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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, August 7, 2025

17 5:30 p.m.

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1 APPEARANCES:

2 REHABILITATION COUNCIL FOR THE BLIND SSB STAFF

3 Samantha Flax, Chairperson Dave Andrews

4 Paulo Castro Jennifer Beilke

5 Diane Dohnalik Jon Benson

6 Frank Eller Sandy Bloch

7 Sue Fager Aarica Burke

8 Deborah Gleason Isaac Hanninen

9 Tom Heinl Susan Kusz

10 Rob Hobson Sheila Koenig

11 Thea Kramer Deanna Langton

12 Kelly Lemke Alana Strickler

13 Jeff Mihelich

14 Corbb O'Connor

15 Justin Salisbury

16 Steve Sawczyn

17 Patrick Vellia

18

19 ALSO PRESENT:

20 Natasha Jerde, Director of SSB

21 Nyia Vang, State Program Administrator

22

23 INTERPRETERS:

24 Sander Kenwood

25 Tamajai Grady

3

1 MS. FLAX: Okay. I will go ahead and

2 call the meeting to order. Mostly because I have

3 been virtual so I finally get to use the gavel,

4 this is momentous.

5 Okay. So I am Samantha Flax. For

6 anyone who doesn't know me, I use he/she/her

7 pronouns. I am the Chair of the Council and I

8 think we can just go and get started. I'm gonna

9 see who from the Council is here and I'm gonna move

10 this microphone a little closer to me because I am

11 a very short person.

12 Okay. So do we have Connie Berg?

13 (No response.)

14 MS. FLAX: Do we have Corbb O'Connor?

15 MR. O'CONNOR: Present.

16 MS. FLAX: Deborah Gleason. Deborah

17 Gleason are you here?

18 MS. GLEASON: I am here.

19 MS. FLAX: She's here.

20 MS. GLEASON: Not there here, I'm

21 here.

22 MS. FLAX: We can hear your voice and

23 that's what matters.

24 Okay. Diane Dohnalik.

25 MS. DOHNALIK: Diane, here.

4

1 MS. FLAX: I will learn how to say

2 people's name, if I say it wrong, please correct

3 me.

4 Frank Eller.

5 MR. ELLER: Frank Eller, here. Good

6 evening everyone.

7 MS. FLAX: I believe Hannah is at a

8 work event.

9 Jeff Mihelich.

10 MR. MIHELICH: Yes.

11 MS. FLAX: Hello, Jeff.

12 Jennifer Points.

13 (No response.)

14 MS. FLAX: All right. Justin

15 Salisbury.

16 MR. SALISBURY: Here.

17 MS. FLAX: Hello, Justin.

18 Kelly Lemke.

19 MS. LEMKE: Here.

20 MS. FLAX: Hi Kelly.

21 Patrick Vellia.

22 MR. VELLIA: Here.

23 MS. FLAX: Paulo Castro.

24 (Off the record talking.)

25 MS. FLAX: What's happening? Can

5

1 everyone stay muted if you are not talking just so

2 I don't mess up and think someone is here and

3 they're not.

4 Is Paulo Castro here?

5 MR. CASTRO: Yes, Paulo is here.

6 MS. FLAX: Hi there.

7 Robert Hobson.

8 MR. HOBSON: I'm here.

9 MS. FLAX: Hello.

10 Steve Sawczyn, our newest member.

11 MR. SAWCZYN: Oh my gosh, that's me

12 and I am here.

13 MS. FLAX: Excellent.

14 Sue Fager.

15 MS. FAGER: Sue Fager, here.

16 MS. FLAX: Hi Sue.

17 MS. FAGER: Hello.

18 MS. FLAX: Thea Kramer.

19 MS. KRAMER: Here.

20 MS. FLAX: Hi there.

21 Tom Heinl.

22 MR. HEINL: Here.

23 MS. FLAX: And I, Samantha Flax, am

24 here. I believe that is the entire Council so I

25 believe now we can move to -- let's go to SSB staff

6

1 in the room.

2 MS. JERDE: This is Natasha Jerde, I'm

3 here and a quick little housekeeping thing. If you

4 have a microphone they are all turned off right now

5 you just have to hit the long button to turn it on

6 to talk. So just a little housekeeping thing.

7 MS. FLAX: Thank you for that,

8 Natasha.

9 MR. ANDREWS: People should share,

10 they are not at every place.

11 MS. FLAX: All right. Who is next?

12 MS. LANGTON: Deanna Langton.

13 MS. KOENIG: Sheila Koenig.

14 MS. KUSZ: Susan Kusz.

15 MR. ANDREWS: Dave Andrews.

16 MS. BEILKE: Jennifer Beilke.

17 MS. FLAX: Anyone else in the room who

18 works for SSB?

19 MR. HANNINEN: Sorry, Isaac Hanninen.

20 MS. FLAX: You don't need to be sorry

21 to be here, but we are glad you are here.

22 Anyone else before I go to Zoom?

23 MS. SANDERS: How about people in the

24 room who are not staff?

25 MS. FLAX: We'll get there, don't you

7

1 worry.

2 SSB staff on Zoom.

3 MR. BENSON: Jon Benson.

4 MS. FLAX: Who else?

5 MS. STRICKLER: Alana Strickler.

6 MS. FLAX: All right. Alana.

7 MS. BURKE: Aarica Burke.

8 MS. FLAX: Hi Aarica.

9 Anyone else?

10 MS. BLOCH: Sandy Bloch.

11 MS. FLAX: All right. Anyone else

12 from SSB on Zoom?

13 (No response.)

14 MS. FLAX: And just since we are

15 already talking to virtual people, let's just do

16 anyone else on Zoom who hasn't introduced

17 themselves. Go for it and then we will do the

18 room.

19 MS. JERDE: This is Natasha. Eric

20 VanDam put in the chat he is here, he's an SSB

21 staff person.

22 MS. FLAX: Perfect. Thank you for

23 checking the chat.

24 All right. Anyone else on Zoom who

25 has not introduced themselves who isn't on the

8

1 Council or SSB staff or if you just didn't get to

2 introduce yourself earlier? Going once.

3 (No response.)

4 MS. FLAX: All right. In the room.

5 Jennifer Dunnam. Briley O'Connor.

6 Rocky Hart. Judy Sanders. Steve Jacobson. Silas

7 O'Connor.

8 MS. FLAX: Anyone else in the room?

9 COURT REPORTER: Kim Evavold, court

10 reporter.

11 MS. FLAX: Kim, all right, taking all

12 those notes, I understand, you can't talk.

13 Okay. In that case I think we have

14 everyone, if we missed anyone let me know and

15 definitely let Kim know so there is a record of you

16 existing.

17 And let's go ahead and I would ask for

18 a motion about the minutes from June. I do know

19 there are some corrections, some that I believe

20 were just recently sent out, there were some things

21 not in terms of content necessarily, but in terms

22 of formatting and such with numbers and just some

23 extra items that shouldn't have been there. So

24 that is being addressed in the minutes.

25 But I am wondering if there is a

9

1 motion to approve those minutes.

2 MR. ELLER: Frank Eller motions.

3 MS. FLAX: Okay, Frank moves. Anyone

4 want to second?

5 MR. MIHELICH: Jeff Mihelich seconds.

6 MS. FAGER: Sue seconds.

7 MS. FLAX: Excellent, Jeff and Sue can

8 fight it out. I think Jeff was first.

