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 7 STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL FOR THE BLIND

 8 BIMONTHLY MEETING

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 14 2200 University Avenue

 15 St. Paul, Minnesota

 16 Thursday, June 5, 2025

 17 5:30 p.m.

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 1 APPEARANCES:

 2 REHABILITATION COUNCIL FOR THE BLIND SSB STAFF

 3 Samantha Flax, Chairperson Jennifer Beilke

 4 Hannah Harriman, Vice Chair Jon Benson

 5 Paulo Castro Isaac Hanninen

 6 Diane Dohnalik Brianna Holeman

 7 Frank Eller Susan Kusz

 8 Deborah Gleason Sheila Koenig

 9 Tom Heinl Lisa Larges

 10 Rob Hobson Lisa Rogers

 11 Jeff Mihelich

 12 Corbb O'Connor

 13 Justin Salisbury

 14 Patrick Vellia

 15

 16 ALSO PRESENT:

 17 Nyia Vang, State Program Administrator

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 1 MS. FLAX: All right. So call the

 2 meeting to order and we'll get started with a roll

 3 call of councilmembers and then if other people are

 4 in the room or on Zoom they can go ahead and

 5 introduce themselves.

 6 So is Connie here?

 7 (No response.)

 8 MS. FLAX: No Connie. Going once for

 9 Connie.

 10 Corbb.

 11 MR. O'CONNOR: Corbb is here.

 12 MS. FLAX: Debra Gleason, our new

 13 member.

 14 MS. GLEASON: Hello, Deborah is here.

 15 MS. FLAX: Hi Deborah, good to have

 16 you.

 17 MS. GLEASON: Thank you.

 18 MS. FLAX: Diane.

 19 MS. DOHNALIK: Diane is here.

 20 MS. FLAX: Frank Eller.

 21 MR. ELLER: Frank Eller is here.

 22 MS. FLAX: Hannah.

 23 MS. HARRIMAN: Here.

 24 MS. FLAX: Jeff.

 25 (No response.)

 4

 1 MS. FLAX: Do we have Jeff?

 2 (No response.)

 3 MS. FLAX: Okay. Jennifer Points, are

 4 you here today?

 5 (No response.)

 6 MS. FLAX: Justin Salisbury, do we

 7 have Justin?

 8 MR. SALISBURY: This is Justin, I am

 9 here on Zoom and I am also about to walk in the

 10 front door in ten seconds if somebody would let me

 11 in.

 12 MS. FLAX: Okay. Awesome, glad you

 13 are here, Justin.

 14 Our other new member, Kelly Lemke, are

 15 you here?

 16 MS. LEMKE: Hi, yep, I'm here.

 17 MS. FLAX: Great to have you.

 18 Pat McGee.

 19 (No response.)

 20 MS. FLAX: Do we have Pat?

 21 (No response.)

 22 MS. FLAX: Patrick, are you here?

 23 MR. VELLIA: Patrick is here.

 24 MS. FLAX: Excellent.

 25 Paulo, are you here?

 5

 1 MR. CASTRO: Paulo is here.

 2 MS. FLAX: Robert Hobson.

 3 MR. HOBSON: Robert Hobson, here.

 4 MS. FLAX: Perfect. I thought I heard

 5 you earlier.

 6 I'm here.

 7 Sue Fager. I do not -- Sue Fager, are

 8 you here?

 9 (No response.)

 10 MS. FLAX: Okay. Thea Kramer.

 11 (No response.)

 12 MS. FLAX: And Tom Heinl.

 13 MR. HEINL: Here.

 14 MS. FLAX: Awesome. Thank you

 15 everyone.

 16 And now SSB staff, first in the room

 17 and then Zoom, who is here?

 18 MR. BENSON: Jon Benson.

 19 MS. FLAX: Hi Jon.

 20 MS. KOENIG: Sheila Koenig.

 21 MS. ROGERS: Lisa Rogers.

 22 MS. KUSZ: Susan Kusz.

 23 MR. HANNINEN: Isaac Hanninen.

 24 MS. FLAX: Wonderful. Was that

 25 everyone on the room?

 6

 1 MR. VANG: And Nyia Vang.

 2 MS. FLAX: Hi Nyia.

 3 All right. And any SSB staff on Zoom

 4 today?

 5 MS. HOLEMAN: Brianna Holeman.

 6 MS. FLAX: Brianna.

 7 MS. LARGES: Lisa Larges.

 8 MS. BEILKE: Jennifer Beilke.

 9 MS. FLAX: Awesome, thank you

 10 everyone. And in the room who if you haven't

 11 announced yourself yet just part of the public or

 12 anything like that.

 13 MS. SANDERS: I don't think we have

 14 microphones, can you hear us?

 15 MR. HANNINEN: Actually you have one

 16 in front of you.

 17 MS. SANDERS: Oh, I didn't see it

 18 there. Judy Sanders.

 19 MR. LANGLAND: Matt Langland.

 20 MS. FLAX: Oh, hi Matt.

 21 Anyone else in the room?

 22 COURT REPORTER: Kim Evavold, court

 23 reporter.

 24 MR. HART: Rocky Hart.

 25 MS. FLAX: Hello, hello. Okay.

 7

 1 Anyone else in the room?

 2 MS. MCCUTCHIN: ASL interpreter.

 3 MS. FLAX: Hello.

 4 MS. GRADY: Tamajai Grady, ASL

 5 interpreter.

 6 MS. FLAX: Anyone else in the room?

 7 (No response.)

 8 MS. FLAX: All right. Whose on Zoom

 9 who doesn't work for SSB or isn't on the Council?

 10 MR. SAWCZYN: Steve Sawczyn.

 11 MS. FLAX: Okay, got Steve, a very

 12 quiet Steve Sawczyn.

 13 All right. Well, thank you all so

 14 much for being here and thanks for bearing with me,

 15 I am virtual today and almost home. I'm in a car

 16 so if there are any weird sounds that's what that

 17 is, it will be done soon, my apologies for that.

 18 Why don't we go ahead and do we have a

 19 motion to approve the minutes for the April 3

 20 meeting?

 21 MR. HOBSON: Rob Hobson, so moved.

 22 MR. O'CONNOR: Corbb so moves.

 23 MR. ELLER: Frank Eller seconds.

 24 MS. FLAX: We've got a Rob/Corbb

 25 motion, perfect. Any discussion?

 8

 1 (No response.)

 2 MS. FLAX: All right.

 3 MR. O'CONNOR: Corbb.

 4 MS. FLAX: Go ahead, Corbb.

 5 MR. O'CONNOR: Just a big thank you to

 6 I think it was Nyia and fam for putting those

 7 together, love the newer format that has more

 8 detail in it. So thank you, thank you.

 9 MS. FLAX: Thanks for that, Corbb.

 10 And thanks, Nyia, for helping put those together, I

 11 really appreciate it.

 12 MR. ELLER: Thank you from Frank as

 13 well. Thank you, Sam.

 14 MS. FLAX: All right. Let's go ahead

 15 and do a roll call. I'm just going to go through

 16 everyone's name in case people come in who weren't

 17 here.

 18 Connie.

 19 (No response.)

 20 MS. FLAX: Corbb.

 21 (No response.)

 22 MS. FLAX: Corbb might be otherwise

 23 occupied at the moment.

 24 MR. O'CONNOR: Yes.

 25 MS. FLAX: There you go.

 9

 1 Deborah.

 2 MS. GLEASON: Abstain.

 3 MS. FLAX: Diane.

 4 MS. DOHNALIK: Diane, yes.

 5 MS. FLAX: Frank.

 6 MR. ELLER: Frank, yes.

 7 MS. FLAX: Hannah.

 8 MS. HARRIMAN: Yes.

 9 MS. FLAX: Jeff.

 10 MR. MIHELICH: Jeff, yes.

 11 MS. FLAX: Jennifer.

 12 (No response.)

 13 MS. FLAX: Justin.

 14 MR. SALISBURY: Salisbury, abstain.

 15 MS. FLAX: Kelly.

 16 MS. LEMKE: Abstain.

 17 MS. FLAX: Pat McGee.

 18 (No response.)

 19 MS. FLAX: Patrick.

 20 MR. VELLIA: Here, Patrick, here.

 21 MS. FLAX: Are you voting yes for the

 22 minutes?

 23 MR. VELLIA: Yes.

 24 MS. FLAX: Perfect, thank you, just

 25 wanted to double check.

 10

 1 Paulo.

 2 MR. CASTRO: Paulo, yes.

 3 MS. FLAX: Robert Hobson.

 4 MR. HOBSON: Rob Hobson, pass.

 5 MS. FLAX: Samantha Flax, yes.

 6 Sue Fager.

 7 (No response.)

 8 MS. FLAX: Thea Kramer.

 9 (No response.)

 10 Tom Heinl.

 11 MR. HEINL: Yes.

 12 MS. FLAX: All right. Well, we had a

 13 lot of abstains, but I think we are good on yeses

 14 so I think we can go ahead and pass those. Thank

 15 you so much everyone.

 16 Next couple orders of business, I want

 17 to remind all committee chairs that annual reports

 18 will be due on October 15. It might feel early,

 19 but it comes up fast so just keep in mind to start

 20 to think about those over the next few months and

 21 if anyone has any questions, please feel free to

 22 reach out to me.

 23 In that same area we will be accepting

 24 names for committee appointments for the upcoming

 25 year. The committees go from, I believe it is,

 11

 1 October -- September 1 through the next year, so we

 2 will be making those appointments at the August

 3 meeting. If anyone is interested in being on a

 4 committee and we will be going over all of the

 5 committees later on tonight, please email me and

 6 let me know which committee you want to be on and

 7 let me know if you'd want to chair.

 8 I very much encourage, particularly

 9 councilmembers, if you are able to chair one or two

 10 committees that would be extraordinarily helpful,

 11 particularly we would love to have some new people

 12 doing some of that.

 13 I've noticed over the past few years

 14 it's really been consolidated to a few people and I

 15 would like to spread that around, so if you have

 16 any questions, concerns, thoughts on that, happy to

 17 chat. Reach out to me at any time about that, but

 18 hope to get those emails from you all saying that

 19 he would like to volunteer for a committee.

 20 MR. VELLIA: Can we get clarification?

 21 MS. FLAX: Yes.

 22 MR. VELLIA: October is what, the

 23 committee? This is from Patrick. Is there no

 24 meeting in August? I just want to clarify is there

 25 no meeting in August?

 12

 1 MS. FLAX: No, there is a meeting in

 2 August. We will be appointing new committees at

 3 the August meeting and we will be accepting

 4 committee reports for the past year in October.

 5 MS. HARRIMAN: This is Hannah. I have

 6 another question for clarification as well. So I

 7 guess I am a little confused because for some of us

 8 I know I think myself included my term ends in

 9 December, so how does that work if the calendar for

 10 the committee isn't synced with the start and end

 11 of councilmember terms?

 12 MS. FLAX: Great question. So

 13 basically the reason for that is that the

 14 committees, their calendar syncs with a lot of

 15 reporting through SSB, things like the fiscal year.

 16 And so what happens is if you are on a committee,

 17 if you are appointed in August even if your term

 18 ends on the Council you are still on that

 19 committee, noncouncilmembers can be on committees.

 20 So if you join a committee in August,

 21 even if your term ends in September you can finish

 22 out your year on the committee. Does anyone have

 23 any other points to add to that or Hannah, does

 24 that answer your question?

 25 MS. HARRIMAN: I think that makes

 13

 1 sense. I might have some questions later, but I

 2 think it makes sense.

 3 MS. FLAX: Okay. Previous chairs any

 4 thoughts that I missed on that?

 5 MR. O'CONNOR: This is Corbb. Just

 6 one thing that I would say, so most years we have

 7 set a deadline for requesting a committee is

 8 July 15, then August we appoint the committees, but

 9 that October deadline is super important for

 10 chairs. If you've chaired a committee in the past,

 11 so if you are chairing a committee right now the

 12 report that we need in October is the work that

 13 your committee has done up to that point. So I

 14 just want to clarify that that's not the new

 15 committee that's writing the report for October,

 16 that is the last year's committee.

 17 MS. FLAX: Thank you very much, Corbb.

 18 Any other comments or questions on this year/next

 19 year committee-related things? And we will be

 20 going over the committee structure for the next

 21 year later in the agenda.

 22 All right. Next, the other thing you

 23 can volunteer for is we have some conferences

 24 coming up in the fall that we can send

 25 councilmembers to. Nyia, I'm still in the car, do

 14

 1 you happen to have those dates?

 2 MR. VANG: I do not have those dates,

 3 but I know that it will be in San Diego for fall.

 4 MS. FLAX: Okay. Well, we will send

 5 those dates out, I thought he had them written down

 6 in front of me and they are not here. So I will

 7 send them to everyone and make sure that everyone

 8 has that information and we will talk about that

 9 more later.

 10 The next thing I have is our

 11 Director's report and Natasha Jerde was not able to

 12 be here this evening but I would love to turn it

 13 over to Jon Benson to tell us all the great things

 14 happening at SSB.

 15 MR. VELLIA: I'm sorry, Jon, this is

 16 Patrick for point of clarification.

 17 MR. BENSON: This is Jon Benson.

 18 MS. FLAX: Patrick had a point of

 19 clarification and then I will have Jon get started.

 20 MR. BENSON: Sure.

 21 MR. VELLIA: Last year we were in

 22 Seattle and this year it's in San Diego for the

 23 conferences, correct?

 24 MS. FLAX: Yes.

 25 MR. VELLIA: Thank you.

 15

 1 MS. FLAX: All right. I'm going to

 2 turn it over to Jon and I'm going to go inside and

 3 get my computer so I can talk more openly to you

 4 all.

 5 MR. BENSON: All right. Great, thank

 6 you very much. This is Natasha's Director's

 7 Report.

 8 Greetings Council. SSB's Budget

 9 Outlook Updates. We have just finalized our fiscal

 10 year '26 budget, we are projecting an approximately

 11 $400,000 budget deficit in our state funded

 12 programs namely primarily the Communication Center

 13 and Senior Services. The good part of this is we

 14 did not budget any incoming program income, so if

 15 we do not get any that will help eliminate the

 16 deficit as those funds are generally transferred to

 17 Senior Services.

 18 The unfortunate part is we will still

 19 not be able to fill positions in Audio Services or

 20 Radio Talking Book, which means we are now going to

 21 need to collectively brainstorm different ways to

 22 do the work that we do in the Communication Center.

