joked that he's a bad blind person: he doesn't read braille, he's not the best at JAWS or the white cane and he's allergic to dogs. After listening to him speak, I am convinced that Blair is an excellent blind person. He has not allowed his blindness to hold him back. His life story informs me that anything is possible.

The Sunday morning session began with a brief memorial to those who have passed away during the past year as well as those who are struggling with medical problems. Those who have passed include Roz Rowley, Geri Jackson-Goodwin, and Alice Jackson. President Charlson asked us to join him in a moment of silence to honor those individuals.

Our first presenters were Sharon Strzalkowski and Jim Badger. Their topic was adjustment to blindness and keeping one's dignity along the way. Jim is a rehabilitation teacher for MCB and he began by telling us a bit about his struggles with blindness. Until age 49, Jim was visually impaired, but he refused to use a cane until he fell onto the tracks at Back Bay Station. With help and support from his MCB colleagues, Jim developed a training for the MCB VR staff on this topic. He also told us a story about how he saw what he thought was a person coming toward him in a Logan Airport men's room, but what he was actually seeing was himself in a mirror. Blindness, he said, is something we deal with every day. The trick is to be confident in ourselves and learn to ask for

help when we need it, and be ok with that. Sharon Strzalkowski is a VR counselor for MCB. She told us about using the Worcester paratransit to go home after evening music lessons. She would get frustrated because she was never sure when she would get home and the van usually picked up others along the way. However, one night, she began to talk more freely with the driver than she had before. She discovered that the driver didn't like to tell her how many people would be picked up because he knew she would be disappointed about taking longer to get home. Now she and the driver make jokes about how long it might take. She also talked about the frustration of being in a room full of sighted persons who are looking at pictures or watching a movie that she could not follow. In the past, she would have stayed there feeling left out. Now, she has the self-confidence to leave the room and do something more constructive. All of us in the room then had the opportunity to share similar frustrations and how we deal with them. How we adjust varies from person to person. Some folks take much longer than others to come to terms with it. In the end, it is best to develop a mindset whereby you are confident and you believe in your dignity as a blind person, often easier said than done. It also helps to have a healthy sense of humor.

Our next presenters were members of the BSCB Legislative Committee lead by DeAnn Elliott. Cheryl Cumings filled us in on her experiences as an elector for president. To me, it was certainly an honor to have a BSCB member be chosen for a position in the Electoral College. She was one of eleven from Massachusetts. Cheryl earned this position by being an active member of the Democratic Party for many years. Cheryl is a member of the Democratic State committee. This is a body of over 400 Democrats who give advice to party leadership. In order to become an elector, Cheryl campaigned to win the support of committee members. Cheryl received the third highest number of votes during this process. The top eleven become electors. In



December, the electors got together to cast their votes. It was a very formal gathering that began with lunch at the UMass Boston Club. The electors cast their votes at the State House in the chamber normally used by the House of Representatives. The formal ceremony included a choir and orchestra, and a reading from a poet. Cheryl commented that the drafters of the Constitution who were white, Anglo-Saxon males who owned property would never have expected that someday an elector might be an immigrant, naturalized citizen, African-American blind woman. She encouraged us to not allow barriers to stand in our way.

Next, Carl Richardson summarized how a bill becomes law. It must pass through various committees and then the entire House of Representatives and the Senate. If there are differences between the House and Senate versions, a conference committee is formed to iron out those differences. Then it goes to the governor's desk. The governor can sign a bill, veto it or take no action. Each legislative session lasts two years always beginning in odd numbered years. It takes a bill an average of seven years to become law. Carl illustrated the importance of personal advocacy on issues that directly impact the advocate.

Next, Bob Hachey reported on a survey that BSCB conducted just after the November election. The purpose of the survey was to learn more about voter experiences with the AutoMark, which makes the ballot accessible such that a blind or visually impaired person may vote privately and independently. We had 106 survey participants and the results were very good over all. The AutoMark was available 82 percent of the time. Seventy-one percent of elections officials were extremely knowledgeable regarding the AutoMark. Eleven percent showed little or no knowledge on this one. The AutoMark was also available for early voting in most cities and towns. If you're having problems using

the AutoMark, please do continue to work with your local elections officials and the Secretary of State's office to resolve the problems. We will be submitting a report and all of the survey data to the Secretary of State's office which is very interested in knowing where the problems are and in solving them.