9 Any discussion on the minutes?

10 MR. SALISBURY: Salisbury.

11 MS. FLAX: Salisbury.

12 MR. SALISBURY: I think these minutes

13 are very comprehensive, I really appreciate

14 everything in them. One thing that I notice is

15 that sometimes in the minutes councilmembers are

16 listed with councilmember before their name and

17 other times they are not. And so I think it's

18 really cool to do that. I would like to suggest or

19 recommend, ask, that maybe we add the word

20 councilmember before the names of all the

21 councilmembers each time they occur.

22 MS. FLAX: I think that's a great

23 idea. I know that when I even joined the Council I

24 had no idea who the other councilmembers were

25 sometimes, so I think that's fine with me unless

10

1 anyone has any objections to that, certainly doing

2 that in the future.

3 MS. SANDERS: This is Judy.

4 MS. FLAX: Judy.

5 MS. SANDERS: Okay. If I were doing

6 it I would want to do it the first time so that you

7 do know that it is a councilmember, but do you

8 really want to -- it makes the minutes a whole lot

9 longer if you are going to say councilman every

10 time.

11 MS. FLAX: It makes sense to me, I

12 think that's a good edit.

13 Anyone else about this or any other

14 corrections or ideas for future minutes, I guess?

15 MR. SALISBURY: Salisbury.

16 MS. FLAX: Justin.

17 MR. SALISBURY: I just want to say I

18 would support what Judy Sanders shared there.

19 MS. FLAX: Excellent. I love when we

20 all agree.

21 Any other corrections to the minutes?

22 MR. ELLER: Frank Eller also agrees

23 with councilman added. Yeah.

24 MS. FLAX: Wonderful. Without any

25 other corrections to the minutes, I will go ahead

11

1 and do the roll call.

2 So Connie Berg, I believe, is not

3 here.

4 Corbb.

5 MR. O'CONNOR: Yes. I can't reach my

6 microphone, the Chair has it.

7 MS. FLAX: There you go.

8 MR. O'CONNOR: Corbb O'Connor, yes.

9 MS. FLAX: Okay. Deborah.

10 MS. GLEASON: Yes.

11 MS. FLAX: Diane.

12 MS. DOHNALIK: Diane, yes.

13 MS. FLAX: Frank.

14 MR. ELLER: Frank Eller, yes.

15 MS. FLAX: Hannah is not here.

16 Jeff.

17 MR. MIHELICH: Jeff, yes.

18 MS. FLAX: Jennifer Points is not

19 here, I believe. Is that correct?

20 MR. O'CONNOR: Um-hmm.

21 MS. FLAX: Okay. Justin.

22 MR. SALISBURY: Salisbury, yes.

23 MS. FLAX: Kelly.

24 MS. LEMKE: Yes.

25 MS. FLAX: Patrick.

12

1 MS. VELLIA: Yes.

2 MS. FLAX: Paulo.

3 MR. CASTRO: Yes.

4 MS. FLAX: Rob.

5 MR. HOBSON: Yes. Oh, I'm sorry,

6 pass.

7 MS. FLAX: He voted, it's a momentous

8 occasion.

9 Steve.

10 MR. SAWCZYN: Yes.

11 MS. FLAX: Sue.

12 MS. FAGER: Sue, yes.

13 MS. FLAX: Thea.

14 MS. KRAMER: Yes.

15 MS. FLAX: Tom.

16 MR. HEINL: Yes.

17 MS. FLAX: And I guess I will go ahead

18 and vote yes too, so those passed. Thank you very

19 much to Nyia for sending those out this month. As

20 some of you know, I've been quite busy the last few

21 weeks so I really appreciate Nyia's help with

22 getting everything ready tonight.

23 So moving on. We are going to talk

24 about the business of the Council and I am going to

25 talk about the committees. So a couple things

13

1 about committees before I announce the new

2 appointments, just a -- did I turn my mike off?

3 MS. JERDE: Yes, it is.

4 MS. FLAX: I hit into it, I was

5 talking with my hands like the Italian person that

6 I am.

7 Okay. So just a reminder that for

8 current committee chairs that your reports for the

9 Annual Report are due by October 15, please,

10 please, please get those in. I have one to do too

11 so I'm not just telling you guys to do something

12 and if anyone has any questions about that, please

13 let me know, happy to help out.

14 Then in terms of committees for this

15 upcoming year starting in September. I am going to

16 go through who the appointments are and if someone

17 who was Chair before me or if someone wants to

18 remind me, do we approve each committee at a time

19 or do I go through a whole list?

20 (No response.)

21 MS. FLAX: Okay. So should I just

22 read them all off and if anyone has any questions,

23 all right, perfect.

24 So thank you also to the six of you

25 who did send me your requests. If you didn't send

14

1 me your request, then I put you where either your

2 Council appointment required you to be or where I

3 needed you and I made sure that every councilmember

4 is on two committees. And some of you are lucky

5 enough to be chairing committees. So thank you to

6 all of you for your work on committees.

7 However, committees do some really

8 important work and it's really important to have

9 that involvement. So I thank you all for your

10 involvement this year in advance.

11 I will start with the Communications

12 Center Committee. So Jeff Mihelich is going to be

13 the chair of that committee this year. On that

14 committee we have Diane Dohnalik, we have Tom

15 Heinl, we have Catherine Durivage, we have Lynne

16 Johnson, Steve Jacobson, Corbb O'Connor, Steve

17 Sawczyn and that is it for that one.

18 For Community Partners and Measures we

19 have Deborah Gleason chairing, Rob Hobson, Thea

20 Kramer, Briley O'Connor, Kimberly Strickland.

21 And for Customer Satisfaction, Goals

22 and Priorities. We have Corbb O'Connor as chair,

23 Thea Kramer, Jennifer Points, Steve Jacobson,

24 Connie Berg, Paulo Castro, Sue Fager and that's it.

25 For the DeafBlind Committee we have

15

1 Patrick chairing, we have Hannah Harriman, Wendy

2 DeVore, Rocky Hart, Kim Johnson, Ann Mayes and

3 that's it.

4 For the DEI Committee we have Justin

5 Salisbury as chair, Connie Berg, Frank Eller,

6 Patrick Vellia, Paulo Castro. And that's it for

7 that one.

8 For employment we have Hannah Harriman

9 as chair, Rob Hobson, Deborah Gleason, Justin

10 Salisbury, Frank Eller. And that's it for that

11 one.

12 For Seniors, everyone.

13 THE INTERPRETER: Can you slow down a

14 little bit? You are saying a lot of names.

15 MS. FLAX: Oh absolutely, I'm sorry.

16 I will talk slower.

17 THE INTERPRETER: Just a little break

18 between the committees.

19 MS. GLEASON: This is Deborah. Could

20 you repeat the title of the previous committee, I

21 didn't write it down fast enough.

22 MS. FLAX: Employment.

23 MS. GLEASON: Thank you.

24 MS. FLAX: Oh wait, was it? I had

25 already read Employment. Are we good to continue

16

1 or do I need to repeat any of them?

2 (No response.)

3 MS. FLAX: Happy to repeat if needed.

4 Okay. Seniors, everyone wanted to be

5 on Seniors this year, it was the committee to be

6 on. We have Kelly Lemke as chair, Tom Heinl, Jeff

7 Mihelich, Jan Bailey, Teresa Gfroerer, Barb Klein,

8 Linda Warren and that's it for that one.

9 I will pause for a second for those

10 who are typing and interpreting and such. And we

11 are almost done.

12 Transition. Steve Sawczyn is

13 chairing, we are putting him right to work. Diane,

14 Sue Fager, Kelly Lemke, Jennifer Points and that's

15 it. That is all the committees.

16 I would entertain a motion to appoint

17 these lovely humans to these committees.

18 MR. O'CONNOR: Corbb, so moved.

19 MS. FLAX: Excellent.

20 MR. SAWCZYN: Steve, second.

21 MS. FLAX: Excellent, all right.

22 Connie is not -- was Connie here?

23 (No response.)