 23 In addition to meeting with the

 24 Communication Center staff I am planning on joining

 25 an upcoming Communication Center Advisory Committee

 16

 1 meeting to review the budget and get their advice

 2 and input.

 3 In addition, Senior Services will be

 4 primarily providing their services in-house as much

 5 as possible, as we do not have a lot of wiggle room

 6 in their budget. Fortunately with the federal

 7 fiscal year '25 increase in our federal VR award,

 8 at least for now, we are not feeling as tight in

 9 WDU. We still, however, need to be vigilant in our

 10 budget and make sound financial decisions,

 11 especially given what has been proposed in the

 12 federal fiscal year '26 federal budget, details

 13 further down.

 14 National News. We are following

 15 closely The One Big Beautiful Bill Act of 2025,

 16 especially as it pertains to services for people

 17 with disabilities. Some notable items and areas of

 18 concern include: Medicaid. Medicaid work

 19 requirements to be implemented in 2027 or by the

 20 end of December 2026 versus 2029. When an

 21 individual with disabilities only qualifies for

 22 Medicaid as part of the expansion population, they

 23 will be required to prove eligibility every six

 24 months instead of yearly.

 25 And when an individual with

 17

 1 disabilities lives in a state that provides

 2 Medicaid coverage to those in the country

 3 illegally, and that includes California, Oregon,

 4 Colorado and Minnesota, the federal match for

 5 Medicaid coverage will be reduced by 10 percent.

 6 And last, a state's waiver for home

 7 and community health services or other relevant

 8 waivers is not considered budget neutral, so that

 9 means there is a negative impact on the budget.

 10 Department of Education. The

 11 administration's fiscal year 2026 budget proposal

 12 includes a total of 4.6 billion in mandatory and

 13 discretionary funding to support a wide range of

 14 vocational rehabilitation services and direct

 15 support programs aimed at promoting independence

 16 and community integration for individuals with

 17 disabilities.

 18 Within this total, the proposal

 19 includes 4.5 billion in mandatory funding for the

 20 Vocational Rehabilitation State Grants Program

 21 reflecting a consumer price index based increase as

 22 authorized by statute. However, the request also

 23 includes a change in mandatory program to reduce

 24 the post-sequester funding to 3.7 billion.

 25 Sequester meaning it is a reduction. Aligning it

 18

 1 with the federal fiscal year 2024 enacted level and

 2 resulting in an estimated $523 million in taxpayer

 3 savings. The administration notes that states have

 4 returned hundreds of millions in unspent funds over

 5 the past five fiscal years, suggesting that the

 6 current funding levels remain sufficient to meet

 7 needs. As such, no additional increase is

 8 proposed.

 9 Additionally, no funding is requested

 10 for the following programs in fiscal year 2026.

 11 Client Assistance Program State Grants, Training

 12 Program. These are grants for graduate level

 13 education VR. Demonstration & Training Programs,

 14 Protection and Advocacy of Individual Rights

 15 Program and Supported Employment State Grants.

 16 According to the proposal, states and

 17 localities are in a better position than the

 18 federal government to decide how to fund and

 19 operate these initiatives without added

 20 administrative burden. The administration has

 21 suggested that state VR agencies fund Client

 22 Assistant Programs at their own discretion and

 23 purview. This has a huge impact in Minnesota as we

 24 have a very active CAP funded through education.

 25 The lack of funding for training programs means no

 19

 1 funding for RSA scholars pursuing a degree in

 2 vocational rehabilitation. It also means no more

 3 technical assistance centers, which have been vital

 4 in educating and supporting VR agencies.

 5 The removal of the Supported

 6 Employment Grants has no impact on SSB, as we

 7 declined receiving those dollars during our last

 8 State Plan cycle. The dollars are so hard to use

 9 that it is almost impossible to use them. What

 10 they should have done is kept these grants but

 11 loosened the requirements.

 12 Funding for Older blind remains the

 13 same at fiscal year '24 levels and funding for

 14 Helen Keller National Center remains the same at

 15 FY24 levels.

 16 As a State Rehab Council I would

 17 encourage writing a letter to RSA Acting

 18 Commissioner Chris Pope regarding the necessity of

 19 receiving an increase in funds. Going back to

 20 federal fiscal year '24 funding will put us in a

 21 much larger deficit.

 22 Return to Office. Return to office

 23 started this week and it seems to be going okay.

 24 DIF Grant Updates. DIF is Disability

 25 Innovation Fund Grant Updates. We have nearly

 20

 1 fully hired all staff for that grant and those

 2 staff are now being oriented and trained to the

 3 work that they are going to be doing.

 4 Administrative Updates, Outreach.

 5 Since the last council meeting the Outreach Team

 6 has had vendor booths at four conferences and also

 7 presented on disability etiquette and SSB services

 8 to Explore Minnesota at their all staff meeting.

 9 We met with the Senior Services and Youth Services

 10 staff to talk about outreach and opportunities for

 11 collaboration.

 12 In April we presented on SSB services

 13 to attendees of the Mind, Body & Soul webinar

 14 hosted by the Governor's office. On May 20 a

 15 reporter from WCCO came by and interviewed Jeff

 16 Behl of Audio Services, people in Audio Services

 17 and Braille Unit staff, a volunteer reader and an

 18 Audio Book patron, our very own Judy Sanders.

 19 (Clapping.) The segment aired on their

 20 4:00 o'clock news the same day.

 21 Last week Lisa Larges spoke with a

 22 reporter from Duluth about Radio Talking Book. We

 23 are working on additional RTB media campaigns for

 24 Rochester, Mankato, Fergus Falls and St. Cloud.

 25 This summer we will be at conferences in Duluth,

 21

 1 Cloquet and Bloomington. We also continue our

 2 efforts to reach out to eye care clinics across the

 3 state.

 4 We have two big events on the horizon.

 5 The first is an introduction to the new DA2 audio

 6 player in August with the Minnesota Braille and

 7 Talking Book Library. The other is the White Cane

 8 Day event in October with a committee of O & M

 9 instructors and TVBIs. Be on the lookout or more

 10 information about those two fabulous in-person

 11 events.

 12 MR. O'CONNOR: Jon, will you stop for

 13 a question?

 14 MS. FLAX: Jon, are you good to stop

 15 for a question?

 16 MR. BENSON: Yeah.

 17 MS. FLAX: Awesome, go for it, Corbb.

 18 MR. O'CONNOR: Two questions. Jon,

 19 wondering if you could pause at different sections

 20 just so we can ask those when they might be fresher

 21 on folks' minds.

 22 But the first one was around the

 23 budget impact. Hearing that there is this

 24 $523 million drop in VR funding, when you first

 25 started by saying that you were projecting a

 22

 1 $400,000 --

 2 MR. BENSON: Deficit, yeah.

 3 MR. O'CONNOR: In the red for

 4 Minnesota, is that already accounted for or would

 5 that be an even lower number after the feds dropped

 6 with the requested amount?

 7 MR. BENSON: Basically what that's

 8 going to do is kind of just keep it even Steven.

 9 The 523 million in taxpayer savings has to do with

 10 the budget proposal from The Big Beautiful Act.

 11 The 400 we're talking about is our existing budget

 12 deficit. So it's a different pot there.

 13 MR. O'CONNOR: Right, okay, I just

 14 want to make sure that we shouldn't be projecting

 15 anything further than that. That is helpful.

 16 MR. BENSON: Yeah, we certainly

 17 wouldn't want to, we'll see.

 18 MR. O'CONNOR: And my second question

 19 was I remember a few years back there was a bill

 20 passed in the Minnesota Legislature about

 21 technology training for seniors or funding for

 22 senior training. And so I wonder if you can tell

 23 us about that, if that's still in place and if so,

 24 does that help at all with the Senior Services Unit

 25 needing to cut back on its spending?

 23

 1 MR. BENSON: It is still in play and

 2 it is a dedicated amount of dollars so from that

 3 perspective it is solely and only intended for that

 4 particular purpose.

 5 What we are looking at with Senior

 6 Services has to be a little bit more around those

 7 areas of our ability to provide items, aids and

 8 devices that we may have typically been able to

 9 simply offer to seniors without cost and without

 10 any sort of requirement other than that they can

 11 benefit from it, so we may be seeing some

 12 differences in our ability to stock and provide

 13 consumable inventory, for example.

 14 But that particular budget, that was

 15 enhanced by the state those few years ago that

 16 remains in the place and those dollars that are

 17 dedicated to tech training continue to be solely

 18 used for that purpose.

 19 MR. O'CONNOR: Thank you.

 20 MR. BENSON: And thank you, I will

 21 take little breaks here so folks can ask questions

 22 along the way. Thank you, Corbb.

 23 MS. FLAX: While we are in a break,

 24 does anyone else have any questions for Jon? I'll

 25 give people a minute to unmute and such.

 24

 1 (No response.)

 2 MR. BENSON: All right.

 3 MS. FLAX: All right, go or it.

 4 MR. BENSON: I will.

 5 Community Partnerships. We have had a

 6 few Community Partner retirements, that would be

 7 Dan Behl, one of our independent trainers, Ruth Ann

 8 Marsh and Mary Nicklawske have recently retired.

 9 So we've lost a bit of our complement or our

 10 training for customers and as we know those are

 11 hard positions to replace.

 12 The Community Partner monitoring

 13 schedule has been set up through summer and

 14 forecasted for 2026. We have completed 13

 15 monitoring events since last fall and by the end of

 16 2025 we will be caught up on the backlog of

 17 monitoring events, including for those Community

 18 Partners who have not been through a monitoring

 19 event before.

 20 After using the new monitoring tool

 21 feedback from Community Partners indicated that

 22 some additional polishing was needed such as

 23 including Workforce 1 which is a way for Community

 24 Partners to submit invoices and reports through

 25 SSB's secure system. We have also received

 25

 1 feedback that Community Partners prefer the tool be

 2 reviewed during the monitoring event, rather in

 3 advance.

 4 In addition to the contract monitoring

 5 tool that we are sending to the Community Partners

 6 we have developed a tool to gather feedback from

 7 staff and current recipients of services.

 8 Vocational Rehabilitation Services,

 9 our sister agency, the general agency, is

 10 developing a Community Partner monitoring system

 11 and met with SSB for information. So they're

 12 looking for us to give them some help and guidance

 13 on that, which is great.

 14 SSB has been encouraging our Community

 15 Partners become trained to use our secure client

 16 information system, which is Workforce 1. A few

 17 community partners have voluntarily joined

 18 Workforce 1 which allows them to directly upload

 19 their invoices and reports and get realtime payment

 20 information. Eight Community Partners have begun

 21 using the system since the Workforce 1 pilot,

 22 several more have joined since and have completed

 23 the training and begun using it.

 24 Most Community Partners have positive

 25 comments and find the realtime information useful.

 26

 1 An accessible fillable invoice form has been

 2 created or Community Partner use. Community

 3 Partners may find it beneficial to use this form as

 4 it contains all of the required invoice elements,

 5 use of the form is optional, it can be found on the

 6 SSB website.

 7 We continue to make improvement with

 8 our Community Partner website. Community Partners

 9 are being asked to work with Lisa Rogers to develop

 10 elevator pitches and a map for funding -- excuse

 11 me -- may I try that again, and a map for finding

 12 Community Partners searchable by multiple fields is

 13 being mailed. And finally we continue to work on

 14 updating the Community Partners manual.

 15 Questions/comments around Community

 16 Partners?

 17 (No response.)

 18 MR. BENSON: We are lucky to have

 19 Susan here because she is ready and able to answer

 20 any questions related to that. Hearing none,

 21 Communication Center Updates.

 22 MR. HOBSON: Wait, I do have a

 23 question.

 24 MR. BENSON: Rob.

 25 MR. HOBSON: This is Rob, I have a

 27

 1 question. What were the three community partners

 2 that retired, did they teach O & M, did they teach

 3 technology, were they rehab teachers? And if you

 4 don't know, that's okay, I was just curious.

 5 MS. KUSZ: Jennifer is also on the

 6 meeting and I will refer to Jennifer since she has

 7 been doing this much longer than I have.

 8 MS. BEILKE: This is Jennifer. Dan

 9 Behl provided orientation and mobility training,

 10 rehabilitation teaching, he was able to provide

 11 Braille training, he provided quite a variety. He

 12 did not do technology, he did not do computer

 13 training, but he could do some, you know, some

 14 light items that would not be considered

 15 technology. He also worked with Deaf/Blind

 16 individuals as well.

 17 Ruth Ann Marsh provided only

 18 orientation mobility training. And Mary Nicklawske

 19 provided only orientation and mobility training.

 20 MR. BENSON: There you go.

 21 MR. HOBSON: Thank you.

 22 MR. BENSON: All right. Other

 23 questions?

 24 (No response.)

 25 MR. BENSON: Communication Center

 28

 1 Updates. Audio Services. Audio Services remains

 2 busy with individual book requests, despite the

 3 expected slow down with experience with the end of

 4 every school year. We've had an influx of books on

 5 Buddhism and Self-Actualization which require a

 6 high level of attention to detail and proper word

 7 pronunciation.

 8 In addition we recently completed the

 9 updated employee manual for Costco stores to help

 10 them attract and retain Blind and otherwise print

 11 impaired people.

 12 And we completed a textbook for the

 13 University of Minnesota Extension Service that

 14 explores Minnesota's natural resources titled

 15 Northwoods Great Lakes. We are also recording a

 16 rare European English translation of the King James

 17 version of the Bible.

 18 We spent a morning in late May

 19 visiting with WCCO TV video journalist, Tony

 20 Peterson, who put together a nice montage

 21 describing who we are and what we do that aired the

 22 same day on Channel 4, as we mentioned before.

 23 Despite Jeff Behl's apprehension about being on

 24 camera the clip appeared to be well received. Nice

 25 thoughts about Jeff, if you saw that, he did a

 29

 1 fabulous job.