Finally, Anne Donna led us through a fun little exercise in identifying acronyms, or as she calls it, alphabet soup. The audience participated in a little contest to identify acronyms. Anyone involved in government affairs knows that we are inundated with acronyms. The acronyms identified ranged from easy to hard.

Perkins Superintendent Ed Bosso was our next presenter. His topic was special education. Ed is former Vice President of the National Deaf Education Center at Gallaudet University. He was also director of the statewide program for deaf and deaf-blind students in Delaware for 15 years. Ed's wife passed away shortly after the birth of their daughter, Ella Grace. Ella is legally blind and a student in Perkins' toddler program. Perkins recruited Ed and he has been superintendent for just over a year. Ed told us a bit about the Perkins of today. Along with the traditional on-campus programs, Perkins now runs an off-campus program employing 45 itinerant teachers of the visually impaired. This program includes identifying very young children and infants who have vision loss. Ed is a true advocate for children with disabilities. He believes strongly in finding the right fit for each child in the early stages. Ed also spends time on Capitol Hill advocating for special education services. Perkins also has a pre-employment program in which high school and college students meet on ten Saturdays to learn about things like resumé writing, interviewing, and dressing for success. Perkins will begin the College Success program, designed to ensure that blind and visually impaired students will graduate from college, in the fall.

Ed told us that a disturbing 60 percent of blind students who go to college do not graduate.

BSCB Treasurer Rick Morin next gave us his treasurer's report. He expressed gratitude for all of the sponsorships and donations given by BSCB members to support the convention and the fall conference. BSCB received around \$2,500 in convention sponsorships. BSCB also recently received a check for \$3,300 from the United Way. Our balance after the convention was around \$142,000. Rick encouraged us to make donations to ACB and BSCB through the Monthly Monetary Support System. Donors can designate up to 50 percent of their donations to their favorite ACB affiliate. Rick told us that BSCB will be investing some of our funds in something a bit more rewarding than a checking or savings account. BSCB now produces annual budgets that are approved by the board. BSCB is eternally grateful to Rick for all the work he does as Treasurer including a good deal of paperwork.

The convention concluded with a few brief committee reports. Frank Ventura is chair of the Conference and Convention Committee. Chris Devin is the chair of the Constitution and Bylaws Committee. Bob Hachey is chair of the Resolutions Committee. David Kingsbury is chair of the Social Committee. Mary Haroyan chairs the Membership Committee. Steve Dresser chairs the Publications Committee. Rick Morin chairs the Transportation Committee. Last, but certainly not least, DeAnn Elliott chairs our Legislative Committee. At the very end of the Convention, President Charlson challenged each member of BSCB to recruit new members, a most worthy goal.

## **Thoughts about Membership by Mary Haroyan**

As the new Chairperson of the BSCB Membership Committee, I want to share some of the Committee's feelings about this topic.

Membership is as much about helping to keep current members feeling engaged and connected to our organization as it is about recruiting new people to it. This is a concept that we hope to be able to make a reality through the committee's actions.

On January 31, we hosted a statewide call open to both BSCB members and anyone else interested. The topic was "what motivates people to remain a member of BSCB, or if not a member, what it is that someone looks for in an organization". We had 18 people join the call, including three non-members.

People talked about community as being important reasons for wanting to belong, being with others with whom common ground is shared. Being able to feel comfortable with blindness and even being able to find humor in it. We plan to have more of these statewide calls in the future. If there is a topic you would like us to discuss, please let me know.

I mentioned how important we think it is for members to feel engaged with BSCB. As someone who personally knows how difficult it can be for some to join right in and get involved, I am mindful of how important it is to make people feel welcomed and valued. To assist in this effort, I would like to encourage you to let us know what are your interests and skills. Do you have an idea for a presentation at a future BSCB convention? A fun thing you would like to share at an upcoming fall conference. Would you like to help plan one of these gatherings? Would you like to serve on

a committee? BSCB committees are wide ranging in their scope, covering everything from Legislative, Finance, Social, Transportation, and more!

New ideas and input can be so invaluable, helping to infuse positive energy into these groups. You never know what can come from just one new thought. If you would like to know more about BSCB committees, please reach out to me.

Perhaps for many of you, belonging to BSCB means enjoying the friendships nurtured through the years, coming together at convention time, and just hanging out. This is as essential as any committee work or phone call made to a legislator. This is being part of the BSCB community.