24 Corbb.

25 MR. O'CONNOR: Corbb, yes.

17

1 MS. FLAX: Deborah.

2 MS. GLEASON: A tentative yes. I

3 don't know anything about the committees yet.

4 MS. FLAX: Okay. I think was that a

5 yes or a pass?

6 MS. GLEASON: It's a yes.

7 MS. FLAX: All right, sounds good.

8 Diane.

9 MS. DOHNALIK: Diane, yes.

10 MS. FLAX: Frank.

11 MR. ELLER: Frank, yes.

12 MS. FLAX: Hannah is not here.

13 Jeff.

14 MR. MIHELICH: Jeff, yes.

15 MS. FLAX: Jennifer is not here.

16 Justin.

17 MR. SALISBURY: Salisbury, yes.

18 MS. FLAX: Kelly.

19 MS. LEMKE: Kelly, yes.

20 MS. FLAX: Patrick.

21 MS. VELLIA: Yes.

22 MS. FLAX: Paulo.

23 MR. CASTRO: Yes.

24 MS. FLAX: Rob.

25 MR. HOBSON: Rob passes.

18

1 MS. FLAX: Oh, we didn't get him to

2 vote again.

3 Steve.

4 MR. SAWCZYN: Yes.

5 MS. FLAX: Sue.

6 MS. FAGER: Yes.

7 MS. FLAX: Thea.

8 MS. KRAMER: Yes.

9 MS. FLAX: Tom.

10 MR. HEINL: Yes.

11 MS. FLAX: And I will vote yes because

12 why would I have put all these together and then

13 vote no, that would be really confusing.

14 Okay, thank you all. And if anyone

15 has any questions, particularly new chairs or

16 returning chairs, please let me know, happy to meet

17 with anyone anytime and talk about committees in

18 any way.

19 I would also say that it's really

20 important for new chairs just in general at the

21 first meeting of the year go over what the

22 committee is supposed to be doing, the goals, the

23 priorities of that committee to make a plan for the

24 upcoming year and to figure out what you want to be

25 doing.

19

1 All right. The last thing I have, I

2 will pause for a second, does anyone have any

3 questions or comments about committees, anything

4 that anyone wants to bring up, anything that I

5 forgot?

6 MR. SALISBURY: Salisbury.

7 MS. FLAX: Justin.

8 MR. SALISBURY: Is there some point in

9 the meeting, whether now or later, that we will be

10 hearing about changes in what the DEI Committee

11 needs to be doing?

12 MS. FLAX: The short answer is yes, I

13 think that's going to be an ongoing discussion

14 tonight and in the future as there are different

15 things coming up, so that will be an ongoing

16 conversation and certainly something that the

17 committee is also going to be recommending as well.

18 I don't think we are going to be

19 making any choices about that tonight, but that is

20 certainly coming. That's a great question.

21 Anyone else?

22 MS. GLEASON: This is Deborah.

23 MS. FLAX: Deborah.

24 MS. GLEASON: In particular for the

25 committee that I have been volunteered to chair, is

20

1 there a past chair or someone I can meet with or

2 talk with about the purpose and what's been going

3 on with that committee or are there things on the

4 website that talk about that committee a little bit

5 more other than just a paragraph?

6 MS. FLAX: Absolutely.

7 MS. GLEASON: Okay, that would be

8 great. Thank you.

9 MS. FLAX: And there's also some

10 background, I believe, for your committee, so I

11 will be in touch with you too with some extra

12 contents and such, so don't worry, I'm not gonna

13 throw you in without any preparation.

14 Corbb.

15 MS. GLEASON: I will make my own rules

16 if you don't help us.

17 MR. O'CONNOR: This is Corbb. One of

18 the things that we voted on at the last meeting was

19 the Committee Structure Task Force Report. That

20 report, which hopefully is now on the website in

21 its final form, I believe that it is, details the

22 charge for each committee, so what is it that the

23 committee should be working toward. And sometimes

24 there are a few bullets and sometimes there are,

25 you know, just one or two, but that should give you

21

1 a good sense of direction as well as Samantha said,

2 connecting with the past chair and the current

3 chair of the Council.

4 MS. JERDE: This is Natasha.

5 MS. FLAX: Natasha.

6 MS. JERDE: As a plug, Nyia is putting

7 together committee training. So for returning

8 folks and for new folks who are joining or chairing

9 a committee, Nyia will be reaching out to offer an

10 opportunity to go over requirements, roles,

11 responsibilities and how your SSB staff liaison can

12 support you in your role.

13 MS. FLAX: Thank you, Natasha, I think

14 that will be great to have and I look forward to

15 enjoying a bunch of those as well, I would love to

16 be there if I can. It sounds like something I

17 could learn from too.

18 Okay. Any other things on committees?

19 I don't want to get ahead of myself.

20 (No response.)

21 MS. FLAX: All right. The last thing

22 I want to talk about was the fall conferences

23 coming up. Let's see if I get all the letters

24 right. The NCSRC.

25 MS. JERDE: Close. No, no, that is

22

1 right.

2 MS. FLAX: CSAVR and NCSAB.

3 MS. JERDE: Right.

4 MS. FLAX: Oh my gosh, that's like my

5 biggest accomplishment of the day.

6 Anyway, those are going to be the

7 first week in November, I believe, and so if anyone

8 is interested in going to those, please let us

9 know.

10 Natasha, did you want to say anything

11 about those? You have been more times than I have.

12 MS. JERDE: Sure, this is Natasha. So

13 the first one, the National Coalition of State

14 Rehabilitation Councils, is sort of a new one that

15 councilmembers have started to attend. It's

16 typically the weekend leading into the next

17 conference which is CSAVR.

18 So they talk a lot about policy, of

19 law, they talk about how to run a really great

20 Council and give best practices. That's going to

21 be on November 1 and November 2, location is San

22 Diego, I mean, who wouldn't want to go to beautiful

23 San Diego in November.

24 And then on November 3, 4 and then

25 the morning of the 5th is the Council for State

23

1 Administrators in Voc Rehab, CSAVR. This is a

2 combination of general agencies, Blind agencies and

3 combined agencies, so all of the VR agencies across

4 the country. And it's not Blind agency specific,

5 so that's where the National Council of State

6 Agencies for the Blind comes in which will be held

7 the afternoon of the 5th of November, the 6th of

8 November and then will conclude by noon on Friday,

9 November 7. And all of this is held at the same

10 hotel which is the Manchester Grand Hyatt in San

11 Diego.

12 MS. FLAX: Thank you. So does anyone

13 want to go?

14 MR. SALISBURY: Justin. Not asking to

15 go, but can I offer a couple more things on this?

16 MS. FLAX: Yes, if you can keep it

17 kind of brief because I want to be mindful of the

18 schedule. But we would absolutely love to hear

19 from you.

20 MR. SALISBURY: Yes. I found these

21 events to be very helpful as I got to go to two of

22 these in the last year. I'm not going to be asking

23 to go this time, I have other things I need to

24 attend to.

25 However, there is a call for papers,

24

1 which basically means you can get a chance to

2 present at this as well and if you decide you are

3 interested in going and you would like a copy of

4 the call for papers I'm happy to share it with you.

5 Because if you are going and you want to present or

6 something, that might be great.

7 THE INTERPRETER: Do you mind saying

8 the dates of each of them again?

9 MS. JERDE: This is Natasha. NCSRC is

10 November 1 and 2. CSAVR is November 3, 4 and the

11 morning of the 5th. And then NCSAB is the

12 afternoon of the 5th, 6th and then the morning of

13 the 7th.