 2 Braille. Braille services provided to

 3 Minnesota students kindergarten through Grade 12

 4 from July 1, 2024 to June 2, 2025. We are going to

 5 go through some numbers. Number of students

 6 served, 34. Number of Braille titles purchased

 7 from other states, 123. Number of Braille titles

 8 newly transcribed by the Communication Center, 188.

 9 Number of Braille titles reproduced and reused by

 10 the Communication Center, 239. Total number of

 11 Braille titles provided, 550. Number of Braille

 12 pages purchased from other states, 114,413. Number

 13 of Braille pages newly transcribed by the

 14 Communication Center, 15,632. Number of Braille

 15 pages reproduced and reused by the Communication

 16 Center 58,431 and total Braille pages provided to

 17 Minnesota students 188,476.

 18 Questions about the numbers? A lot of

 19 Braille going on, which is one of our feature

 20 points of SSB.

 21 (No response.)

 22 MR. BENSON: All right.

 23 Engineering/Radio Talking Book. We are in the

 24 final stages of going live with our new Braille

 25 management software, KLAS. We will be starting

 30

 1 using it exclusively on July 1. In June we are

 2 conducting extensive training sessions for staff.

 3 Work continues on our project of digitizing old

 4 Radio Talking Books with the library so they can be

 5 put on BARD. Questions?

 6 (No response.)

 7 MR. BENSON: Development Update. Our

 8 annual fund from October 24 through June 4, 2025 we

 9 have leveraged 446 gifts totaling $158,000, I'm

 10 just going to round them. Endowment Fund total is

 11 $398,000. In April Angela Bodensteiner set out a

 12 Planned Giving Newsletter focusing on estate

 13 planning, importance of wills and so forth. As of

 14 June 4, 2025 the newsletter has resulted in 13

 15 gifts totaling $1,180.

 16 Program Services Updates. Senior

 17 Services Unit. We are pretty much business as

 18 usual. We will be leaning into training harder and

 19 being very conservative with device distribution,

 20 given the tightness in our state budget.

 21 Workforce Development Unit. Workforce

 22 Development Unit plans to look at, in the coming

 23 months, at the definition of maintenance, in

 24 particular post-secondary housing.

 25 Got some data, more numbers for you

 31

 1 all. Our data set and dates are from July 1 to the

 2 present. Applications received for services, 254.

 3 Individuals being served, these are open cases,

 4 839. Applicants, these are pending cases, 10.

 5 Successful closures, 69, plus we have 5 more

 6 identified that can probably close this month, so

 7 that's great, it's going to put us over 70.

 8 Unsuccessful closures, 125. Total

 9 closures, 194. And the average caseload size per

 10 counselor is 52. The Employer Reasonable

 11 Accommodation Act or Fund, excuse me, ERAF,

 12 continues to demonstrate strong growth and impact

 13 across Minnesota and has reached a few milestones.

 14 And keep in mind this is one of those programs that

 15 the legislators have decided not to continue to

 16 fund, which as unfortunate because this has turned

 17 out to be an absolutely outstanding program.

 18 As of last month total reimburses

 19 issued by ERAF have surpassed the one million

 20 dollar mark, with an exact approved total of

 21 1,125,024. This milestone speaks to the programs

 22 growing relevance and value among Minnesota's small

 23 and medium sized employers.

 24 We are proud to report that for fiscal

 25 year '25 we've already eclipsed fiscal year '24 in

 32

 1 both the total amount reimbursed and the number of

 2 applications approved. So the total number of

 3 funds reimbursed is 426,000, the total number of

 4 applications was 72, that means 72 employers have

 5 been approved for these. Total funds reimbursed is

 6 702,000 and total applications approved was 114.

 7 So this is represents a 64 percent

 8 increase in reimbursements and a 58 percent

 9 increase in approved applications compared to

 10 fiscal year '24 and with still several payments

 11 remaining in this fiscal year.

 12 Across '24 and '25 a total of 27

 13 applications were denied each year, keeping our

 14 overall denial rate consistently low, which is

 15 good. We don't want to deny people, we want to do

 16 as much as we can to approve their requests. This

 17 indicates that applicants are largely eligible and

 18 submitting appropriate documentation reflects

 19 positively on both outreach efforts and application

 20 guidance.

 21 ERAF recognized in the community while

 22 not directly naming ERAF Michael Kollar, a Coast

 23 Guard veteran and owner of inclusive coffee shops

 24 in Minnesota, was recently featured on CBS News.

 25 In his interview he acknowledged that programs

 33

 1 offered by the State of Minnesota, such as ERAF,

 2 have played a major role in helping him create

 3 opportunities for youth and adults with

 4 disabilities.

 5 Financial outlook and program

 6 momentum. With $3,200,000 total remaining funds

 7 available through federal year '26 ERAF still has

 8 ample resources to continue assisting Minnesota

 9 employers. As program awareness increases we

 10 anticipate even greater use of funds in the coming

 11 year.

 12 We are seeing repeat applicants, which

 13 is wonderful, and new applicants, many of who are

 14 introduced to ERAF through our monthly information

 15 sessions. These sessions have proven instrumental

 16 in driving inquiries and applications both before

 17 and after events.

 18 National level engagement and

 19 recognition. Following February's trip to

 20 Washington D.C. Ray McCoy accepted the William J.

 21 Harris Equal Opportunity Award, valuable national

 22 connections were established with leaders from the

 23 National Association of State Workforce Agencies

 24 and as a result ERAF was recently pictured in a

 25 joint presentation with Heather Stein to the NASWA

 34

 1 Veteran's Committee in May. I'm sorry, I don't

 2 know what the acronym is for that.

 3 The presentation emphasized the

 4 program's potential as a model to support disabled

 5 veterans in other states. So again, one day

 6 perhaps we can get the legislatures to renew this,

 7 but at the time being we showed and proved that

 8 this actually worked, which is absolutely

 9 fantastic.

 10 Employment Services. A new cohort for

 11 the CVS pharmacy tech training should be starting

 12 in August. That's been a really successful program

 13 and there's also discussion for new pharmacy tech

 14 program with Walgreen's.

 15 Independent Living. Kia had an

 16 increase in assessment for independent living

 17 training and working with others on independent

 18 living training. Jenny Pelletier, John Hess, and

 19 Kia have come up with an assessment for customers

 20 who are interested in going into the BEP, they are

 21 assessing on technology skills, O & M skills and IL

 22 skills including a hands-on piece & assessing

 23 physical stamina, opening and loading vending

 24 machines and identifying products. Recommendations

 25 will be made on what training is necessary to

 35

 1 continue in the BEP program. They had their first

 2 assessment on the 25th of May and it went really

 3 well.

 4 MS. O'CONNOR: I have --

 5 MR. BENSON: Sorry?

 6 MS. O'CONNOR: Sorry, I just have a

 7 question when you have a minute.

 8 MR. BENSON: I have a minute.

 9 MS. O'CONNOR: Sorry, if there is a

 10 better pause point let me know. This is Briley

 11 O'Connor. I believe I heard you say something

 12 about in-house services for seniors and I have a

 13 question but I wonder if you could repeat what you

 14 said so before I ask my question I can make sure

 15 that I heard you correctly.

 16 MR. BENSON: I can certainly go back

 17 to that part here. Let's see, one moment.

 18 This was the Senior Services Update.

 19 We are pretty much business as usual, we will be

 20 leaning into training harder and be very

 21 conservative with device distribution given the

 22 tightness in our state budget. That is that

 23 section of the report.

 24 MS. O'CONNOR: Okay.

 25 MR. O'CONNOR: Are you referring,

 36

 1 Briley, to the section of the budget where Jon was

 2 talking about the $400,000 deficit?

 3 MS. O'CONNOR: Yeah, I thought there

 4 was a note about how budget cuts would change

 5 service delivery. Would you be moving services

 6 in-house more rather than relying on Community

 7 Partners?

 8 MR. BENSON: For the Senior Services

 9 Unit that is a probability, yep.

 10 MS. O'CONNOR: Is there a concern

 11 that, the Senior Services staff is wonderful and

 12 also small, that people's needs will not be

 13 appropriately met, training needs?

 14 MR. BENSON: One could argue there is

 15 always a possibility, but until we actually start

 16 seeing the results it would be hard to give you a

 17 better answer than I don't know. We will just have

 18 to see.

 19 MS. SANDERS: This is Judy.

 20 MR. BENSON: Um-hmm.

 21 MS. SANDERS: I want to follow up with

 22 that, with what Briley was talking about, because I

 23 do -- I wondered the same thing. And the other

 24 part that you didn't mention in this part of your

 25 review that you said earlier was that the budget

 37

 1 that the state gave specifically for Senior

 2 Services a couple of years ago is still there. So

 3 if that is the case wouldn't that indicate that

 4 there would be room to expand services that would

 5 involve in-house and Community Partners?

 6 MR. BENSON: That's certainly

 7 probable. Keep in mind that as we are looking at

 8 cost, we see costs rising in many areas. So the

 9 budget is flat, the Senior Services budget is flat,

 10 we have gotten no further dollars from the state,

 11 we have gotten no further dollars from our federal

 12 partners. And with budgets being flat what that

 13 means is as costs around us rise our dollars

 14 basically shrink.

 15 And so looking at the different

 16 aspects of what our state dollars are able to cover

 17 and what we need our federal dollars to cover, we

 18 are finding that we are having to take a really

 19 hard look at what are some of the things that we

 20 can do and what we are able to do.

 21 Now, nothing that I have said or

 22 shared should in any way imply that there will not

 23 be use of Community Partners. So I want to be very

 24 sure that that's not an assumed understanding of

 25 what I'm talking about here. What we are talking

 38

 1 about is we have to take a hard look at how can we

 2 extend the services and the dollars that we have to

 3 provide the services to our customers.

 4 That may very well be relationships

 5 with our Community Partners in ways that helps

 6 establish things where we are able to maintain what

 7 we can maintain, but at the same time we also

 8 recognize the value of our dollars is less.

 9 MS. O'CONNOR: Briley. I just want to

 10 pop in, though, with just I heard you say two

 11 different things and I think from a Community

 12 Partners perspective what would be most helpful for

 13 us, I can just speak for the Minnesota Center for

 14 the Blind, I suppose, I can't speak for other

 15 Community Partners, but I think for everybody what

 16 would really help around this is some transparency

 17 and consistent communication.

 18 Because it is understandable that

 19 there will be changes in the current climate,

 20 right, that's a thing I think that everybody has

 21 expected and understands, but it is difficult to

 22 plan for us. It is beneficial to SSB when

 23 Community Partners can maintain a sustainable

 24 business and it's helpful for SSB when there are

 25 Community Partners available to provide services.

 39

 1 And so it would help if this was

 2 communicated to us more consistently. Because

 3 you've said both in what we have just asked that it

 4 is probable that services will be moved in-house

 5 and that it is probable that it won't. And so I

 6 just would ask that as these decisions are made and

 7 as we move forward that there is upfront

 8 communication with us. If we are not going to be

 9 getting referrals, not great, but I would rather

 10 know that and be able to plan around it.

 11 MR. SALISBURY: Justin. I'm not

 12 hearing whether I am being told to go next or not,

 13 but this is Justin and I also have a question if

 14 you are ready, Jon, to have another question.

 15 And that is: How, if at all, would

 16 the VR principle of informed choice apply to the

 17 people who are being served through this DIF Grant?

 18 MR. BENSON: Could you let me see if I

 19 understand your question. So we know that the

 20 construct of informed choice is a critical element

 21 of the Act, it permeates the Act, it is throughout

 22 the Act. And informed choice is having the

 23 information available to you to determine what you

 24 may want to do. We also know that informed choice

 25 is not unfettered choice, that's also been

 40

 1 established.

 2 And so there are times when one has a

 3 choice that's rather limited, one time, and

 4 sometimes one has a choice that is fairly broad.

 5 And so what we are not saying is this is the only

 6 option you have. I have never said that. I have

 7 not said that in this meeting, that is not stated

 8 in this report. What I am saying is we have

 9 limited dollars, we have to live within our means.

 10 There is no program in the country that is not in

 11 the same situation as we are, nobody, nobody has

 12 extra dollars.

 13 And so every state rehab program is

 14 trying to figure out how to manage, what they can

 15 do to serve the customers that they have. Can we

 16 use Community Partners in the Senior Services

 17 Program? Sure, we can do that. And we have to

 18 look at what is the value, then, too.

 19 If we are going to use Community

 20 Partners maybe we need a different model though,

 21 for example, group training. We know that with one

 22 of our community partners group training has been

 23 something that has been off their list, it's not

 24 been on their menu. Well, they have changed their

 25 minds now and they are ready to develop with us

 41

 1 group training. Well, there is an efficiency to

 2 group training, that's fabulous, we can't do group

 3 training here, we don't have the capacity to do

 4 that. So part is having the capacity.

 5 You know, at this point there are

 6 other options that we may not have any idea of what

 7 might work, but what we need to do is take a look

 8 at what we can do to maximize what we can do, at

 9 the same time recognizing that in order for us to

 10 maximize our dollars we also have to take advantage

 11 of in-house staff as well. And that's one of the

 12 reasons why we have in-house staff.

 13 If we want to look at it more broadly,

 14 where we really struggle is in greater Minnesota.

 15 Where are the Community Partners in greater

 16 Minnesota who teach adjustment to Blindness

 17 training? Where are the Community Partners in

 18 greater Minnesota who teach technology? And these

 19 other aspects are so critical for people.

 20 Everybody is on the east side of the

 21 state, there is nobody in the western side or the

 22 central part of the state teaching these various

 23 things, in fact, we just identified three vendors

 24 who are gone. Some of those folks were in greater

 25 Minnesota or able to travel to greater Minnesota,

 42

 1 right.

 2 So one of the reasons we had our

 3 direction change as far as having in-house

 4 trainers, so we could get people out there, so we

 5 could actually say yes, we have someone we can get

 6 out to you, somebody we can send out there. We can

 7 do that very quickly.

 8 So there is a balance here, there is a

 9 balance and I realize there is a change going on

 10 and I realize that there is a shift and in some

 11 ways one could say well, that's unfortunate, and it

 12 is, and yet at the same time we are trying to do

 13 what we can to minimize the impact that it may have

 14 on our customers.

