

Bay State Council of the Blind
Board minutes, April 11, 2021

Officers and Board Members

Brian Charlson President

David Kingsbury First Vice President

Frank Ventura Second Vice President

Jerry Berrier Secretary

Rick Morin Treasurer

Rose Miller board member

Cheryl Cumings board member

Mary Haroyan board member

Rafael Toro board member

Ex Officio

Steve Dresser Webmaster

DeAnn Elliott Legislative committee chair

Brian called the meeting to order at 7:33 PM. All officers and board members were present, except for Rick Morin who had a conflict. Also in attendance were Sharon Strzalkowski, Chris Devin, and Nick Corbett.

Mary asked that gender questions be added to the agenda. After that the agenda was adopted.

The minutes of our march 2021 meeting were approved.

[Treasurer's report](#)

There was no formal treasurer's report, but Nick reported as follows:

We have 202 active certified members, including 3 life members.

We are being charged by ACB for 199 members.

Nick sent Rick a spreadsheet showing what each chapter should pay.

Mary said our membership has decreased by 15.

Brian said the balance of \$400 owed on the Bob Hachey ACB Angel has been submitted.

Nick had a conflict and left at this point.

President's report; Brian

BSCB sent a letter under Brian's signature requesting an opportunity to express our concerns about a lack of transparency by MCB.

Commissioner D'Arcangelo has expressed willingness, and he and Brian are negotiating a meeting time. Brian and David will represent us at this meeting.

They will send a document to MCB after the meeting, expressing our asks, one of which will be that MCB provide financial data to the RC and SAB prior to each meeting; some previous commissioners have put the data into each meeting agenda.

Brian will ask if he and David may record the meeting.

We also discussed the value of having a transcript of the meeting, but it was pointed out that we had not requested that in advance.

Mass Eye and Ear has contacted us requesting a meeting to discuss our long-term agreement with them regarding needed accessibility improvements. Brian suggested a meeting in early May. Our 5-year agreement with them will end in August 2021. Meetings were to be held every 6 months, but that has not happened recently for various reasons. Brian will strategize with DeAnn and possibly others.

Brian is reviewing our membership list to determine which members belong to which congressional districts in preparation for conference calls to be scheduled with legislator staff in lieu of an in-person legislative seminar, now known as a leadership seminar.

Thanks to a lot of manual work by Rick, approximately 2/3 of our members are matched with their legislative districts. Once the list is complete, Brian will ask the legislative committee to assist in soliciting help from members. He plans for this all to take place in May.

Brian talked about inequities in how voting is done within some districts.

Brian implored us to help raise funds for the annual ACB walk; BSCB will receive 50% of the revenue.

Publications report; David

(Written report)

The Publications Committee last met on April 8.

David Kingsbury, Myra Ross, and Steve Dresser attended a recent Zoom call organized by the ACB Board of Publications for affiliate newsletter editors. Experience

among the affiliates was varied, but there seemed to be a trend towards making newsletters shorter and more frequent. One or two affiliates seemed to be

having success with longer, team-produced, newsletters (like Washington state), but this was the exception.

Call organizers said they would set up an affiliate editors discussion list and also organize more Zoom calls in the future.

Regarding Bay Lines Express, we might think of posting our monthly feature articles by members on this list, as well as perhaps reprinting interesting

articles from other affiliates in our own newsletter.

The Pubs Committee wishes to propose that the Board adopt a retention policy for official correspondence from the Board to outside entities, especially

for advocacy-related correspondence. We propose to create a folder in our current Dropbox folder. Emails would be saved as text files so we have a record

of who received correspondence, as well as the time stamp for when it was sent. Pubs Committee members with Dropbox accounts would all be granted editing

rights, as would be the President. Board members could request a Dropbox link at any time so they could download the folder to their own computers.

At the last Board meeting, we were asked to determine if we should revive our Newline channel. We think we should, but only if we can post regular content.

We agreed to post Bay Lines Express each month, as well as perhaps other important announcements. David contacted Gina Russo of the Perkins Library who

was happy to help on this. She will try to find our user name and password, but if Brian has it readily available, he should share it with the Pubs Committee.

The topic of the next BSCB Third Thursday in May will be remote voting. Ray Campbell and Jeff Thom have confirmed their participation. Sharon has also

sent out a request on the Announce list for topic suggestions. David will contact Jonathan Gale about a possible presentation on housing policy.

(End of written report)

Jerry made, and David seconded a motion to create a repository for electronic storage of official BSCB correspondence. The motion was approved with one abstention.

Brian said the BSCB president and secretary must have access to any folders containing official BSCB correspondence and documents.

Cheryl made, Steve seconded, and the board approved a motion to create a separate Dropbox account for official BSCB correspondence.

Frank will create a Dropbox account on a separate user account and test it, to be ready by our June meeting.

Legislative report; DeAnn

(Written report)

President Brian Charlson sent a letter from BSCB to Massachusetts Sec. of Health and Human Services Sudders on March 25 that was copied to the Governor,

President of the Senate, Speaker of the House, and the MCB Commissioner. The letter expressed BSCB's deep concern about a growing lack of transparency

from the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB). The letter asked for information about a number of troubling issues, including MCB's abrupt closing

of two regional offices and the absence of communication about the availability of more than \$850,000 in social rehabilitation funding for consumers. Secretary

Sudders invited Brian and David Kingsbury, BSCB 1st Vice President, to meet with the undersecretary. They are trying to secure an appointment.