14 And this is Natasha. I will add to

15 Justin's comment about the call for proposals.

16 CSAVR requires anyone not affiliated with a VR

17 agency to have a VR agency work on the call for

18 proposals. So if anyone does do a call for

19 proposals for CSAVR, feel free to reach out to me

20 as the VR sponsor, if you will.

21 THE INTERPRETER: It's all San Diego?

22 MS. JERDE: This is Natasha, the

23 question is: Is it all San Diego? It sure is.

24 THE INTERPRETER: Thank you.

25 MS. FLAX: Awesome. Any other

25

1 questions?

2 MR. BIALKE: This is Jennifer Beilke.

3 MS. FLAX: Jennifer.

4 MR. BEILKE: I'm being told to get

5 close. Okay, so it's Natasha's fault if I'm too

6 loud.

7 This is a question for Natasha. Maybe

8 if you have any insights as to themes for the

9 conferences this year that might be helpful for

10 folks to make a decision if they are interested in

11 going, but if you have any insights as to themes, I

12 know it might be early, but that would be helpful.

13 MS. JERDE: This is Natasha. So I'm

14 on both of the executive committees for CSAVR and

15 NCSAB so I'm part of conference planning. But

16 fortunately or unfortunately this year I went on

17 vacation during their planning.

18 I do know NCSAB, I think there is some

19 Beastie Boys involved in the theme, something

20 around fight for your right something, I think

21 that's Beastie Boys. That's going to be -- there

22 is a lot of conversation around retention and

23 growing your own in the Blindness field so how do

24 we develop rehabilitation teachers and O & M

25 instructors in a field that isn't churning out a

26

1 lot of those professions.

2 CSAVR is going to be very heavy on

3 policy and then federal national landscape and I'm

4 sure RSA is going to be there. I am out of the

5 loop on NCSRC though.

6 MR. HOBSON: This is Rob.

7 MS. FLAX: Rob.

8 MR. HOBSON: I would like to go to

9 CSAVR and NCSAB.

10 MS. FLAX: Awesome. Who else wants to

11 go? You get to hang out with Rob. I will put

12 myself as a maybe.

13 Anyone else?

14 MR. VELLIA: This is Patrick.

15 MS. VELLIA: Patrick speaking. If I

16 want to go do we have to pay the hotel up front

17 ourselves and flight and then get reimbursed

18 afterwards?

19 MS. FLAX: Someone remind me how it

20 works. I believe the hotel is paid for and then

21 the thing to get reimbursed for is the per diem for

22 food and stuff, but Natasha you can correct me if I

23 am wrong on that.

24 MR. VANG: This is Nyia. No, you

25 won't be spending anything. I book the flights for

27

1 you and I book your hotel for you as well. And you

2 also get a per diem as well while you are there.

3 MR. O'CONNOR: This is Corbb. I just

4 want to clarify that per diem comes to you after

5 you return typically.

6 MR. VANG: Yes, after.

7 MR. O'CONNOR: I'm glad to hear you

8 are able to book flights now, I know we had some

9 trouble with that a couple years ago, so that's

10 very exciting.

11 MS. VANG: Yes.

12 MR. O'CONNOR: Thank you.

13 MS. KRAMER: This is Thea.

14 MS. FLAX: Thea.

15 MS. KRAMER: I am interested in the

16 NCSRC.

17 MS. FLAX: Great.

18 MS. GLEASON: This is Deborah.

19 MS. FLAX: Deborah.

20 MS. GLEASON: I just want to let

21 you -- I have kind of the basic agenda for NCSRC,

22 just the themes, and it's about mandated

23 activities, advocacy role in state and federal

24 issues, innovative SRCVR joint projects, partnering

25 with consumer organizations, recruitment and

28

1 training.

2 MS. FLAX: Awesome --

3 MS. GLEASON: And something --

4 MS. FLAX: Oh, go ahead.

5 MS. GLEASON: And something about

6 addressing consumer behavior expectations, I

7 believe.

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

9 put myself down as a maybe for NCSRC. And I will

10 say as the Budget Committee chair I will tell you

11 that so far I think we are good on funding based on

12 what I'm hearing of how many days people are

13 wanting to attend.

14 MS. FLAX: Great.

15 Okay. Well, especially for those of

16 us who are a maybe, keep us posted. I will let

17 myself know what I decide, but if everyone else can

18 let us know, that would be great, and we look

19 forward to going to that. I went a few years ago

20 and I unfortunately got sick and couldn't go to

21 everything, but the things I went to were awesome.

22 Got to see Natasha speak and everything, it was

23 great.

24 All right. With that I'm going to

25 hand it over to Natasha for the Director's Report.

29

1 MS. JERDE: All right, thank you,

2 Madam Chair. So greetings Council. I just

3 realized I was not here in June, so it's nice to be

4 here with you all after a little hiatus.

5 My Director's Report for you all this

6 time is going to be a bit different than other

7 report outs. So instead of going unit by unit with

8 updates, I am going to be talking about what is

9 happening nationally and here in Minnesota as it

10 relates to policy and budget.

11 I do have a few unit updates though,

12 but for the most part I want to have a conversation

13 with you all about where things are at and some

14 potential changes that may or will need to be made.

15 And then in October I can resume providing the unit

16 by unit updates on our teams.

17 But first I do want to share a few

18 highlights before I get into the deeper, heavier

19 part of my report, I'm doing a little

20 foreshadowing. So tomorrow Lieutenant Governor

21 Peggy Flanagan and some SSB staff are holding a

22 reception for the four Minnesota Braille challenge

23 students who made it to Nationals. The Lieutenant

24 Governor will be saying a few words and then the

25 group will be touring the Braille unit.

30

1 One of the four students, actually I

2 think, got third place in the country, which is

3 pretty cool.

4 Joe Niffen, in our Engineering Unit,

5 received the award of Engineer of the Year from the

6 Society of Broadcast Engineers for Chapter 17. And

7 also --

8 (Clapping.)

9 MS. JERDE: Yes, well deserved from

10 Joe.

11 And speaking of engineering, Ed

12 Stofferahn and Isaac Hanninen, who is here,

13 recently received training on how to repair Perkins

14 Braillers. So they will now be able to assist our

15 staff and customers with those repairs and there is

16 a huge backlog. Our Braille team alone has 40

17 Braillers waiting to be serviced. So in the past

18 it could take upwards of nine months to a year to

19 get a Brailler back from getting repaired.

20 Our Disability Innovation Fund Grant

21 is officially serving two participants. They

22 aren't ready yet to open the doors fully for

23 referrals, but there were two job retention

24 situations that arose and that team was definitely

25 not going to turn them away. They have been super

31

1 busy creating the policies and procedures,

2 developing the structure for the Advisory Council,

3 which you will hear more soon, getting the case

4 management system ready for launch and finalizing

5 two Request for Proposals.

6 The first is around the customer

7 service and technology training curriculum. And

8 the other is going to be for Adjustment to

9 Blindness and Employment Services to provide under

10 that grant. Those, I don't even want to say the

11 date those are going to launch, because I know

12 Jennifer is going to give me the evil eye, but we

13 are hoping very soon so that our community partners

14 can apply for those.

15 And then finally I recently, as of I

16 think just a few days ago, received a request for

17 SSB to engage with an upcoming delegation of

18 disability activists from Pakistan who are visiting

19 Minnesota as part of the U.S. Department of States

20 International Visitor Leadership Program. The

21 group of ten professionals plus about ten more

22 interpreters will be meeting with a few SSB staff

23 on the 2nd of September to learn more about the

24 work that we do.