 15 So back to informed choice,

 16 absolutely, I will stand up and say informed choice

 17 from here to tomorrow. At the same time we have to

 18 also recognize what informed choice actually is and

 19 it's not unfettered choice, so.

 20 All right. Other questions? Other

 21 comments?

 22 MR. O'CONNOR: Corbb.

 23 MR. HART: Rocky Hart.

 24 MR. BENSON: I guess I don't know if

 25 you want me to recognize folks or if you want to.

 43

 1 MS. FLAX: So it goes Corbb and then

 2 Rocky.

 3 MR. O'CONNOR: Okay, thanks. I

 4 totally understand what you are saying, Jon, about,

 5 you know, needing -- you know, you reduced the

 6 amount of income you need to reduce the amount of

 7 expenses, you know, to a commensurate degree, not

 8 that they need to be equal, but certainly need to

 9 recognize the changing landscape.

 10 And we have been talking about this

 11 for as long as I've been on the Council about the

 12 dollars going back to the federal government and,

 13 you know, that would mean, of course, fewer dollars

 14 coming into these programs. And I think we are just

 15 noticing that come true.

 16 The two things that come to mind from

 17 what you've just shared, one is that when it comes

 18 to the funding for seniors that the National

 19 Federation of the Blind worked so diligently to get

 20 approved with the state legislature, I think where

 21 it gets tricky for us is, and I'm gonna make up

 22 some numbers to just illustrate the example. If

 23 fully funding Senior Services is 100,000, right,

 24 and let's say that we find, you know, 20,000 from

 25 the state, well, I think what we need to make sure

 44

 1 of is that when we now need to cut the budget down

 2 that we do so and add that 20 back in as opposed to

 3 kind of saying well, we have enough from this extra

 4 pot of money that's already allocated.

 5 And so I think what maybe I'm hearing

 6 as a concern from Briley and from Judy has been

 7 that, you know, we are reducing the services even

 8 though we have some dedicated funding for it.

 9 Certainly not saying that it needs to be one way or

 10 the other and we are not the decision-making body

 11 there, but I do want to just clarify that I think

 12 the intent of that fund is not to help to balance

 13 and make up for losses, but rather to be in

 14 addition on top of any cuts that need to be made.

 15 So that we don't factor that money in the budget

 16 process until the end so it can be the boost that

 17 Senior Services need.

 18 And I think the second piece to that

 19 and related is when we talk about there aren't

 20 enough service providers in the western half of the

 21 state, I think we can continue to lament how there

 22 aren't providers out there, but clearly the

 23 capitalist in me says that that means that the

 24 model that we have is not a model that is

 25 profitable, otherwise we would have vendors in the

 45

 1 western part of the state.

 2 And so I think what we might want to

 3 be thinking about is we have historically not had

 4 any in-person adjustment to Blindness residential

 5 training for seniors and maybe we ought to think

 6 about for those in the western half of the state

 7 instead of saying hey, you can wait on a waiting

 8 list, we will get to you or we will send a staff

 9 person out there as they are able. Maybe what we

 10 ought to be thinking about is the mindset of hey,

 11 those folks need to come to where the service

 12 providers are so that the finances work for both

 13 the State Services for the Blind and for those

 14 services providers so seniors get what they need

 15 rather than just continuing to ask for and hope for

 16 folks that are willing to live and work in western

 17 Minnesota with a business model that clearly is

 18 more conducive to an urban area.

 19 Those are my two points. Thanks.

 20 MR. BENSON: Thank you.

 21 MR. HART: Yes, thank you very much.

 22 You know my question is related to your comment,

 23 Jon, about informed choice. I know that in the

 24 past even before the federal landscape has changed

 25 there have been policies that prioritize in-house

 46

 1 service providers were possible over Community

 2 Partners. I know, for example, that if a client is

 3 searching, you know, if they are seeking employment

 4 and they would like to receive assistance or

 5 support from an employment specialist, services

 6 from an employment specialist, they might have

 7 someone -- I remember this actually happened to me,

 8 I was requesting employment services from a

 9 Community Partner and I was actually told that

 10 SSB's policy was to check with in-house providers

 11 first. So it seems to me that some of these things

 12 were in place before the federal landscape was

 13 changed.

 14 My question is: With the reduction in

 15 funding that we are expecting, and some of which

 16 has already happened with VR, will that be further

 17 emphasized, will that continue, I mean, what should

 18 customers expect if they want to, for example, seek

 19 employment or other services that SSB could

 20 provide, but they might be more comfortable with

 21 Community Partners because that is an issue of

 22 informed choice which is really the foundation of

 23 VR.

 24 MR. BENSON: This is Jon. So if -- I

 25 just want to make sure I understand your question,

 47

 1 because I want to be able to answer it as

 2 accurately as I can.

 3 Informed choice in terms of employment

 4 services and the question is around what is the

 5 weight of informed choice with whether one receives

 6 in-house services or not?

 7 MR. HART: Yes, correct, with the

 8 federal landscape and things changing I know that

 9 there have been policies in place even before now

 10 that have prioritized in-house services. You know,

 11 basically my question is: Will that continue? Is

 12 that something that is going to be prioritized even

 13 if a client, for example, wishes to work with a

 14 particular vendor, what are we looking at as far as

 15 that goes?

 16 MR. BENSON: That's a very fair

 17 question and I think that could apply to other

 18 services as well that we have been discussing like

 19 the rehabilitation teaching and so forth.

 20 So I am hesitating when I hear that --

 21 I'm the kind of person that is going to go look at

 22 the policy manual and see what it says and that

 23 will give me a better response probably to if this

 24 is in policy or not. I know that I have over the

 25 course of time many times heard from staff and

 48

 1 customers regarding, well, this is policy. And

 2 when I look at policy I say well, actually it's

 3 not, it is not there, I can't find it. So it may

 4 be something you may have implied or assumed or

 5 otherwise invented, but it's not there.

 6 So in-house services are there to

 7 enhance what we have not -- to enhance Community

 8 Partner services. All right, maybe that's the best

 9 way to put it. Our in-house services are there to

 10 enhance what the Community Partners are able to

 11 provide. And the reason we enhance is because we

 12 have limited capacity.

 13 Our employment specialists are booked,

 14 our O & M staff of two are booked, they have a

 15 waiting list of 40 people. Well, they shouldn't be

 16 having the 40 people on a waiting list, those

 17 people should be referred out to a Community

 18 Partner, we need to get them into training.

 19 So Rocky, your question, if it's

 20 about, as I think I understand it is, where does

 21 informed choice come in terms of a customer's

 22 preference? Well, it certainly needs to be part of

 23 the conversation, it certainly needs to be part of

 24 how a decision is made. And that for me is the

 25 bottom line, what is the information that allows

 49

 1 that determination to be made? You do an

 2 assessment, you consider the options available, you

 3 consider the resources available and you consider

 4 the needs of the individual. And if there are

 5 circumstances that make it very clear that this

 6 person is looking at and would require and would

 7 benefit from an outside vendor, then we need to go

 8 to an outside vendor.

 9 There is literally nothing in our

 10 policy, nor would I allow myself to even consider

 11 something in our policy, that would say well,

 12 in-house services are in, that's it, that's all you

 13 get or you have to go there first before you go

 14 somewhere else. I know that's come up several

 15 times for me in the last year, or even in the last

 16 several months really, a misinterpretation of the

 17 fact that no, in-house services are not a

 18 gatekeeper for someone having other service vendors

 19 available Community Partners to them.

 20 And if that is happening to someone I

 21 want to know about it, because I need to know that

 22 we are not overstepping the reasons for why we have

 23 in-house services.

 24 MR. HART: Thank you.

 25 MR. BENSON: You are welcome. Talk to

 50

 1 me afterwards if you need to.

 2 MR. SALISBURY: Justin.

 3 MS. FLAX: Justin.

 4 MR. SALISBURY: Yeah. So this has

 5 been very educational for me and I really

 6 appreciate it. The next question that I have is

 7 actually kind of about a flow of money that can go

 8 in another direction, a way that we can be getting

 9 money in. And I wonder if this is possible, so I'm

 10 going to lay that out like out an idea, and please

 11 tell me if it is.

 12 The idea is that the Communication

 13 Center does a lot of great work with converting

 14 materials and a lot of universities right now are

 15 downsizing because of their budget issues, which

 16 also means reductions in staff that might be

 17 converting materials for students on college

 18 campuses. And so those universities may need to

 19 find an outside vendor that they can contract with

 20 to produce those instructional materials and our

 21 Communication Center is one of the best places to

 22 do that, I would any.

 23 And so I'm wondering if it is possible

 24 that the Communication Center could start

 25 contracting its services to bring in money from

 51

 1 universities and perhaps other entities with

 2 similar situations.

 3 MR. BENSON: I got the note, we will

 4 see what we can get for you.

 5 MS. KUSZ: Susan.

 6 MR. VELLIA: Patrick.

 7 MS. FLAX: Susan, go ahead.

 8 MS. KUSZ: I just want to backtrack to

 9 what Jon was talking about as far as our Community

 10 Partners and I just would like people to understand

 11 that when the Office of State Procurement has us

 12 doing contracts, we always are having to take like

 13 the lowest, you know, bid or the lowest cost. And

 14 I go back to a conversation I heard Jon say not too

 15 long ago, if we had two computers and one was

 16 $1,000 and another one was $10,000 and they both

 17 provided the exact same thing, we as the state

 18 agency are obligated to go with the one that costs

 19 the $1,000.

 20 So I think that my point, I guess,

 21 that I am trying to get at is that this is not

 22 something that we just came up with as far as using

 23 in-house staff to do certain things, this is

 24 something that, you know, like we have to go with

 25 kind of the lowest denominator.

 52

 1 So not saying that are our staff is

 2 the lowest denominator, because I think our staff

 3 are all phenomenal, and I do understand how that

 4 affects our Community Partners and I know that many

 5 are upset about what's going on, but it's like it

 6 is not just a new thing. That's it. Thank you.

 7 MR. O'CONNOR: Corbb.

 8 MR. BENSON: Patrick has had his hand

 9 up for quite a while, this is Jon, I just want to

 10 recognize that.

 11 MS. FLAX: Okay. Just a note that we

 12 are going to do it based on voice calling out, so

 13 we are going to go to Corbb and then we will go to

 14 Patrick and then if there are one or two more we

 15 will take them and then we will move on.

 16 MR. O'CONNOR: So with all due

 17 respect, Susan, I think we need to clarify that

 18 there is a big difference in state procurement of

 19 something like, you know, a coffee cup, right,

 20 which is very much a paper coffee cup is the same

 21 from different vendors and has different costs and

 22 we should go with the lowest vendor.

 23 And Blindness education, we should not

 24 be comparing cane travel instruction from vendors

 25 A, B and C purely by cost when we know from

 53

 1 research which cane travel methods are going to be

 2 a better outcome for each individual. And when

 3 that individual has the informed choice to say this

 4 is why this vendor is a better fit for me. And

 5 better yet, when a counselor should be in a

 6 position to face that person, I have three vendors

 7 for you, yet this one is a longer wait, here is why

 8 they are probably a better fit given that you are

 9 looking not for route training, but you are looking

 10 to understand and live independently.

 11 This course for seniors that you are

 12 going to be with other Blind people, it's going to

 13 be taught by Blind people, you are going to learn

 14 differently. It might be a little more expensive

 15 but, you know what, we shouldn't even be talking

 16 with our customers about the cost at that point

 17 anyway. Our customers deserve the understanding,

 18 as RSA has said many times, they deserve the

 19 understanding of what options are out there and we

 20 should not be comparing cost items when it comes to

 21 services.

 22 MS. FLAX: Thank you very much, Corbb.

 23 Patrick, go for it.

 24 MR. VELLIA: Okay. Two things now

 25 since Corbb just commented. First -- so to

 54

 1 clarify, for example with the vendors and Corbb's

 2 example, VLR vs. Blind, Inc. vs. HK, Inc. the

 3 Deafblind would have an option between the three

 4 and then the consumer can pick which vendor to work

 5 with to get their training, is that what you mean,

 6 Corbb?

 7 MR. O'CONNOR: I'm gonna defer to Jon,

 8 he is probably in a better position to answer that

 9 question. But my initial answer would be to say

 10 it's about informed choice and it's not to say that

 11 it's automatic choice, but it's about deciding and

 12 matching the services that you are receiving and

 13 the qualifications of that provider, the outcomes

 14 of that program with your individualized plan for

 15 employment. It's about creating the right match

 16 with both time and philosophy of those services,

 17 but Jon, I will let you add onto that.

 18 MR. BENSON: Yeah, if we are talking

 19 about the Community Partners, our Adjustment to

 20 Blindness training centers, then absolutely, that

 21 has been in play for years where basically an

 22 individual is informed of those -- the options

 23 available, given the opportunity to tour, to visit,

 24 to show up in person and speak to the students, to

 25 speak to the trainers, to get a sense of the

 55

 1 environment and make a decision. And it's their

 2 decision, it's their call, we will -- whatever it

 3 is that they decide we will support that.

 4 Because we do agree and do believe

 5 that learning the skills of Blindness is one of the

 6 most important things that this program does. It's

 7 one of three vital things that this program does,

 8 so that has been an element of informed choice for

 9 decades for us at least.

 10 MR. VELLIA: Thanks, that's what I

 11 thought.

 12 Anyway, the second part was one of the

 13 hard parts for the Community Partners to be added

 14 is that you have to wait for the RFP to become

 15 available.

 16 MR. BENSON: Could you ask that again?

 17 MR. VELLIA: I wonder if the hard part

 18 to add Community Partners is you have to wait for

 19 the RFP, Request for Proposal, to become available

 20 and then you can apply.

 21 MS. FLAX: So that's not a question,

 22 right Patrick, you are just commenting that that's

 23 a challenge that some Community Partners face; is

 24 that correct?

 25 MR. BENSON: Gotcha.

 56

 1 THE INTERPRETER: Yes.

 2 MS. FLAX: Okay cool, great. All

 3 right, thank you Patrick.

 4 Jon, do you want to go ahead and

 5 finish up with the rest of what you have for us and

 6 maybe we can take one or two more questions and

 7 then we will move on.