Speaking of committees, BSCB's Publications Committee has just created and made available a new Membership Brochure. It is a wonderful tool for helping to educate people about BSCB and can be given to any potential new member. It can also serve as a valuable reminder to those of us familiar with the organization, its mission, qualities, and many accomplishments. If you haven't seen this brochure, please let me know if you would like a copy.

Given the significant role chapters play in the vitality of BSCB, we plan to examine the possibility of establishing (or re-establishing) new chapters in Boston and Worcester. For anyone living in and around Boston, and out in the Central Mass. area, please stay tuned. Of course, you can always call or e-mail me with your questions or interest.

In closing, let me say how pleased I am to be Membership Chair of this wonderful organization. I thank President Brian Charlson for appointing me. I am fortunate to be assisted in this effort by

Cheryl Cumings, Lillian Johnson, Sandy Burgess, Kim and Brian Charlson and soon, new representatives of the South Shore and BSCB Students chapters.

Once again, I invite you to call or e-mail me with any questions, comments, thoughts or input you would like to share. I look forward to speaking with you.

(Editor's Note: Mary's contact information is included at the end of *BayLines* in the list of BSCB officers and board members.)

## **BSCB Forming New Special Interest Chapter for Diabetics by Bob Hachey**

Bonnie Adams and Kathy Devin are in the process of creating a new special interest chapter of BSCB for diabetics. Diabetes is a common cause of blindness and visual impairment. This chapter will be working closely with the ACB national special interest affiliate, Diabetics In Action. It will offer support and advocacy for the needs of blind and visually impaired diabetics. They will be working on issues such as access to medical facilities, and promoting accessible methods for managing diabetes. Like other affiliates, they will also offer opportunities for fellowship and social gatherings.

A meeting to gauge interest for such an affiliate here in Massachusetts took place on May 6 and it was very successful. There next meeting is scheduled for Saturday August 5 from 1:00 PM to 3:30 PM and will take place at 1550 Beacon Street, Brookline, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor Library. All are welcome to attend. At this meeting, the group will begin the formal process of creating the

affiliate, including election of officers. For more information, please contact Bonnie Adams via phone at 617-277-235, or via email at [bon54.adams@gmail.com](mailto:bon54.adams@gmail.com).

## **Solving a Transportation Crisis for the Elderly and Disabled** **by Karen Crowder**

In 2017, there is an increasing number of senior citizens who are unable to drive due to vision loss or dementia. Younger people disabled because of recent wars, accident or birth rely on public transportation, Uber, or paratransit.

If you live in a metropolitan area such as Boston, Cambridge or New York City, there is frequent public transportation and paratransit. Smaller cities and towns often rely on busses and paratransit. In many cases, there is no paratransit service after dark or on Sundays. The elderly and disabled cannot attend nighttime activities or church services unless they obtain rides from family and friends.

With a rising population of people unable to drive, and threatened cuts to transportation services, what is the long-term solution? Although Uber has started a pilot program with the RIDE in the Boston area, autonomous vehicles may be the best solution.

Autonomous vehicles are in development and testing across America and other nations. Can we develop affordable cars, which disabled and elderly people can learn to operate? With newer computer GPS and voice recognition, this goal may be realized in five to ten years. This dream will involve private and government funding, research, and commitment.

How would we train blind, elderly, and disabled people in the operation of autonomous vehicles? Could under-utilized schools and training centers for the blind develop courses allowing high school and young adults to learn the operation of these cars? Instructors could come to a person's home, teaching him/her how to operate and drive these vehicles around town. This would be a bit like orientation and mobility; instructors would stay with students until they could confidently operate cars and diagnose simple problems. Like sighted drivers, students would pass tests to receive a temporary license to drive across cities and towns. Eventually the license would allow operators to drive across states. They would be able to drive to school or work, banks, stores, and doctor's appointments. Operators would have the ability to visit friends, eat out, and go to their activities more independently, when they wished to, day or night. The excuse of "I can't get there because of transportation," would be nonexistent.

How would this change society? It would usher in an era of independence and liberation for seniors, the blind, and disabled. As autonomous vehicles become more and more commonplace, accidents from distracted driving would be rare. They may create jobs; blind disabled and seniors could be paid to drive others unable to afford these vehicles.