The MCB announced it had entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with MCB staff members who belong to the Service Employees International Union

(SEIU) Local 509. As a result of the MOU with the union, there will be small "touchdown spaces" in the areas that were previously served by regional offices.

The touchdown spaces will be used to store equipment used by rehabilitation teachers and to meet with clients outside their homes when necessary—two concerns

also raised by consumers.

The Joint Ways and Means Committee held hearings on March 30th for the commissioners of several Health and Human Service agencies, including the MCB. The

advocacy community compiled a list of 20 direct questions for committee members to ask of the MCB commissioner, and distributed the list prior to the hearing.

Committee members asked two or three of the questions, though in a format that was much less direct. Little new information came from the hearing.

The House budget will be released on Wednesday, April 14. Legislators will have two days to file amendments. As the budget progresses through the House

and Senate, we anticipate there may be a need for members to make calls to their representatives. Please stay tuned for more information.

There will be public budget hearings soon. This is an opportunity for members to testify directly if they would like to advocate for more funding to support MCB's programs. More information to come.

Cheryl Cumings has completed a draft of the BSCB voting survey from the Nov. 2020 election. Approximately 19% of respondents had used the electronic accessible absentee ballot. By design, the scope of the survey was very focused on the experiences of the blindness community. The results are interesting and will be shared with membership. BSCB plans to forward the survey to the Disability Law Center, the Secretary of State's Office, and several other organizations and legislators.

The DLC drafted an advocated hard for an amendment to a bill that was moving quickly through the Massachusetts legislature. The bill, which passed, will extend vote by mail through June 30, 2021. Two other bills—one that would make voting by mail permanent, and another one drafted by DLC about accessible absentee voting by mail are still active and will require advocacy so they include all of the accommodations secured last year.

The language of the amendment reads as follows:

“SECTION 8. Said chapter 255 is hereby further amended by adding the following subsection:-(m) A voter who is blind or has a vision impairment, a mobility

or dexterity disability or other disability that makes it difficult or impossible for the voter to effectively access a paper vote by mail ballot because

the voter cannot independently read, write, hold or physically manipulate standard print materials may request an accommodation from their local election

official by phone or electronically. The request shall be received by the local election official not later than the fourth business day before the election.

Upon receiving such a request from a voter, the local election official shall make reasonable efforts to grant accommodations to the voter.”

Although the language isn't specific, it should be enforceable if necessary.

Mass. Eye and Ear reached out to schedule a time for BSCB to meet with staff. The five-year agreement between BSCB and MEEI will end this summer. Brian

returned their call. A meeting will be arranged for early May.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) released a Public Notice to invite public comment on whether any updates are needed to the rules implementing the Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act (CVAA). Public comments are due May 24. We're told ACB will have a response, and we plan to amplify the message from the national office.

The MBTA announced it will be restoring some of the cuts made to bus routes, though with less mid-day service. There will also be more commuter rail service.

The announcement followed comments from many organizations, including BSCB.

DeAnn sent a letter to the Cambridge Commission on Persons with Disabilities, expressing the BSCB board's view that armrests on public benches (that prevent people who are homeless from resting there) are not a BSCB priority. While we cannot speak for other disability communities, we have not advocated for them and believe there are more pressing ADA funding priorities.

In a setback, the Eleventh Circuit said Winn Dixie's Inaccessible Website Does Not Violate The ADA. In a separate action, the Online Accessibility Act was reintroduced in Congress. More work ahead.

(End of written report)

Along with her report, DeAnn included a draft accessible voting survey written by Cheryl. Comments were to be in by Wednesday April 14.

The assistant attorney general has told one of our board members that it is permissible to record meetings such as the SAB and RC meetings which are open to the public. We would like to post links to them on our website. We would trim but not edit the recordings.

The meeting chairperson would need to announce that it was being recorded.

The board agreed it was interested in posting recordings of RC and SAB meetings; Brian requested written confirmation from an official source that BSCB

had the right to post recordings of open meetings under the Open Meeting Law.

[Spring conference report; Frank](#)

It is not necessary to register in advance to participate in the auction.

Frank will add the Philmore number to the next convention reminder.

The reminder will be posted on the ACB leadership list.

Fifteen minutes will be added on Saturday for Brian to reiterate the current MCB issues.

Nobody has signed up for the talent show.

We discussed having a karaoke event instead, and it was then suggested that DeAnn do a segment on how to advocate for yourself.

38 people have registered for the convention so far.

The entire convention will be streamed.

Social committee report; Rose

(Written report)

We met in March to discuss plans for our next Social hang-out.

Possibly to meet on a weekend after noon in June 2021

The topic would be travel, to talk about some places folks have gone or where to go once the pandemic is over.

All of the social team members were in attendance

(End of written report)

Membership report; Mary

Mary urged us to complete the form she sent to us regarding gender and race.

A question arose on why age was not included in the ACB questions. Possibly they could have requested year of birth instead of birthdate.

Other business

Jerry made, Rose seconded, and the board approved a motion to accept the list of BSCB award recipients provided by Kim Charlson on behalf of the awards committee.

Our next meeting is scheduled for May 16 at 7:30 PM.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:36 PM.

Respectfully,

Jerry Berrier, Secretary