25 They had one leader from Pakistan who

32

1 specifically requested to meet with SSB staff as he

2 himself is Blind and wanted to learn how the

3 services differed from his home country.

4 All right. Now, let's talk about the

5 budget both nationally and as it relates to SSB.

6 MR. O'CONNOR: Corbb with a quick

7 question.

8 MS JERDE: Oh sure.

9 MR. O'CONNOR: Before you move on.

10 MS. JERDE: Yeah.

11 MR. O'CONNOR: Are any of the events

12 that you talked about, the IVLP or the reception,

13 are those open to the community?

14 MS. JERDE: This is Natasha. That's a

15 great question and the one question I did ask of

16 the person who is facilitating this, I never got a

17 response back, but I will check again.

18 I do know they are bringing along over

19 20 people and so we just have to have enough room,

20 but I will ask and let the Council know if they are

21 good with opening it up.

22 MR. O'CONNOR: Thank you.

23 MS. JERDE: I would probably limit the

24 invite to Council, just so we don't have a huge

25 number of people in this room.

33

1 MR. SALISBURY: Salisbury. Just if I

2 can ask a follow-up to -- I had a question of my

3 own, but there was part of what Councilmember

4 O'Connor asked that I don't know if I heard the

5 answer to, and that was the part about, you know,

6 with both of the events -- I heard the answer, the

7 Pakistan Event, but how about the reception that is

8 tomorrow with the Braille challenge winners or

9 competitors.

10 MS. JERDE: This is Natasha. The

11 request came from the Lieutenant Governor's office,

12 the guest list had be to contained for security.

13 There are folks from the Department of education

14 that will be coming, Diane, supervisor, is coming

15 because Diane wasn't available, but the

16 Lieutenant Governor's office is the one who

17 arranged this whole reception and we are the

18 location that they asked to do it at.

19 MR. SALISBURY: Got it. So this is

20 Justin with my own question now and that is so with

21 the DIF Grant it sounds like I am hearing that the

22 policies and everything are being built right now

23 and at the same time the design of what the

24 Advisory Council is is also being developed, but I

25 guess I thought I remembered us with a plan that we

34

1 were going to create the Advisory Council and with

2 the Advisory Counsel build the policies, but it

3 sounds like they are both happening at the same

4 time. So can you tell us more about that and the

5 sequence of it?

6 MS. JERDE: This is Natasha.

7 Unfortunately Dacia is the true expert in the

8 implementation, but from my understanding is they

9 are drafting everything because they need to have

10 something to bring to the Advisory Council versus

11 building it from scratch with several people

12 providing input, which takes a significantly longer

13 period of time. So if they have something that

14 they can work from it is a lot easier to go that

15 way. In addition, they have to get going in the

16 next few months.

17 So I will defer to Dacia, who is on

18 vacation until Monday. I'm putting together maybe

19 just where things are at and to talk a little bit

20 more about the Advisory Council. I believe, if I

21 remember correctly, the Advisory Council would be

22 separate from the SRC-B, but there would be a

23 reporting structure or sharing of information. And

24 so my hope is that that will happen by the

25 October -- or September 25 council meeting. But I

35

1 will get some more information from Dacia.

2 MS. SANDERS: This is Judy.

3 MS. FLAX: Judy.

4 MS. SANDERS: Can we know who the

5 third place winner was in the Braille challenge for

6 Minnesota?

7 MS. JERDE: This is Natasha. I just

8 had his name.

9 MS. FLAX: I do actually know some of

10 it. Yeah, so I know that the four students,

11 partially because some of them were in our B.E.L.L.

12 Program, so Elizabeth Siduzar, I believe, placed in

13 second in the country and third in, I think it was,

14 the spelling category.

15 Matt, oh my gosh, what's his last

16 name, give me a minute, it will come to me.

17 Matthew something, he was also -- it was Colton

18 Reinhart, I believe, might have placed as well.

19 And then Mila Halling was the other student who I

20 don't think she won, but she was another student at

21 the Braille challenge. And Bertrom, I think, or

22 Bertrand is Matt's last name.

23 MS. JERDE: This is Tasha. So who I

24 have for third place overall was Colton finished

25 third place overall. And out of the -- he was the

36

1 only contestant among all 50 to record a perfect

2 100 percent score on his 40 question timed reading

3 comprehension test.

4 MS. FLAX: That's awesome.

5 MS. JERDE: That's amazing. And then

6 the other three students are Elizabeth, is it Mila

7 or Myla?

8 MS. FLAX: I think it's Mila.

9 MS. JERDE: And Sloan.

10 MS. FLAX: That's who I forgot about,

11 it wasn't Matthew, I apologize. I lost my mind for

12 a second. Any other questions or we move on?

13 (No response.)

14 MS. JERDE: All right, budget. So

15 with the recent passing of OBBBA, the One Big

16 Beautiful Bill Act, which is a reconciliation bill

17 which means it was more of around Medicare and

18 other things not specific to the Voc Rehab Program,

19 our attention now turns to the passing of

20 appropriations which is where we fall, that's where

21 Voc Rehab is, where Older Blind or Senior Services

22 is and a number of other programs.

23 And so the President released a

24 proposed budget in May and I think Jon may have

25 talked a bit about that in the June council

37

1 meeting, but I thought it worth maybe just

2 repeating a bit on what that proposed budget is.

3 So the President proposes returning

4 the Voc Rehab grant back to what we got in 2024 and

5 cutting an additional 8 percent on top of that. So

6 for SSB that would be about a little over

7 $1.8 million cut to our budget, which is a lot when

8 you don't have a huge budget.

9 The President's budget also ended

10 funding for the Client's Assistance Project and the

11 Protection and Advocacy for Individual Rights or

12 PAIR. And in the proposed budget it hinted that VR

13 programs are responsible or should pay for those

14 programs, which in our mind was a conflict of

15 interest because CAP is not for VR, it's for VR

16 recipients.

17 The budget also ended the supported

18 employment grants, the national training grants

19 including discontinuing funding for the technical

20 assistance centers and the rehabilitation

21 counseling training program stipends which were

22 incentives for counselors to get their degree in

23 counseling.

24 So as you all are very much aware,

25 I've talked about it almost every single council

38

1 meeting this past year is that we are already on a

2 very tight budget with a projected $400,000, give

3 or take, deficit by the end of next year. If we

4 don't do anything at all, that's what the deficit

5 would be.

6 But the positive is we are able to

7 have this information as we prepared for 2026, so

8 we've already have our 2026 budget done and we have

9 prepared for the very worst case scenario budget

10 that reflects that significant decrease.

11 As such, we had to make cuts across

12 all of our programs to absorb that and we focused

13 on the areas that would have the least impact on

14 customer service delivery.

15 So for the Radio Talking Book it means

16 we are not going to immediately fill behind our

17 broadcaster, Michael LeFleur, who is going to be

18 retiring in a few months. This will result in

19 scheduling changes for when Radio Talking Book is

20 able to be on the air.

21 What those changes look like are still

22 being developed and the First Group that gets to

23 hear about them will be the Radio Talking Book

24 team.

25 For audio it means continuing to not

39

1 fill for the volunteer coordinator position, which

2 has been vacant for over a year. It also means we

3 have a very tight scope for the audio and Radio

4 Talking Book side of our CCSS Replacement Project.

5 CCSS stands for the Communications Center Software

6 System. It's not a very creative name, but we had

7 the highest security risk, I think, out of every IT

8 system in the State of Minnesota. So we were

9 basically told you have to replace it.

10 And Braille, Braille is done, that

11 went live on July 1 without any hiccups, knock on

12 wood, it was an amazing launch. Thank you Dave and

13 team, but now we need to move onto Audio and Radio.