People would work in their communities with less dependence on public transit and paratransit. States would save money on a fading paratransit system, making more money available for improved public transit and autonomous vehicles.

In five to ten years, I believe autonomous vehicles will be coming to a city or town near you. Read my two-part sci-fi story "A Car of Her Own," published in the October/November, 2013 issue of the *Matilda Ziegler* magazine.



# Bay State Council of the Blind Resolutions for 2017

## Resolution 2017-01: Restoring State Funding for Rehabilitation Services

WHEREAS, people who are legally blind receive rehabilitation services through the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB), which serves approximately 26,000 registered consumers; and

WHEREAS, the clear majority of active cases are funded through the MCB 4110-1000 **Community Services account**, which provides specialized independent living services spanning all ages from legally blind children under the age of 14, working age adults not seeking employment, and seniors. This account also provides **essential community access** for **deaf blind** consumers (through the Deaf Blind **Community Access Network, or DBCAN**); and

WHEREAS, the proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2018 is \$4,207,203, approximately \$338,000 below the level it was in FY2009, and the account has been funded below FY2009 levels for the previous nine years; and

WHEREAS, the budget would need to increase by approximately \$880,000 to equal FY2009 spending when adjusted for accumulated inflation of 11.9%; and

WHEREAS, the 4110-1000 account provides rehabilitation teaching and mobility training to seniors who nationally represent the largest and fastest-growing cohort, since vision loss is highly correlated with age; and

WHEREAS, the 4110-1000 account presently has no funding for specialized assistive technology training despite considerable technology advances for the blind since 2009; and

WHEREAS, due to a recent change in federal legislation, there is no longer funding for working age adults not seeking employment to receive rehabilitation training as “homemakers”;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by the Bay State Council of the Blind in convention assembled on this 25th day of March, 2017, in Burlington, Massachusetts, that this organization will publicly advocate to our State Representatives, Senators, and to the Governor for an increase of \$880,000 to the MCB 4110-1000 account to restore rehabilitation services to vulnerable blind and deaf blind Massachusetts citizens.

### **Resolution 2017-02: Special Education funding**

WHEREAS, the Bay State Council of the Blind (BSCB) has always supported a continuum of educational options for students who are blind or visually impaired ranging from full mainstreaming in public and private schools to specialized residential placements; and

WHEREAS, the Massachusetts Special Education Circuit Breaker fund (line item 7061-0012) is supposed to reimburse local school districts for 75 percent of the added costs of educating students with disabilities without regard to student placement; and

WHEREAS, the Governor’s FY 2018 House One Budget proposal level funds this account at \$277,281,180.00; and

WHEREAS, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) projections indicate that this

account is not fully funded in order to meet the special education needs of our students with disabilities; and

WHEREAS, this lack of funding negatively impacts students with disabilities in areas such as graduation and dropout rates; and

WHEREAS, more than half of our special education schools now operate with a deficit budget; and

WHEREAS, the population of children with a wide variety of disabilities continues to increase due to medical advances which allow more and more premature and low-birth weight infants to survive;

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Bay State Council of the Blind in convention assembled on this 25<sup>th</sup> day of March 2017 in Burlington, Massachusetts asks the Massachusetts Legislature to fully fund the Special Education Circuit Breaker fund, (line item 7061-0012 at **\$295,281,180.00**, **which will allow local school districts to meet the needs of a growing population of students with disabilities.**

### **Resolution 2017-03: Creating an Office of Health Equity in Massachusetts**

WHEREAS, the Bay State Council of the Blind (BSCB) advocates for accessible and high quality healthcare for all residents of the Commonwealth including those who are blind or visually impaired; and

WHEREAS, a 2013 study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention documented the existence of health disparities based

on factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, disability, and income;  
and

WHEREAS, the absence of accessible websites, informational brochures, prescription labels, medical equipment, and transportation can present barriers to good health care for patients who are blind or vision impaired; and

WHEREAS, Senator Michael Barrett has filed S600, an act to promote health equity, which would create an Office of Health Equity to study health disparities experienced by marginalized populations based upon race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability, and income;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by the Bay State Council of the Blind in convention assembled on this 25th day of March, 2017, in Burlington, Massachusetts, that this organization supports the passage of S600 by the Massachusetts Legislature, as the first step toward recognizing and eliminating health disparities in Massachusetts.

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