 8 MR. BENSON: Sure, I could --

 9 MS. GLEASON: This is Deborah, can I

 10 say something very quick?

 11 MS. FLAX: Okay, Deborah really quick

 12 and then we will go back to Jon.

 13 MS. GLEASON: I think it would be

 14 really important, for especially new folks to

 15 understand how it is we are allowed to ask

 16 questions, that would be super awesome, but I think

 17 one of the challenges, Jon, you are probably going

 18 to address this, is we don't have a finalized

 19 federal budget yet, so we have a lot of decisions

 20 we can't completely make at this time. So I don't

 21 think it is an intentional not sharing information,

 22 I think it's that we don't have the information to

 23 share.

 24 MR. BENSON: There are certainly some

 25 elements to that and I also, though, do recognize

 57

 1 and appreciate the ongoing matter of communication

 2 and transparency I tell you. I think we can all

 3 agree that that is probably one of the greatest

 4 challenges that we all face is ensuring that that

 5 occurs. So that is important, and yeah.

 6 All right.

 7 MS. FLAX: Sam, just a quick note,

 8 Jon, sorry I don't want to interrupt you, but I

 9 know we do have some new members and everything, if

 10 you all haven't had an orientation yet, please be

 11 in touch. Nyia and I should be doing that with all

 12 new members and we will go over things like to your

 13 point, Deborah, about asking questions and

 14 everything, I'm happy to do that. I just want to

 15 throw that out there, so if anyone is unsure about

 16 any of those things please reach out to me.

 17 And go for it, Jon.

 18 MR. BENSON: If you like I, in the

 19 interest of your meeting and time, I can be a

 20 little briefer with some of the last things I have

 21 here.

 22 MS. FLAX: Sure, I think we're okay,

 23 but yeah, we are getting close to time.

 24 MR. BENSON: All right. I do know

 25 there may be some other questions, so I just want

 58

 1 to be respectful of that.

 2 Okay. So we've got -- we were talking

 3 about independent living, we've got something going

 4 on with our pre-employment transition Services

 5 thing called Ready, Set, Prep, which is a beginner

 6 friendly hands-on course designed for Blind and low

 7 vision teens who are building confidence with

 8 kitchen exploration, food handling and

 9 independence. So with no requirement for prior

 10 cooking or appliance experience to learn to

 11 navigate a kitchen, handle food safely, read

 12 packaging and recipes, prepare simple meals and

 13 gain essential laundry skills for home life.

 14 And there are goals, of course, but

 15 this will be something new for us to try out and we

 16 will see how it goes. I think we have is it four

 17 students in that? Yeah, so that will be exciting.

 18 O & M training. Ooops, questions? I

 19 can pause a little more now.

 20 (No response.)

 21 MR. BENSON: O & M, Rob is laughing at

 22 me.

 23 O & M, hosted our first training at

 24 the Minneapolis/St. Paul Airport, I'm not sure what

 25 that means, but I hope it meant training staff and

 59

 1 people out there doing the work that they do. I

 2 will just leave it at that. White Cane Day, that's

 3 coming, be ready. Go out and have a good time.

 4 Pre-ETS, back to that. A lot of

 5 summer programs coming up. We want to welcome, we

 6 may not look it, Sheila make sure I am pronouncing

 7 her name correctly because I probably won't, Lila

 8 (phonetic) Nachar.

 9 MS. KOENIG: Laila.

 10 MR. BENSON: Laila, thank you. Nacar

 11 (phonetic).

 12 MS. KOENIG: Nachar.

 13 MR. BENSON: Thank you. Why don't you

 14 say the name.

 15 MS. KOENIG: Laila Nachar.

 16 MR. BENSON: Thank you. She's our new

 17 multiple systems and pathways navigator and she has

 18 resided and worked in Abu Dhabi in the United Arab

 19 Emirates as a school psychologist for 12 years.

 20 And she has worked with refugees and Community

 21 Partners in mental health support and governmental

 22 aid and counseling. And she is really -- we are

 23 looking forward to having her come on and do what

 24 she does.

 25 I will just say really quickly,

 60

 1 Sheila, anything else to add to that? It's a big,

 2 big deal.

 3 MS. KOENIG: Our multiple systems and

 4 pathways navigator position is one that works

 5 specifically with students with multiple

 6 disabilities and their families helping them

 7 navigate things like waiver services or

 8 guardianship and that's in addition to finding

 9 work-based learning experiences. So we are excited

 10 to have Laila.

 11 MR. BENSON: Thank you. And BEP,

 12 Business Enterprises Program, some of the high

 13 points there. The BEP is working with the

 14 Department of Corrections on the potential install

 15 of micro markets in prison employee break rooms,

 16 that would be a wonderful thing. And BEP operators

 17 and staff are working collaboratively with state

 18 office building reps to ensure that vending needs

 19 are met as employees work more in these

 20 recollections starting this week.

 21 So we hope to see people's incomes

 22 increase and business really pop as a result of

 23 going back to work.

 24 Last is that the BEP is working to

 25 update it's informal brochure and website and we

 61

 1 are hoping to have that completed in the next

 2 several weeks. And the next meeting of the elected

 3 committee of Blind vendors will be held on Friday,

 4 July 18. And so concludes the report.

 5 MS. FLAX: Thank you so much for all

 6 of that, Jon, really appreciate you taking the time

 7 to let us know all the things that are happening.

 8 We are a bit behind schedule, but does

 9 anyone have any last questions for Jon, I will take

 10 one or two?

 11 MR. BENSON: For those who are here

 12 they can feel free to approach me anyway during the

 13 break, so.

 14 MS. FLAX: Okay. So thank you again,

 15 Jon. What I propose we do is we do have some guest

 16 speakers after the break, what I would propose is

 17 we take our ten minutes and then he will do our

 18 guest speakers and do the budget report right after

 19 that. Does that work for everyone? Any major

 20 objection?

 21 (No response.)

 22 MS. FLAX: All right. So after the

 23 break we are going to -- tonight we are going to be

 24 hearing and having some discussions about NaviLens

 25 and then also some stuff about the Department of

 62

 1 Natural Resources, making parts and stuff more

 2 accessible.

 3 I wanted to do this because I thought

 4 it would be a good way for us to brainstorm ideas

 5 and things like that that we could then use to give

 6 to SSB as they get questions about things like

 7 this. So with that, let's all please come back at

 8 7:10 and we will get started.

 9 (Break taken from 6:59 to 7:12 p.m.)

 10 MS. FLAX: Let's actually go ahead and

 11 get started. So our next two events will be first

 12 with Jennifer and with Sara and we are going to

 13 have some discussion, give some feedback and pass

 14 around some ideas.

 15 Without further ado I am just going to

 16 let Jennifer introduce herself and find out what

 17 she wants to talk to us about.

 18 MS. PELLETIER: Hi everybody, this is

 19 Jenny Pelletier. Can you hear me okay, am I coming

 20 through?

 21 MS. FLAX: Yes, it sounds good.

 22 MS. PELLETIER: Okay, good. Well,

 23 thank you. You know I was just going to actually,

 24 before I say anything more, Jon had mentioned

 25 briefly White Cane Day, I just wanted to make sure

 63

 1 that folks know that there is a group planning --

 2 starting to plan and if there are others out there

 3 who want to join in, let one of our outreach folks

 4 know. We just want to make sure that there is not

 5 several people planning something without each

 6 other knowing. So just wanted to shout out that.

 7 I think my cohort here, Abdi, was

 8 going to join us, I don't know if he was able to or

 9 not, but I'm going to get started and then he can

 10 certainly chime in if he arrives later.

 11 So a year ago when I was at Leader Dog

 12 for some training I noticed the square colorful

 13 codes besides each doorway. And later at an O & M

 14 conference in Huntsville these were also placed by

 15 the restroom, front desk, elevators and check-in

 16 table and all that.

 17 And so these codes when used with the

 18 NaviLens free app can offer some information,

 19 whatever you want to assign to it. It could also

 20 be used for navigation like how many feet away you

 21 are away from a particular object. So in the past

 22 few months I've had some conversations with a

 23 NaviLens rep in Europe and here in the U.S. and I

 24 come to find out that these are fixtures in a lot

 25 of places at some universities and museums and on

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 1 products like Kellogg and Coke and other products,

 2 probably more so in Europe than here. And also I

 3 was recently in Austin and noticed that these are

 4 on all the transit signs.

 5 And whenever I travel as an O & M

 6 trainer I get excited and geek out over just how

 7 different intersections are built and designs and

 8 different tools like this, so I'm kind of

 9 intrigued. These codes don't replace, you know,

 10 cane, guide dog or the skills that go along with

 11 that, but I feel like it could provide some useful

 12 information in large unfamiliar public places.

 13 And so what I am wondering and why I

 14 am here is I just wanted to hear what other people

 15 think of, you know, would it be worth going to

 16 MnDOT and just having a conversation. I just think

 17 of how our bus signs are placed on metal poles that

 18 are not unique, they are exactly like the same

 19 posts that parking, you know, no parking signs are

 20 placed and sometimes transit signs are just in odd

 21 places that are really, really challenging to

 22 locate. And, you know, if you can hold your phone

 23 up, catch this code, get information, it's bus

 24 stop, you know, bus route 23, the next bus is

 25 coming by in 15 minutes, it gives you some

 65

 1 information to go on.

 2 So anyway, just throwing this out

 3 there as a discussion. You know, if this sounds

 4 interesting to other people in terms of just having

 5 a conversation like with MnDOT.

 6 MS. FLAX: Sam. Just a quick

 7 question, Jenny, if you don't mind. I wonder if

 8 you could talk a bit about have you used these at

 9 all with students either at SSB or anywhere else

 10 and anything you have noticed when you have used

 11 them?

 12 MS. PELLETIER: Yeah, so we put a few

 13 of these codes just in the lobby there at SSB by

 14 the bathrooms and the front desk and like by the

 15 kitchen exit. And these are free codes that

 16 anybody can get from their website and put

 17 anywhere, just to kind of get feedback.

 18 And I feel like it's more effective,

 19 again, in larger places than a small, like,

 20 entryway, but just for the sake of kind of a trial

 21 just to again get feedback. And I have gotten

 22 positive feedback from the staff whose used these,

 23 you know, just to kind of test it out, but no to

 24 the broader question because they are not placed

 25 out and about, it's very new here in Minnesota.

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 1 And I guess one more -- just one more

 2 thing to add is I am, you know, like as an O & M

 3 specialist I am always, like, really leery about a

 4 lot of different things, pros and cons about

 5 everything. But when it comes to transportation I

 6 feel like something like this is more of a

 7 universal design approach where I think everybody

 8 with a smart phone, which I know is not 100 percent

 9 of the population right there, but it's a pretty

 10 good percentage, I think just about anybody would

 11 benefit.

 12 But again, I don't want to advocate

 13 where, you know, that's not wanted and so that's

 14 where I am really interested in hearing from other

 15 people and just chatting about that a little bit.

 16 MS. FLAX: I really appreciate your

 17 wanting the feedback and, you know, I think that's

 18 a great way to be an ally is always be having these

 19 conversations and asking.

 20 So I guess the ultimate question is:

 21 Is this something that would be worth talking to

 22 the Department of Transportation about? And I'm

 23 curious, you know, particularly from our

 24 organizations that really represent, you know, lots

 25 of Blind people around the state, what do people

 67

 1 think either just in general or, you know, about

 2 this thought about talking to the Department of

 3 Transportation? I'm curious what people's thought

 4 are.

 5 MR. O'CONNOR: Corbb.

 6 MS. DUNNAM: Jennifer.

 7 MS. FLAX: Corbb and then Jennifer.

 8 MR. VELLIA: And Patrick.

 9 MS. FLAX: Okay, Corbb, Jennifer and

 10 then Patrick.

 11 MR. O'CONNOR: Jenny, good to meet

 12 you, I'm Corbb O'Connor, serve as president of the

 13 National Federation of the Blind of Minnesota. And

 14 I think the first piece I would say is that I think

 15 this is a great discussion to have and something

 16 that I personally have found great value in the

 17 NaviLens technology, particularly as you mentioned

 18 in big open wide spaces moreso than, you know,

 19 putting it where you would see a sign for the front

 20 desk, right? But if I'm at the front desk I

 21 probably found the front desk regardless of finding

 22 a sign to confirm that I am at the front desk

 23 versus like if I'm in a large convention center,

 24 right, and I'm looking for the check-in desk and

 25 it's a very large echoey lobby that could be

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 1 valuable, or if I'm at a street corner, right, and

 2 I'm wondering which bus stop is here.

 3 But that aside, I think the one piece

 4 that I want to bring forward for all the members of

 5 the SRC-B is that our group here convenes to

 6 discuss and oversee the workings of State Services

 7 for the Blind. And when there are topics like this

 8 where we are seeking the input of Blind people, as

 9 we should before approaching groups like MnDOT or

 10 Metro Transit, I would say that a better forum for

 11 these conversations is with elected organizations

 12 made up of Blind people, not organizations that

 13 come together at a state level or the services that

 14 serve Blind people at the state level.

 15 You know, we certainly have a really

 16 important position here and one that as was just

 17 illuminated by the great discussion we had with Jon

 18 and Natasha's report about making sure that we have

 19 services available to Blind Minnesotans, but it's

 20 really not the right venue for us to be an advocacy

 21 organization or for us to be using this meeting to

 22 provide feedback to technology manufacturers like

 23 we did I think it was last summer when there was a

 24 group that was looking for some of that feedback.

 25 So those are my two points.

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 1 MS. PELLETIER: So tell me again who

 2 would you recommend reaching out to?

 3 MR. O'CONNOR: Yeah, so the National

 4 Federation of the Blind of Minnesota hosts monthly

 5 meetings as well as annual state conventions and,

 6 you know, those are the place where we have a large

 7 gathering of Blind people who are using, in this

 8 case public transit, or who have navigated

 9 independently and a better group of folks probably

 10 to get you the sample size there and also a group

 11 that's poised to and actively works on from an

 12 advocacy perspective on moving legislation, moving

 13 regulation and bettering the things like, as you

 14 mentioned, you know, working with MnDOT or Metro

 15 Transit or the Airport's Commission.

 16 MS. FLAX: Great, thank you so much

 17 Corbb. And if there is anyone else who wants to,

 18 you know, get in touch with Jenny as part of groups

 19 and I hope, Corbb, you guys can connect to maybe

 20 get some of that feedback from those groups as

 21 well.