14 So we are only getting the bare bones

15 of what we need and not a single thing more than

16 that. Maybe in the future we will be able to add

17 some bells and whistles, but not now.

18 For Braille it means we must

19 prioritize our book requests and limit how much we

20 purchase externally. Because sometimes if a book

21 is available through the Louie System we can buy

22 versus doing it ourselves.

23 The team may be transcribing materials

24 that they normally would have purchased which takes

25 a lot of time to do and they are already at max

40

1 capacity. For BEP it means we continue to fund

2 Keith and Tim's salaries through the Set-aside

3 Fund, which has already been vetted and approved by

4 the elected committee.

5 For Senior Services it was reducing

6 the number of consumables we purchase and handout

7 and it's also being mindful of how we contract out

8 for services. This does not mean we won't contract

9 out, that is impossible, we have many seniors we

10 are working with and we cannot do it ourselves.

11 It does mean we need to be mindful of

12 how many hours we authorize, ensuring that the

13 services are being delivered in accordance with the

14 referral, et cetera.

15 What we did not do is reduce our

16 travel cost to customers as this is the most vital

17 part of what SSU does. They get out and get into

18 people's homes and we did not touch that part of

19 the budget.

20 For Workforce Development or our VR

21 Program it was continued supervisory oversight of

22 purchases. Reducing travel whenever possible and

23 not filling behind several positions, including the

24 assistive technology position after Greg Hunder

25 retired in July and the employment services

41

1 position after Dacia VanAlstine moved over to our

2 DIF grant. What we did not do was reduce how much

3 we budget for customers' services. In other words,

4 how much we authorize for services. However, our

5 costs in this area continue to exceed what we have

6 budgeted and we won't have additional or spare

7 funds to absorb this next year like we did this

8 year.

9 So in 2025 we are still -- we are

10 about three months left -- two months, two months

11 left of 2025, we had budgeted $4.4 million

12 specifically to customers and so far we have

13 authorized almost 6.

14 In 2026 we were able to budget the

15 same, 4.4, we did not reduce that, but if we

16 continue on the same trajectory without any changes

17 we will exceed it and we will not have carry

18 forward dollars left to cover it. I will remind

19 you this is actually taken into account, a

20 1.8 million dollar decrease to our budget, the

21 worse case scenario.

22 In order to increase our budget for

23 case services, because clearly as you are looking

24 at it we need to budget more, we need to be able to

25 budget more because we have more applications

42

1 coming in, we have more people needing services,

2 but when you look at the budget we've already cut

3 everything we possibly could and the only thing

4 left is personnel and we need our staff to be able

5 to provide the services.

6 Caseloads are increasing and we cannot

7 lose a counselor, a VR tech, and so the positions

8 we haven't been filling behind are not those. But

9 in order to have more money for authorizations

10 there is only one place left and that's personnel.

11 And that's something like we cannot afford to lose

12 anymore staff.

13 So in preparation for this proposed

14 significant decrease in our federal funding and our

15 projected deficit we are doing strategic

16 maneuvering and planning. So we have plans, we

17 have plans, I'm giving you the doom and gloom, but

18 it is not all doom and gloom, I just want to say

19 that, but I'm managing, I think, all of our

20 expectations and just being transparent.

21 So the first thing is around Braille

22 and Pre-ETS. Due to the new KLAS system, so KLAS

23 is the program we are using for Braille and will as

24 well for audio and radio. So due to this new KLAS

25 system we have in place we have a much better

43

1 tracking and reporting setup. As a result we are

2 now able to put more Pre-ETS dollars towards this

3 unit while comfortably knowing the money is being

4 spent in accordance with federal requirements. And

5 I meet Sheila's eye because she keeps us honest,

6 she is tracking that and making sure the money is

7 going for students' Braille who are 14 through 22

8 in school.

9 And starting October 1, we will be

10 able to report the state dollars we already used

11 for Braille as our match. So if our federal award

12 does ever increase again, which we are hoping so,

13 we don't have to take state funds from other SSB

14 programs to meet that increased state match

15 obligation.

16 So what this means, so in order to get

17 every single dollar from our federal voc rehab

18 grant, states are required to kick in state money.

19 So for every $3 of federal money the state has to

20 kick in $1. And if I don't have enough state

21 dollars to put towards VR, I can't take all of my

22 federal grant money. So it's priority, you want

23 every dollar from that grant, but I only have so

24 much state money. The state appropriation has an

25 increase this year, but our award did increase by

44

1 over a million dollars so where do I come up with

2 state money? I would have to take it from the

3 other programs at SSB because I didn't magically

4 get more state money to absorb it, but I don't want

5 to do that because our other programs are just as

6 important and they rely on that funding as well.

7 And salary increases continue to go up and you need

8 to be able to absorb that.

9 So a trick we did, it is not even a

10 trick, it is completely allowable, is we worked

11 with RSA to allow us to just report what we are

12 already spending on Braille, it's called Services

13 to Groups, which means we don't have to take money

14 from another SSB program, we can count what we

15 already have and then pull down our entire award.

16 So it's a way to continue getting those dollars

17 without sacrificing any other program.

18 The next thing we have done is we

19 worked with our sister agency, Voc Rehab Services,

20 on a reallotment request. Reallotment is a process

21 to ask for money that other state agencies, state

22 VR agencies have turned back.

23 Fortunately/unfortunately we got this really

24 unexpected increase to our federal award in April,

25 we were not expecting it. Other states were not

45

1 prepared for that and could not meet the match

2 requirements because they have to go through a huge

3 legislative process to do it. That means they are

4 turning back that money and putting it back into a

5 pool that other states can ask for that money.

6 So SSB is asking for a million dollars

7 for VR and we are also asking for a half a million

8 dollars for Senior Services because a little birdie

9 named Ed Loecher told me that some other states are

10 turning back their Older Blind money.

11 We are definitely not going to get a

12 half a million dollars, but we may be able to get

13 some of that to help support Senior Services. The

14 thing is, to ask for a million dollars I need to

15 have about $230,000 in state money to get it, I

16 don't have it.

17 So I talked to VRS and they are going

18 to basically help us cover it so we can ask for the

19 million dollars. They are not giving me 230,000,

20 but they are spending it so I can ask for a

21 million, if that makes sense. So we are working

22 together on that reallotment request.

23 And then we identified one area within

24 our case services, what we were providing to

25 customers, that we are proposing making changes to

46

1 with Council input that would result in cost

2 savings. The policy change has to do with paying

3 rent. In addition to cost savings this is a policy

4 area that we have identified in supervisory reviews

5 that is causing a lot of confusion in its

6 implementation and in some cases the interpretation

7 of the policy has resulted in an overuse and

8 over-expenditure of dollars.

9 We are in the process of drafting a

10 proposed policy amendment that we would present to

11 the Council and members of the public during the

12 end of September meeting after conferring with our

13 chair. And right now we are reviewing that

14 language with our General Counsel's office,

15 researching case law and also looking at what other

16 VR Blind agencies are doing in this area. And we

17 would provide a copy of that draft policy in

18 advance so council members and the general public

19 have time to review it.

20 What I will say is the policy language

21 we are proposing would not impact housing to attend

22 the Adjustment to Blindness training, housing costs

23 outside of normal living expenses to attend a

24 short-term training program and it would not impact

25 on campus dorm rooms, room and board for

47

1 post-secondary. It is specific to private rent

2 housing off campus, not related to ATB.

3 I will pause there.

4 MS. O'CONNOR: O'Connor.

5 MS. FLAX: Briley.

6 MS. O'CONNOR: So just a question. I

7 understand being prepared, I was on a call last

8 night with a rehab professionals' division so I

9 understand the stress that this is causing, I'm

10 sure, but it is my understanding that the version

11 that came out of the Senate Appropriations, now

12 please if I am misunderstanding this, feel free to

13 school me on this, because I asked 37 questions

14 yesterday to make sure that I understood and I may

15 still be confused.

16 But my understanding is that the

17 President's budget did eliminate CAP and those

18 other two programs included, I think, Supported

19 Employment and then you don't get the cost of

20 living increase, right, what you outlined. But the

21 Senate Appropriations version that passed 26 to 3

22 did retain client assistance, I don't remember if

23 it included the cost of living, I think it did, but

24 it was much more favorable towards us and it just

25 has to -- the trouble comes when we have to get it

48

1 through the House, right, am I understanding that?

2 Because it's not that the President is clarifying

3 with you, it's not that the President's budget is

4 for certain going to happen, there is still work in

5 advocacies to be done on this area.

6 MS. JERDE: This is Natasha, I paused

7 before I got to the good news.

8 MS. O'CONNOR: Sorry I spoiled the

9 soup.

10 MS. JERDE: Briley, you are absolutely

11 correct, and we are not done yet, we are not licked

12 yet. I just paused at the harder news before I

13 launched into the hope part, so I probably should

14 have kept going.

15 MS. O'CONNOR: No, I just wanted to

16 make sure that I was not hopeful under false

17 pretenses.

18 MS. JERDE: This is Natasha. You were

19 correct.

20 MS. FLAX: Now that I know there is

21 some hope, Corbb, do you have a question?

22 MR. O'CONNOR: So I am wondering about

23 the 8 percent cut and given that we know there are

24 plenty of states that don't take their full match

25 and that give back a good amount of that money, is

49

1 there any -- barring the Senate version superseding

2 the House version, if we look at the president's

3 budget alone for a second, is there any thought

4 that sure, those cuts could happen but Minnesota

5 could get more than other states and maybe we would

6 be back up to what we call 100 percent of this year

7 or closer to it.

8 MS. JERDE: This is Natasha. The

9 reallotment process is never a guarantee, but it is

10 an option and it all depends on if states give back

11 money or not. But if that decrease happens, states

12 are probably not going to send any money back.

13 MR. O'CONNOR: So this is Corbb. So

14 that's an across the board cut at 8 percent to each

15 agency, each agency's initial request?

16 MS. JERDE: This is Natasha. Yep, we

17 are all going to get that.

18 MR. O'CONNOR: Got it. Okay, thank

19 you.

20 MS. FLAX: What other questions do

21 people have?

22 MR. SALISBURY: Salisbury.

23 MS. FLAX: Justin.

24 MR. SALISBURY: A couple of questions.

25 First I just want to say I am really glad you

50

1 talked about reallotment funds because I was

2 getting ready to ask you about that.

3 In that similar spirit, though, there

4 is a concept that exists that some states allow and

5 some states do not, I don't know the answer for

6 Minnesota, and that is called third-party match.

7 So that if, for example, a community partner wants

8 to put up money and say we are going to provide VR

9 services, they can do a third-party match just like

10 a state VR agency. Do we allow that in Minnesota

11 and if so, do we have any process of helping our

12 community partners to put those together if they

13 want to?

14 MS. JERDE: This is Natasha. So

15 TPCAs, I think they are calling them, in the

16 federal law it's third-party cooperative agreements

17 that does exactly that, can contribute to match,

18 some states do them.

19 There is nothing that doesn't allow us

20 to do them other than it is incredibly bureaucratic

21 and almost every time states get monitored who have

22 TPCA fail miserably because of all of the federal

23 requirements that have to go into them. And almost

24 every state that has been monitored has had to give

25 funds back because they have been not managed

51

1 according to the law.

2 It's not saying it is impossible, it

3 is highly discouraged to do them, even the feds

4 discourage you to do them, but there is nothing

5 preventing Minnesota from doing them.

6 MR. SALISBURY: And a second question,

7 if I can, this is Justin. And that is 12 months

8 ago at these meetings we were talking about a

9 surplus, you know, SSB was operating in a really

10 nice surplus and that was awesome, I would love to

11 be back there for that. But how does that factor

12 into how the 8 percent cut affects us? Because it

13 could be if a surplus is sufficiently large

14 compared to that 8 percent cut that it basically

15 knocks it out and we don't really end up having to

16 change?

17 MS. JERDE: This is Natasha. So the

18 surplus, the carry forward, if you will, gets

19 absorbed this year because of the

20 over-authorizations that were at 6 million. So the

21 surplus that we have, that we want to continue to

22 have, at least a million to a million and a half in

23 carry forward to protect in these situations would

24 be absorbed if all of those authorizations get paid

25 on.

52

1 We already paid out over $4 million

2 and we budgeted 4.4. We have two months left and

3 we have not authorized for post-secondary. And

4 post-secondary is coming, college costs are coming.

5 Granted the freeze on the tuition, the fee schedule

6 was put back into place. The fee schedules were

7 put back into place which will help with that, but

8 the sudden spike in authorizations that happened in

9 November took us for a loop because we weren't

10 expecting it, the trends had never pointed to that

11 happening, but I would love to get back to that

12 surplus. But the reallotment, that's part of the

13 plan to rebuild that.

14 MR. HART: Rocky Hart.

15 MS. FLAX: Rocky, go ahead.

16 MR. HART: So I am curious about the

17 rent policy. Are you in a position at all, because

18 I know that's going to be on the Council agenda for

19 September, it sounds like it is just applicable to

20 off campus rent, not so much to ATB or

21 post-secondary as you explained. Are you able to

22 comment at all on what exactly that is?

23 MS. JERDE: This is Natasha. Again I

24 will have more specific information during the

25 September 25 meeting, but essentially it's people

53

1 who are receiving rent, we call it maintenance

2 payments or rent payments, who do not live in a

3 dorm room who are not going to Adjustment to

4 Blindness Training, typically it's folks who may be

5 going to an online school and we are paying their

6 rent while they are going to an online school.

7 But we found situations where when

8 does that become a normal living expense that

9 everyone has is paying for your housing costs? And

10 we are finding some sticky wicket situations. And

11 when Courtney finishes drafting the policy for your

12 review I'm gonna have her share some vague general

13 examples on how the policy is working or not

14 working, I should say. So that folks have that

15 information for consideration.

16 MR. HART: Thank you.

17 MS. JERDE: You are welcome.

18 MS. FLAX: Any other questions or

19 comments so far before we move on?

20 MR. SALISBURY: Justin.

21 MS. FLAX: Justin.

22 MR. SALISBURY: So one other change,

23 and it's also going to be mentioned in the

24 Employment Committee report, but one of the things

25 that we have been talking about within the

54

1 Employment Committee and the broader Council is

2 this idea of paying costs associated with

3 professional certifications and licensure processes

4 that customers might need as part of pursuing their

5 employment goal.

6 And I'm hearing that there's actually

7 been a change in the policy about whether SSB can

8 support those costs. And I wonder if that fits in

9 to what you are talking about with some of the cost

10 cutting within VR right here and if it is true

11 actually.

12 MS. JERDE: This is Natasha. Maybe I

13 should know this, but I am not aware of any policy

14 change to it. I don't know if Jon, you would

15 happen to have any background or maybe we can

16 follow up on a specific question if you have that.

17 But I'm not aware -- oh, I see Jon's head popped

18 in.

19 MR. BENSON: Natasha, I am not aware

20 of any policy changes reflective of that. One of

21 the interesting things as we have had supervisors

22 reviewing authorizations is that we have been

23 learning a little bit more about how the decisions

24 are being made and what kind of messages are

25 sometimes being shared that may or may not be

55

1 accurate, so. But I am not aware of any policy

2 change on that front.