 22 I believe and I think it's a really

 23 important thing to think about in terms of, you

 24 know, what our goal is at the Council and I think

 25 discussions like this can really help us to think

 70

 1 about that. I believe Jennifer was next in line

 2 and then Patrick.

 3 MS. DUNNAM: Coming through okay?

 4 MS. FLAX: Yes, ma'am.

 5 MS. DUNNAM: All right. Just briefly

 6 to first I want to underscore what Corbb has said

 7 that made my comments much shorter. My second

 8 point, though, is one of the reasons to be cautious

 9 is there is a number of ways that, you know, object

 10 and location identification works via, you know,

 11 beacons or with codes and et cetera. I know that I

 12 personally have had a very hit or miss experience

 13 with the NaviLens technology in particular, so we

 14 would want to, I think as Corbb was saying, work

 15 with the organization to really unify around what

 16 it is that we would go to, if we went to MnDOT,

 17 what that technology would look like. There may be

 18 some other options that are better, but yeah, let's

 19 talk about that concept in your organizations.

 20 Thank you.

 21 MS. PELLETIER: Awesome. Well, I

 22 appreciate feedback from this group, I mean, even

 23 if that's the feedback that's certainly helpful.

 24 Anything is, yeah, helpful, so appreciate it. And

 25 I would be more than welcome to -- I know do we

 71

 1 have Sara or Jamie here? Yes. I mean, I would be

 2 more than happy to kind of help with the segue to

 3 these folks as well.

 4 MS. FLAX: I think that would be great

 5 because that was going to be our next thing. So

 6 Jenny, I really appreciate you coming to talk to us

 7 about this and I hope that you can meet with some

 8 of these, you know, advocacy organizations like the

 9 NFB to get more feedback.

 10 Yeah, I think that our next

 11 conversation if you want to go ahead and segue

 12 over, but I think there might be some similar

 13 feedback.

 14 MR. O'CONNOR: Point of order.

 15 MS. FLAX: Yes, Corbb.

 16 MR. O'CONNOR: Patrick was in line.

 17 MS. FLAX: Yes. We will go to Patrick

 18 and then we will segue over and I imagine some of

 19 the feedback will be similar, but would love to

 20 hear from Sara about that. And thanks so much,

 21 Jenny, for taking the time tonight.

 22 Let's go to Patrick and then we will

 23 go to Sara.

 24 MR. VELLIA: I am curious if the

 25 NaviLens system works with the Ray-Bans yet?

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 1 MS. PELLETIER: Did you say with

 2 Ray-Ban?

 3 MR. VELLIA: Yeah, the Ray-Bans, yeah.

 4 MS. PELLETIER: Yeah, I don't know the

 5 answer to that, I'm gonna assume it would, but I

 6 can certainly look that up and do a little

 7 research. But yeah, I don't know all the ins and

 8 outs, it's hard to know how deep to dive into

 9 something again without knowing what other people

 10 think as well, you know. So yeah, I don't have a

 11 good answer for you right now, but I can definitely

 12 check it out.

 13 MS. HARRIMAN: This is Hannah, just a

 14 really quick thing. You know, and I put this in

 15 the chat so I just want to make sure that everyone

 16 has access. I think in these conversations, too,

 17 and in these discussions it is important to get the

 18 feedback of not only Blind and visually impaired,

 19 but Deafblind to include Blind, hard of hearing and

 20 I think that's a whole other segment of people that

 21 could give feedback on this and I would be happy to

 22 do that.

 23 I haven't used this technology, but if

 24 you are ever curious about the accessibility of

 25 DeafBlind related to some of this I would be happy

 73

 1 to collaborate.

 2 MS. PELLETIER: Thanks Hannah. And

 3 yeah, there are haptics and it is also, as they

 4 describe it, accessible for Deafblind users as

 5 well. So yeah, I would be interested in hearing

 6 what you and others have to say.

 7 MR. VELLIA: This is Patrick, I am

 8 also interested.

 9 MS. PELLETIER: Awesome.

 10 MS. FLAX: All right. So various

 11 people will be contacting Jenny about meeting with

 12 their groups, which is awesome.

 13 And Jenny, did you have something you

 14 wanted to say as we passed it over to Sara?

 15 MS. PELLETIER: Oh, well I was just

 16 going to say so I had met Sara, well, I guess

 17 through some other correspondences and another

 18 webinar that we attended and she and Jamie were

 19 inquiring about accessibility to parks through the

 20 DNR in terms of Blind users. And we had some

 21 conversation but then in the end again I said, you

 22 know, maybe you should come and talk to this group

 23 and they might have some suggestions for you.

 24 So Jamie and Sara, I don't know if you

 25 are both here? Yeah, you are, you can take it

 74

 1 away.

 2 MS. FLAX: I'm sorry, I didn't see you

 3 there Jamie, I didn't mean to just say Sara.

 4 MR. McBRIDE: That's okay. She's just

 5 going to take it away from here, so she's leading

 6 this effort here.

 7 MS. TOZIER: Hi everybody, I'm Sara

 8 Tozier, I'm working with the conservation core this

 9 term and I'm working alongside Jamie McBride whose

 10 the state parks and recreation program consultant.

 11 And yeah, like Jennifer said, we just

 12 want to gain more understanding and perspective on

 13 bringing accessibility into the outdoors through

 14 Get Out More Funds, which is an initiative that

 15 came out a couple years ago. There is I think it's

 16 like $153 million, but within one of the categories

 17 there is a million dollars allocated to Jamie for

 18 adaptive equipment.

 19 And in the past year Jamie has been

 20 focusing on more like mobility equipment like track

 21 chairs, beak chairs, hand cycles, but I think Jamie

 22 will mention like there is just so much money and

 23 there's other communities that we can reach.

 24 So that's why we have been talking to

 25 Jennifer, I've had a few meetings with her and I

 75

 1 think, yeah, that's why we are here is we just want

 2 to gain a better understanding and hear from all of

 3 you, so thank you.

 4 MS. FLAX: Great. Thank you so much

 5 for being here. I am sure that we would love to

 6 get you in touch with some of these advocacy

 7 organizations like Corbb and Jennifer were talking

 8 about.

 9 Do other people have comments or

 10 feedback or things that they want to share with

 11 Sara and Jamie?

 12 MR. SAWCZYN: Steve.

 13 MR. MILHELICH: This is Jeff.

 14 MS. FLAX: Steve and then Jeff.

 15 MR. SAWCZYN: Yeah, just really

 16 quickly and I put this in the chat, I'm not sure if

 17 that is visible to you folks in the room. I'm the

 18 president of the metro chapter of the National

 19 Federation of the Blind of Minnesota and I think

 20 these are conversations we would love to have. We

 21 have chapter meetings once a month, I would love to

 22 be in contact with both of you and I think, you

 23 know, we are a group that can help advocate for

 24 some of this, but can also provide some great

 25 feedback across a diverse population of folks who

 76

 1 are Blind.

 2 So if that's of interest, Steve, email

 3 address is in the chat. If not, maybe someone in

 4 the room can pass my contact info along. Thank

 5 you.

 6 MS. FLAX: Thanks so much, Steve. I

 7 think it was going to be Jeff next.

 8 MR. MIHELICH: Yes, just a suggestion.

 9 There are several consumer groups in the area so,

 10 American Council of the Blind is one, United Blind

 11 is another and I'm sure that there are other

 12 organizations. So getting information from

 13 consumer groups is good, but I really think it's

 14 important to have a wide variety of that

 15 information from various groups and not just focus

 16 in on one.

 17 MR. SALISBURY: Justin.

 18 MR. HART: Rocky Hart.

 19 MS. FLAX: Justin and then Rocky and

 20 then we will see if there is one or two more before

 21 we move on. I'm just keeping an eye on the time.

 22 MR. SALISBURY: Yes, this is Justin

 23 Salisbury, a suggestion. When having these

 24 conversations with consumer groups if possible I

 25 think it would be really awesome to be able to talk

 77

 1 about both state parks and city parks, if possible,

 2 because those are managed a little bit differently

 3 but may have similar needs.

 4 MS. FLAX: Great. Thank you, Justin.

 5 And I believe was it Rocky?

 6 MR. HART: Yes. Just one thing.

 7 Hannah and Patrick mentioned the DeafBlindness

 8 aspect reaching out to consumer organizations

 9 regarding this and I do want to point out that

 10 there are consumer organizations for the Deafblind

 11 in Minnesota, including Minnesota DeafBlind

 12 Association as well as a number of other groups

 13 that we could look at.

 14 The NFB of Minnesota also has a

 15 Deafblind group as well, which I chair, so I would

 16 be happy to discuss this within the context of that

 17 group as well and certainly would take you up on

 18 further discussions regarding this type of

 19 technology.

 20 MS. FLAX: Great. Thank you, Rocky.

 21 MR. VELLIA: This is Patrick.

 22 MS. FLAX: Okay, Patrick.

 23 MR. O'CONNOR: Sam, your audio is

 24 cutting in and out.

 25 MS. FLAX: Am I better now?

 78

 1 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yep, I can hear

 2 you now.

 3 MS. FLAX: Okay, cool. All right. We

 4 will go to Patrick and then we'll finish up.

 5 MR. VELLIA: And expanding from Rocky

 6 as the MDBA and provide feedback. But we

 7 technically have two different defined groups here

 8 in the state, the speaking Deafblind, they run

 9 their own, and then the signing Deafblind, they

 10 tend to be separate here so they tend to use email

 11 and the speaking DeafBlind have phone conferencing,

 12 but the signing Deafblind prefer in person. But

 13 Rocky and I and Hannah can help you get the

 14 feedback from them.

 15 MS. FLAX: Perfect. All right, thank

 16 you, Patrick.

 17 So it sounds like the take-away really

 18 is everyone says talk to groups that do advocacy

 19 and that are consumer groups that are made up of

 20 Blind people. And I just want to thank you guys

 21 for asking these questions and for wanting to talk

 22 to the people who these things will help. I think

 23 that's super important and I hope that this meeting

 24 allows you to form those connections and to meet

 25 with these great groups that people are a part of.

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 1 I don't know if Jamie or Sara if you

 2 have any closing things you would like to share or

 3 ways in which people can get in touch with you,

 4 anything like that? Same for you, Jenny, too. I

 5 realize we didn't do that so if you guys want to

 6 let us know if there is a way our groups can get in

 7 touch with you.

 8 MR. ELLER: This is Frank. There is

 9 United Blind I heard, I never heard of United

 10 Blind, what's the website? Thank you.

 11 MS. FLAX: Frank, we should be able to

 12 get you that information, but I'm curious for now

 13 if our guest speakers would want to share their

 14 contact information if they want to.

 15 MS. PELLETIER: I can put our emails

 16 in the chat for everybody.

 17 MS. FLAX: Perfect, thank you very

 18 much.

 19 Does someone in the room have access

 20 to the chat in case they want to look at it?

 21 MR. HOBSON: I don't think we have

 22 access to the chat. Yeah, say it out loud, please,

 23 if you can.

 24 MR. McBRIDE: Go ahead, Sara.

 25 MS. TOZIER: Okay. Jamie's email is

 80

 1 jamie.mcbride@state.mn.us. And then mine is

 2 Sara.tozier@state.mn.us.

 3 MS. FLAX: Perfect. Thank you so much

 4 and I'm sure if anyone missed those we can get them

 5 to you.

 6 MR. McBRIDE: One last thing. I

 7 really appreciate the time as we work to try and

 8 expand access to parks and go past serving just

 9 this money with mobility issues. I am really

 10 appreciative of trying to serve more people and to

 11 offer whatever kind of equipment that we can get

 12 that would enhance somebody's visit to a state

 13 park.

 14 So it's really appreciated that we

 15 would get some time to do this and we will

 16 appreciate any and all meetings that we can have

 17 with any consumer groups. I think I heard you call

 18 out some consumer groups, I took some notes and I'm

 19 sure Sara did as well and I will let Sara also

 20 speak, but I am really appreciative. Thank you.

 21 MS. TOZIER: Yeah, I'm really

 22 appreciative that we were able to come and I'm glad

 23 that we got feedback on kind of what our next steps

 24 will be in this process. So thank you all for

 25 having us.

 81

 1 MS. FLAX: Thank you so much.

 2 MS. HARRIMAN: Sam, this is Hannah. I

 3 can actually gather those emails from the chat and

 4 send it to you so we can include it in the next

 5 minutes.

 6 MS. FLAX: Sure, excellent. Thank you

 7 for that, Hannah.

 8 All right. So we are a little behind

 9 schedule but that's okay, I bet we can catch up.

 10 Why don't we move onto looking at the

 11 budget document and I believe that means handing it

 12 to you, Rob.

 13 MR. HOBSON: Hello. All right. So in

 14 lieu of time everyone should have received the

 15 budget, if anyone who is not on the Council wants

 16 to see it I am happy to email it to you, let me

 17 know.

 18 Okay. So we are on budget for this

 19 year. I can go through each line item if you'd

 20 like, otherwise I can tell you that we've spent

 21 $35,730. Sorry, that's our total budget and then

 22 what we spent is 24,023.19. So we have

 23 approximately $11,000 left for the next -- that was

 24 right before this meeting, so this was as of what

 25 was it, June 3, June 4. So this meeting and the

 82

 1 August meeting are on this budget, so we are doing

 2 great.

 3 I did move some money around to

 4 account for the court reporter, she had $85 left,

 5 so we moved some money from out-of-state travel,

 6 there was money left because we are not doing any

 7 out-of-state travel the rest of the year so I moved

 8 that money over.

 9 I want to thank Corbb for being on the

 10 committee. Unfortunately I wasn't able to connect

 11 with Ida -- Ada, excuse me. But that's what we

 12 have so far for the rest of the year.

 13 Any questions?

 14 MS. FLAX: Quick question, and I

 15 recognize I should probably know this.

 16 MR. HOBSON: Sure.

 17 MS. FLAX: Are we planning, then, to

 18 send people to CSAVR?

 19 MR. HOBSON: Right now we had budgeted

 20 for this year out-of-state travel was -- let me

 21 find it -- out-of-state travel was 5,600, that's

 22 for hotel, because everything is in a what do you

 23 call it, each one is a line item. I think fees for

 24 like CSAVR fees it would be, let's see.

 25 MR. O'CONNOR: Corbb.

 83

 1 MR. HOBSON: Yeah, go ahead, Corbb.

 2 MR. O'CONNOR: I think to answer the

 3 question broadly, we absolutely shouldn't just send

 4 people to the fall conferences. It feels like we

 5 are kind of always talking about our budget, which

 6 is probably a good thing in these times, but the

 7 ideal would have been that, and this is through no

 8 fault of Rob's, we would have had this presentation

 9 a couple of months ago and so now we would be, I

 10 believe it's either this month or next month, we

 11 appoint a budget task force who will establish a

 12 budget for the Council for the next fiscal year.

 13 MS. FLAX: Okay. Perfect, thank you.

 14 MR. HOBSON: I believe that

 15 presentation is in August.

 16 MS. FLAX: Yes, I believe that's

 17 correct.

 18 MR. HOBSON: So we are not too far off

 19 schedule, this should have been in April, Corbb is

 20 correct.

 21 MR. O'CONNOR: So I would like to

 22 maybe make a motion just to make things easy that

 23 we just maintain the same Budget Task Force to work

 24 on next year's budget that we used to do the mid

 25 year report on this year's budget.

 84

 1 MR. ELLER: Frank Eller motions.

 2 MR. VELLIA: Patrick.

 3 MS. FLAX: So Corbb moved, Frank

 4 seconded. Patrick, were you seconding or do you

 5 have a question before we vote?

 6 MR. VELLIA: I have a question, this

 7 is Patrick.

 8 MS. FLAX: Okay. Go ahead with your

 9 question, Patrick, and then we'll go ahead with the

 10 vote.

 11 MR. VELLIA: My question can wait, so

 12 go ahead.

 13 MS. FLAX: Okay, sounds good.

 14 All right. I will call --

 15 MR. HOBSON: This is Rob.

 16 MS. FLAX: Go ahead, Rob.

 17 MR. HOBSON: I do have a suggestion.

 18 MS. FLAX: Okay.

 19 MR. HOBSON: I think it would be wise

 20 to, since we are dealing with the budget for the

 21 Council, to keep it on Council, so Ada is not part

 22 of the Council and I had a hard time connecting

 23 with her. I think it would be better to keep it on

 24 councilmembers, so a friendly amendment would be

 25 just Corbb and I.

 85

 1 MS. SANDERS: This is Judy.

 2 MS. FLAX: Judy, go ahead.

 3 MS. SANDERS: Well, I just wanted to

 4 point out that people serve on committees and they

 5 are not necessarily on the Council. So Ada had

 6 been appointed as a committee member to the task

 7 force or whatever it is.

 8 MR. SALISBURY: Justin.

 9 MS. FLAX: Quick question before you

 10 go, Justin.

 11 Rob, would you be comfortable with

 12 saying it was still you, Corbb and Ada if she comes

 13 and then maybe we add one more person? That way if

 14 she doesn't it's not just you and Corbb, that way

 15 you have a third person. Would that make sense to

 16 everyone?

 17 MR. HOBSON: Sure, that's fine.

 18 MS. FLAX: Corbb, is that okay with

 19 you?

 20 MR. O'CONNOR: Yes.

 21 MS. FLAX: Judy, did you have a

 22 question or were you volunteering to be the next

 23 person?

 24 MS. SANDERS: No, I wanted to point

 25 out that Ada needed to be included. You were

 86

 1 saying that she is not on the Council, that's true,

 2 but you can do it without being on the Council.

 3 MS. FLAX: Okay, perfect.

 4 Justin, did you have a question or

 5 were you volunteering?

 6 MR. SALISBURY: I had a perspective

 7 for the conversation about task force membership

 8 and Council membership.

 9 MS. FLAX: Oh, okay, so similar to

 10 what Judy was saying?

 11 MR. SALISBURY: Similar, but my angle

 12 on it would be and what you all will see coming up

 13 in the Committee Structure Task Force is explicitly

 14 for committees, although this is a task force,

 15 somewhat different, that for any of them you don't

 16 have to be on the Council, but that doesn't mean

 17 that everyone off the Council is the right person

 18 to be on a task force, right?

 19 So there are some excellent people

 20 that are not on the Council that could be in that

 21 role, so I just think that, you know, it could be

 22 that maybe the right person or wrong person gets

 23 picked, but it doesn't necessarily have to do with

 24 whether or not they are on the Council.

 25 MS. FLAX: Fair enough. Is there

 87

 1 anyone here on the Council or off who would like to

 2 join Corbb, Rob and Ada to talk about money?

 3 (No response.)

 4 MS. FLAX: Come on, one person, you

 5 can do it. Our newer members maybe.

 6 MS. O'CONNOR: Briley.

 7 MS. FLAX: Briley, was that you?

 8 MS. O'CONNOR: Yes.

 9 MS. FLAX: All right. Are you

 10 volunteering?

 11 MS. O'CONNOR: Take one for the team,

 12 yes.

 13 MS. FLAX: Thank you, Briley, for

 14 volunteering.

 15 MR. O'CONNOR: This is Corbb. I will

 16 amend the motion that we appoint Rob as chair,

 17 along with myself, Corbb, Ada and Briley to the

 18 Budget Task Force to create the budget for the next

 19 fiscal year.

 20 MR. ELLER: Frank Eller motions.

 21 MS. FLAX: Perfect, Frank seconds. We

 22 will vote on that.

 23 Connie, has Connie arrived?

 24 (No response.)

 25 MS. FLAX: Okay. Corbb.

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 1 MR. O'CONNOR: Corbb, yes.

 2 MS. FLAX: Deborah? Do we still have

 3 Deborah?

 4 MS. GLEASON: Yes.

 5 MS. FLAX: Excellent.

 6 Diane.

 7 MS. DOHNALIK: Diane, yes.

 8 MS. FLAX: Frank.

 9 MR. ELLER: Frank Eller, yes.

 10 MS. FLAX: Hannah.

 11 MS. HARRIMAN: Yes.

 12 MS. FLAX: Jeff.

 13 MR. MIHELICH: Yes.

 14 MS. FLAX: Jennifer Points.

 15 (No response.)

 16 MS. FLAX: Justin.

 17 MR. SALISBURY: Salisbury, yes.

 18 MS. FLAX: Kelly.

 19 MS. LEMKE: Kelly, yes.

 20 MS. FLAX: Patricia.

 21 (No response.)

 22 MS. FLAX: Patrick.

 23 MR. VELLIA: Yes.

 24 MS. FLAX: Paulo.

 25 MR. CASTRO: Paulo, yes.

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 1 MS. FLAX: Rob.

 2 MR. HOBSON: Pass.

 3 MS. FLAX: I will say yes. Samantha,

 4 yes.

 5 Sue, has Sue arrived?

 6 (No response.)

 7 MS. FLAX: Thea.

 8 (No response.)

 9 MS. FLAX: Tom.

 10 (No response.)

 11 MS. FLAX: Okay. Now that we have

 12 that out of the way, Rob, anymore budget things we

 13 need to discuss?

 14 MR. HOBSON: No.

 15 MS. FLAX: And do we need to vote on

 16 this budget?

 17 MR. HOBSON: No, this is just an

 18 update.

 19 MS. FLAX: I thought so, just didn't

 20 want to miss anything.

 21 All right. Does anyone have any other

 22 budget questions for Rob or for anyone else on the

 23 committee?

 24 (No response.)

 25 MS. FLAX: All right. Well, we are

 90

 1 only five minutes behind schedule everyone, so good

 2 job us, technically six minutes but I rounded down.

 3 I am going to hand it over to

 4 Mr. Justin Salisbury to talk about the committee

 5 structure that is proposed for the next year.

 6 MR. O'CONNOR: Justin, we are not

 7 hearing.

 8 MR. SALISBURY: You are not hearing me

 9 because I'm not talking yet, I'm opening that

 10 document. I've got too many things open at once,

 11 oh gosh.

 12 Report of the Committee Structure Task

 13 Force. I've got the Employment Committee, I've got

 14 all these things open. But anyway, yes, sorry for

 15 the delay.

 16 Report of the Committee Structure Task

 17 Force. In the dead of night you all may have seen

 18 a basically proposed committee structure. I know

 19 last year we voted on it without actually having it

 20 in written form. You may have had a chance to read

 21 it, I hope so, I apologize if you were not able to,

 22 but the updates are relatively minor and I just

 23 want to summarize them.

 24 So in the 2025 cycle the Committee

 25 Structure Task Force met twice and came up with the

 91

 1 following recommendations. Largely we continued

 2 from the 2024 updates, even though not all of those

 3 had made it to the SSB website over the past year,

 4 trying to keep continuity with what we voted on at

 5 least.

 6 And so some of the updates that we

 7 see, though, are updates to disability language,

 8 particularly switching visually impaired to low

 9 vision. And also focused on the spelling of

 10 DeafBlind so that it has a capital D, lower case

 11 e-a-f, capital B-l-i-n-d or lower case l-i-n-d, so

 12 the two capital letters are D and B and it's all

 13 one word.

 14 Also we changed the phrase resource

 15 plan to budget just because that's really what we

 16 are using here. We also made some updates to note

 17 taking responsibilities within committees. And

 18 one of the main things with that is that currently

 19 it requires that the minutes or the notes of the

 20 committee are taken by the staff member. We have

 21 now adjusted that so that the committee will

 22 appoint someone to take minutes and that can be the

 23 staff member, but it doesn't have to be. Because

 24 maybe somebody else is really excited to do that

 25 job and we want to give that option to committees

 92

 1 if they want to let that be what they do.

 2 The DEI Committee, we want to

 3 basically get rid of kind of lingering language

 4 that says formally Minority Outreach. I understand

 5 that that was what it was in the past, but we want

 6 to just kind of cut ties with the past and move

 7 forward with calling it a DEI Committee.

 8 We need to change the committee

 9 website url away from saying minority, because that

 10 is still in the url for the web page for that

 11 committee, just as a carryover. And so we would

 12 like -- we couldn't directly update that in our

 13 document because that would then lead to a url that

 14 doesn't go to anything, but the idea is that we

 15 would like that to happen as well.

 16 And we also -- in the last cycle we

 17 changed like minority to talk about groups that are

 18 marginalized in our society, we had changed that to

 19 minoritized and we got some feedback that some

 20 folks were unfamiliar and felt awkward about that

 21 phrase. And so then the committee basically came

 22 to the idea that marginalized would be a phrase

 23 that more people would understand. That is also

 24 still pretty widely acceptable in DEI spaces.

 25 And then furthermore, with the

 93

 1 DeafBlind Committee we updated the definition of

 2 how we are explaining who is DeafBlind in the

 3 committee description, so that now we are saying

 4 people with combined functional hearing loss and

 5 functional vision loss as opposed to talking about

 6 hard of hearing and visually impaired and a whole

 7 bunch of other things, that was the new language

 8 that we decided would be clearer to a lot of folks.

 9 And then we also -- we did consider

 10 adding another committee to include discussion of

 11 consumer organization, legislative and advocacy

 12 priorities to try to help make sure that that

 13 information showed up in the SRC-B space, but we

 14 ultimately decided against that with the idea that

 15 that would institutionalize in SRC-B what the

 16 consumer organizations are doing independently and

 17 that a better place for that information to show up

 18 is in the reports that the consumer organization

 19 representatives give to the SRC-B.

 20 So that is something that I'm telling

 21 you we discussed and considered, but we decided not

 22 to do.

 23 And then also we added a piece of

 24 language in the, and again this is to the section

 25 that at the beginning describes committee

 94

 1 functioning generally, and it says each year each

 2 committee is responsible or reviewing its charge

 3 and submitting proposed updates to its charge to

 4 the SRC-B at the April meeting of the SRC-B. And

 5 the Committee Structure Task Force will consider

 6 those proposed updates.

 7 And we think that that's a good idea

 8 because when we gather as a Committee Structure

 9 Task Force we can go out and talk to people who

 10 lead the committees, but this would just kind of --

 11 it would prescribe ahead of time that the

 12 committees need to be ready to provide that

 13 feedback.

 14 Because if something in the charges

 15 are not working for those committees, we can always

 16 amend at any time really, but it's important that

 17 they do take that conscious effort to make that

 18 recommendation to the Council and to the task

 19 force.

 20 And lastly, we removed -- the last

 21 thing I will share is that we removed redundant

 22 descriptions of committees which showed up as kind

 23 of abbreviated descriptions of committees with

 24 their links from the main committee's page. And

 25 part of the decision to do that was that also

 95

 1 people might not capture the same understanding

 2 from that description in the shorter form than

 3 versus what they would get if they just clicked the

 4 link and read the slightly longer description that

 5 is on the committee's page.

 6 That concludes the report of the

 7 Committee Structure Task Force.

 8 MS. FLAX: Thank you very much,

 9 Justin. Any comments? Questions?

 10 (No response.)

 11 MS. FLAX: And a previous chair

 12 refresh my memory, do we vote on this one?

 13 MR. O'CONNOR: This is Corbb, yes.

 14 MS. FLAX: I thought we did, I just

 15 wanted to make sure.

 16 So do I have a motion to approve the

 17 Committee Structure Task Force report?

 18 MR. ELLER: Frank Eller motions.

 19 MS. HARRIMAN: This is Hannah, I will

 20 motion.

 21 MS. FLAX: Okay. I have a

 22 Frank/Hannah motion. And I will go through.

 23 Connie.

 24 (No response.)

 25 MS. FLAX: Corbb.

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 1 MR. O'CONNOR: Corbb, yes.

 2 MS. FLAX: Deborah.

 3 MS. GLEASON: Yes.

 4 MS. FLAX: Diane.

 5 MS. DOHNALIK: Diane, yes.

 6 MS. FLAX: Frank.

 7 MR. ELLER: Frank Eller, yes.

 8 MS. FLAX: Hannah.

 9 MS. HARRIMAN: Yes.

 10 MS. FLAX: Jeff.

 11 MR. MIHELICH: Yes.

 12 MS. FLAX: Jennifer.

 13 (No response.)

 14 MS. FLAX: Justin.

 15 MR. SALISBURY: Justin Salisbury, yes.

 16 MS. FLAX: Kelly.

 17 MS. LEMKE: Yes.

 18 MS. FLAX: Patricia.

 19 (No response.)

 20 MS. FLAX: Patrick.

 21 MR. VELLIA: Yes.

 22 MS. FLAX: Paulo.

 23 MR. CASTRO: Paulo, yes.

 24 MS. FLAX: Rob.

 25 MR. HOBSON: Rob, pass.

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 1 MS. FLAX: I will say yes.

 2 Sue.

 3 (No response.)

 4 MS. FLAX: Thea.

 5 (No response.)

 6 MS. FLAX: Tom.

 7 (No response.)

 8 MS. FLAX: And that's it. Thank you

 9 so much to the task force for putting together the

 10 things for the committees.

 11 And now we actually come to committee

 12 reports. So this will be a time where you can hear

 13 the whole list of committees and think about which

 14 one you want to be on, email me and let me know

 15 about what you want to join by July 15.

 16 And if your committee doesn't have a

 17 report at this time or if no one is here we will

 18 just skip it for now.

 19 State Rehabilitation Council. I

 20 believe that's Sue and I believe she is not here.

 21 Is anyone else from SRC here wanting to give a

 22 brief update?

 23 (No response.)

 24 MS. FLAX: Okay. What about the State

 25 Independent Living Council?

 98

 1 MS. LEMKE: Hi this is Kelly, I think

 2 that's me.

 3 MS. FLAX: Hi Kelly, go for it.

 4 MS. LEMKE: I'm a new member of the

 5 State Rehab Council for the Blind and the Statewide

 6 Independent Living Council as of this year.

 7 I can do a brief introduction for who

 8 might not know me. I'm at the Lighthouse Center

 9 for Vital Living in Duluth, Minnesota and I'm the

 10 lead instructor, certified orientation and mobility

 11 specialist and vision rehabilitation therapist

 12 there.

 13 A little bit about MN SILC. We focus

 14 on promoting events and activities of the eight

 15 Centers for Independent Living in Minnesota. And

 16 these can be found on our Facebook page, The

 17 Minnesota Independent Living Network.

 18 Access North in Hibbing is celebrating

 19 its 40 years of service with an open house on

 20 June 18. Options in Grand Forks and East Grand

 21 Forks, Access North in Hibbing and Southwest Center

 22 for Independent Living in Marshall are planning

 23 accessible deer hunts. Southeast Center for

 24 Independent Living Rochester has a fully accessible

 25 indoor playground for people with disabilities.

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 1 MN-SILC submitted their annual program performance

 2 review, which is waiting for approval from the

 3 administration on community living.

 4 The 2024 annual report is being

 5 distributed, can also be found on our website.

 6 We've had two, maybe three as of this week, new

 7 councilmembers that were appointed. And then I

 8 think we still have one, maybe two vacancies for

 9 people with disabilities.

 10 One person from MN-SILC will be

 11 attending the NCIL or National Council on

 12 Independent Living Conference. The conference

 13 includes a march from the hotel to the capitol and

 14 then meeting with Minnesota congressional leaders.

 15 The Advocacy Committee has been

 16 reviewing and revising position papers to share

 17 with Congress members and the public. The Advocacy

 18 Committee has been encouraging Council members and

 19 advocates to educate Minnesota Legislators and

 20 Congressional members about the problems that could

 21 be created for people with disabilities and seniors

 22 if there is the cuts to Medicaid.

 23 And then members of the Outreach

 24 Committee attended Charting the Cs Conference.

 25 This conference is for educators, special education

 100

 1 teachers, school administrators and parents. They

 2 also attended the St. Paul DeafBlind Resource Fair.

 3 And so those are just a few of the highlights over

 4 the last few months.

 5 MS. FLAX: Perfect. Thanks so much,

 6 Kelly. Thanks for the details and we are really

 7 excited to have you, so glad to have you here.

 8 MS. LEMKE: Thank you.

 9 MS. FLAX: All right. Now that we

 10 have done councils we will go to our committees.

 11 The Communication Center Committee, do we have a

 12 report?

 13 MR. JACOBSON: Good evening everyone,

 14 Steve Jacobson here with a report on the

 15 Communication Center meeting. During this year we

 16 have taken some time in past meetings to look in

 17 detail at various aspects of the Communication

 18 Center.

 19 We did something a little different at

 20 our last meeting on May 7. There is a new Braille

 21 file format coming called the eBraille format and

 22 we took a fairly deep dive into that. Our staff

 23 liaison, Dave Andrews, is kind of familiar with

 24 that because of his work on the Communication

 25 Center engineering section as well as on the DAISY

 101

 1 consortium. And I also talked a little bit to

 2 Jennifer Dunnam who is also on the committee that's

 3 working on this.

 4 This is a very interesting format for

 5 those of us who particularly read Braille with

 6 refreshable Braille devices, because it's going to

 7 bring some of the ability to navigate Braille

 8 documents that we have gotten used to doing on

 9 websites, for example, moving from heading to

 10 heading and so forth.

 11 It will be allowing us to take a

 12 Braille document and have it conform to the

 13 parameters that govern our particular Braille

 14 display. If you have a 32 line Braille display and

 15 you are reading an old Braille file that is made

 16 for 40 line displays, you know that can be kind of

 17 an issue, a lot of half empty lines, wrapping that

 18 causes you to lose some formatting. So that was

 19 real interesting.

 20 That was our last meeting of this year

 21 and we expect -- to just go back, we expect this is

 22 going to have an impact on the Communication Center

 23 over the next couple of years.

 24 So at this point we don't have our

 25 next meeting scheduled, we will be waiting until

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 1 after the committee appointment period. Any

 2 questions from anybody?

 3 MS. FLAX: Thank you.

 4 MR. JACOBSON: Thank you.

 5 MS. FLAX: Thank you very much Steve.

 6 We appreciate it.

 7 Community Partner Outcomes and

 8 Measures. Do we have a report?

 9 (No response.)

 10 MS. FLAX: All right. Customer

 11 Satisfaction, Goals and Priorities.

 12 MR. O'CONNOR: We don't have a report,

 13 but there will be a meeting forthcoming in the next

 14 few weeks. And so please watch your in boxes if

 15 you are interested in coming to that meeting, even

 16 if you are not on the committee. This is Corbb,

 17 send me a note.

 18 MS. FLAX: Thank you, Corbb.

 19 Do we have a report from the DeafBlind

 20 Committee?

 21 MR. VELLIA: Nothing to report.

 22 MS. FLAX: Okay. Diversity, Equity

 23 and Inclusion, that's me. Not too much to report,

 24 just that one of the major things we are focusing

 25 on right now is in the uncertain times we are

 103

 1 living in how can we be supportive to -- how can we

 2 recommend SSB be supportive to customers who may be

 3 having some challenges during this time.

 4 We are in the process of finding a new

 5 meeting time that works better for people, so stay

 6 tuned for that.

 7 Employment Committee. Do you have a

 8 report at this time?

 9 MR. SALISBURY: Yes, ma'am, this is

 10 Justin Salisbury for the Employment Committee. As

 11 many people know, there have been a lot of federal

 12 layoffs and we shared information within the

 13 committee about how there's a program that the

 14 National Federation of the Blind is running to

 15 sponsor people who have been -- Blind people who

 16 have been affected specifically by these federal

 17 layoffs to be able to go to the NFB's National

 18 Convention specifically for a series of programming

 19 at the convention that is specifically targeted to

 20 help those Blind federal employees get back on

 21 their feet and find their next new opportunity.

 22 Also we have talked about how in a

 23 time of a really poor job market with all the

 24 people getting laid off and jobs being cut and

 25 things being shut down, now is a great time for

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 1 Blind people to invest in ourselves by attending

 2 Adjustment to Blindness Training if we need it and

 3 if we can benefit from it. So now is a very

 4 important time for us to be raising the

 5 consciousness around Adjustment to Blindness

 6 Training, making sure that more people know about

 7 those opportunities and what it can do for them.

 8 We also, lastly, we discussed a

 9 possible online event that SSB could plan and host,

 10 such as a Zoom webinar which could help to connect

 11 current customers of SSB with employed Blind

 12 people. And we understand those are not two

 13 mutually exclusive groups, you can be both,

 14 employed and a customer, but current customers with

 15 employed Blind people who could then share their

 16 stories about looking for employment, how they

 17 prepared, what made them successful.

 18 It could be kind of a mentoring type

 19 of event in a way and there are challenges in terms

 20 of staff resources to put something like that

 21 together, but if you do it through Zoom the costs

 22 go way down versus doing it in person. So we are

 23 exploring a few different opportunities. That

 24 concludes our report.

 25 MS. FLAX: Thank you very much,

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 1 Justin. Sounds like you guys are doing some great

 2 work over there.

 3 Do we have a report for Senior

 4 Services?

 5 MR. MIHELICH: This is Jeff. We do

 6 not.

 7 MS. FLAX: All right. Thank you,

 8 Jeff.

 9 Anyone here from the Transition

 10 Committee?

 11 (No response.)

 12 MS. FLAX: All right. In that case

 13 just a quick note that was put in the chat, I

 14 believe, but the conference that I was talking

 15 about earlier, the National Rehab Conference,

 16 CSAVR, will be October 31, the week of October 31

 17 through November 7. So if you are interested in

 18 attending that or want more information, please let

 19 me know.

 20 If it will interfere with your trick

 21 or treating I understand, but you could always go

 22 the next day anyway, so I think we can get some

 23 people there this year.

 24 Is there any other business from

 25 anyone on the Council?

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 1 (No response.)

 2 MS. FLAX: Waiting for people to find

 3 the unmute button or microphone or that sort of

 4 thing.

 5 (No response.)

 6 MS. FLAX: All right. In that case I

 7 will open it up for public comment. Who has things

 8 to say?

 9 MR. O'CONNOR: Corbb.

 10 MS. FLAX: Corbb.

 11 MR. O'CONNOR: I just wanted to let

 12 everybody know the National Federation of the Blind

 13 of Minnesota has scheduled an annual convention.

 14 It's going to be November 14, 15, 16 in Rochester

 15 at the Best Western. Registration details coming

 16 soon on our website.

 17 We also are excited to be hosting the

 18 National Federation of the Blind Braille Enrichment

 19 for Literacy and Learning Program here in

 20 Minnesota. So that's teaching Braille and other

 21 activities of daily living along with a whole bunch

 22 of other camp fun for kids aged 4 to 12, that's

 23 going to be hosted at the Minnesota Waldorf School

 24 the second half of June.

 25 We also are going to be exhibiting and

 107

 1 speaking with SSB at the Cornea Research Foundation

 2 Conference at the end of June as well. Look

 3 forward to seeing folks there.

 4 MS. FLAX: Thank you very much, Corbb.

 5 Anyone else, any exciting announcements? Boring

 6 announcements? Somewhere in the middle?

 7 (No response.)

 8 MR. O'CONNOR: I move we adjourn,

 9 Corbb.

 10 MS. FLAX: All right. Corbb is moving

 11 we adjourn, I'm guessing we won't have too much

 12 fight on this one, but anyone want to second it?

 13 MR. ELLER: Second, Frank Eller.

 14 MS. FLAX: All right, perfect. Let's

 15 just go through the roll call.

 16 I don't think we have Connie.

 17 Corbb.

 18 MR. O'CONNOR: Yes.

 19 MS. FLAX: Deborah.

 20 MS. GLEASON: Yes.

 21 MS. FLAX: Diane.

 22 MS. DOHNALIK: Diane, yes.

 23 MS. FLAX: Frank.

 24 MR. ELLER: Frank Eller, yes.

 25 MS. FLAX: Hannah.

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 1 MS. HARRIMAN: Yes.

 2 MS. FLAX: Jeff.

 3 MR. MIHELICH: Yes.

 4 MS. FLAX: Kelly.

 5 MS. LEMKE: Yes.

 6 MS. FLAX: Pat McGee, no.

 7 Patrick.

 8 MR. VELLIA: Yes.

 9 MS. FLAX: Rob.

 10 MR. HOBSON: Yes -- pass, excuse me.

 11 MS. FLAX: Oh, you can vote for that

 12 one Rob, no one will judge you.

 13 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: We got him.

 14 MS. SANDERS: The one thing he can

 15 vote on.

 16 MS. FLAX: I'll say yes.

 17 Sue I don't believe is here.

 18 Thea.

 19 (No response.)

 20 MS. FLAX: Tom.

 21 (No response.)

 22 MS. FLAX: Did I miss anyone?

 23 MR. CASTRO: Paulo, yes.

 24 MR. SALISBURY: Justin Salisbury, yes.

 25 MS. FLAX: I'm so sorry Justin. You

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 1 know, I had moved the tab from my list of people

 2 and you were the collateral damage, I apologize.

 3 Paulo, are you still here?

 4 MR. CASTRO: Yep, yes.

 5 MS. FLAX: All right, perfect. Who

 6 else?

 7 (No response.)

 8 MS. FLAX: Good, I only missed two.

 9 MS. SANDERS: Not bad.

 10 MS. FLAX: Thank you, thank you, I

 11 try.

 12 All right. We will be adjourned until

 13 August 7, I believe it is, I look forward to seeing

 14 you all there. Thank you very much everyone.

 15 (Hearing adjourned at 8:10 p.m.)

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 1 STATE OF MINNESOTA)

 2 ) ss.

 3 COUNTY OF HENNEPIN)

 4

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 6

 7 REPORTER'S CERTIFICATE

 8

 9 I, Kimberly K. Evavold, do hereby

 10 certify that the above and foregoing transcript,

 11 consisting of the preceding 109 pages is a correct

 12 transcript of my stenographic notes, and is a full, true

 13 and complete transcript of the proceedings to the best of

 14 my ability.

 15 Dated: June 13, 2025

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 KIMBERLY K. EVAVOLD

 18 Court Reporter

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