3 MS. JERDE: This is Natasha. The

4 supervisory oversight has been valuable in helping

5 us get back to basics and understanding our

6 policies and how to implement them and talk about

7 them. So that could be a situation here, but I'm

8 not sure.

9 MS. FLAX: All right. Last call. If

10 not, do you want to go ahead? I know we are close

11 to 7:00.

12 MS. JERDE: Maybe I can get us to

13 policy and then we can take a break.

14 MS. FLAX: Okay. Sounds good.

15 MS. JERDE: All right. So this

16 weekend, as Briley pointed out, we did receive some

17 potentially good news from the Senate

18 Appropriations Committee. So the President

19 proposes their budget, but the Senate is really the

20 one holding the purse strings. And they can

21 consider the budget, the President's budget, but

22 they issue their own version.

23 And this committee passed a bipartisan

24 2026 appropriations bill that provided almost $200

25 billion in discretionary funding for labor,

56

1 education and health & human services. The

2 Department of Education would receive almost $80

3 billion in funding, which included a boost to K

4 through 12 funding. Most importantly, this bill

5 includes language that would prevent the

6 dismantling of the Education Department, which is

7 huge.

8 And now a reminder this was

9 bipartisan. The legislation includes $15.2 billion

10 for IDEA Special Education grant programs which is

11 a $50 million increase from last year. In the

12 bipartisan bill VR receives $4.5 billion and an

13 inflationary increase as authorized in statute.

14 However, I can't quite tell from the

15 report if it reduces us to 2024 levels but gets rid

16 of the 8 percent cut but allows us to get increases

17 later or if it keeps us at 2025 levels and gives us

18 another boost into 2026. Either way it's better

19 news, it's much better news.

20 The bill also returns funding to the

21 Client Assistance Project, to PAIR, to the training

22 grants and Supported Employment. It also includes

23 language that OESE and OSEP, the Office of Special

24 Education --

25 MR. O'CONNOR: Policy.

57

1 MS. JERDE: -- policy, thank you,

2 prevents them from being moved to another federal

3 agency and ideally that would include all of the

4 offices.

5 So the Senate has more money to work

6 with than the House. So what the Senate has

7 proposed is what's called the high-water mark for

8 the program, that's like the highest it's gonna be

9 proposed. And the House is going to work hard to

10 advance its own priority programs.

11 The House Freedom Caucus has renewed

12 its commitment that there would be no increase in

13 discretionary spending from '25 to '26 and that

14 many programs would see significant cuts.

15 So budget-wise federally we are still

16 in a bit of purgatory, though the outlook is more

17 positive than what we have seen these past few

18 months. Because we won't know where all of this

19 lands until probably closer to the holidays, we

20 must continue moving forward with the worst case

21 scenario in mind. I'm sure we will fall somewhere

22 in the middle, but if we plan for the worst case,

23 we should end up in a much better -- we will have

24 that surplus that we so hope to get back, we should

25 get there because we have budgeted for a $2 million

58

1 decrease and heck, we may have 3 extra million

2 dollars to work with we could hope.

3 MR. O'CONNOR: Corbb.

4 MS. FLAX: Corbb.

5 MR. O'CONNOR: If I understand

6 correctly, the next fight, right, is great. The

7 money is allocated by now, the Education Department

8 says, but we're not spending it, right?

9 MS. JERDE: This is Natasha. VR has a

10 direct line appropriation that they must use for

11 VR. So I should say, though, technically, yes, we

12 are supposed to get it, but, you know, things can

13 happen. But VR, from what I am hearing from the

14 national lens from our folks that are down there,

15 it tends to be the most -- the least controversial

16 of all of the programs. There's information behind

17 it, data that supports that this program helps

18 people be tax paying folks and so that's a good

19 thing in the eyes of everyone, people are

20 re-investing in the economy. So it tends to be a

21 program that has bipartisan support, which is

22 great.

23 So I haven't talked about the state

24 budget, I only have a little paragraph on that. As

25 for the state budget, we need to continue being

59

1 fiscally conservative because as we read in the

2 news, there is a projected deficit for the entire

3 State of Minnesota going into the next biennium.

4 So that leads me to something, a big

5 thing that happened, of course while I was on

6 vacation, and it has to do with the funding for the

7 Employer Reasonable Accommodation Fund.

8 So an oversight occurred when the

9 policy language was drafted and the Government

10 Affairs Team for DEED at the time unintentionally

11 forgot to add a few little words which was around a

12 special revenue stipulation. That stipulation

13 allows for funds to carry forward at the end of the

14 biennium, meaning after two years if you don't

15 spend it all you can continue to spend it, that had

16 always been the intention of ERAF.

17 Unfortunately, at the end of the

18 fiscal year which was June 30, because that

19 stipulation was not explicit in the policy, ERAF

20 funds were returned to the Minnesota Management &

21 Budget essentially ending the program. The

22 Commissioner's office and our legislative budget

23 officer at DEED have been working tirelessly with

24 MMB's office to get the funds returned back to

25 ERAF. So far they have not been successful, but we

60

1 have two more plans to try to get the money back,

2 but it is possible that ERAF is done. We will know

3 more in the next few weeks, but needless to say, we

4 are incredibly disappointed and disheartened about

5 it.

6 I think the one shining light is that

7 the two staff, Ray and Morgan who have been working

8 on ERAF, will seamlessly transition over to our

9 Disability Fund grant team. Morgan was already

10 providing administrative support half time to that

11 team and Ray was already beginning to work with

12 some of the outreach planning because that's what

13 he does for ERAF.

14 We knew ERAF would not be forever,

15 though we were hoping, and we wanted to ensure that

16 our staff continued to have a job so we had already

17 made long-term plans for that transition, we just

18 did not expect it to happen in like three weeks.

19 We were expecting it to happen in maybe two years,

20 so with that --

21 MS. GLEASON: This is Deborah, can I

22 say two things real quick if that's okay? I am

23 wondering if we could solicit the Governor's

24 Workforce Development Board and put a voice in

25 toward getting those funds redistributed? If you

61

1 think that sounds like an idea, I would be happy to

2 reach out to the leadership and see what we could

3 do.

4 MS. JERDE: This is --

5 MS. GLEASON: Go ahead.

6 MS. JERDE: This is Natasha. Thank

7 you so much for the offer. I haven't had a chance

8 to talk to Katie, who's the head, but stay tuned,

9 that could be another rabbit in the hat, if you

10 will.

11 MS. GLEASON: Awesome.

12 MS. JERDE: So thank you.

13 MS. GLEASON: And then the one other

14 quick thing is, you know, there were a tremendous

15 amount of layoffs both at the federal and the state

16 level and I think that we need to make sure that in

17 the budget projections we cover the expense of

18 rehires, not just at our level, but the federal

19 level and how much monies they will take to rehire

20 their staff.

21 MS. JERDE: This is Natasha. That's a

22 valid point.

23 MS. FLAX: Any other quick questions

24 or should we continue?

25 MR. MIHELICH: This is Jeff.

62

1 MS. FLAX: Jeff, go ahead.

2 MR. MIHELICH: Earlier you said that

3 there were some verbiage that was left out, but

4 this is, this policy was, like, ongoing, correct,

5 it wasn't, like, made from scratch?

6 MS. JERDE: This is Natasha. It was a

7 made from scratch policy, ERAF, this is the first

8 program of its kind in the country and it was a

9 pilot. And it was during that huge supplemental

10 budget session where all of these ideas came out

11 and everyone was moving so quickly. So I don't

12 fault the Government Affairs Team for forgetting

13 it, I think it was just a flurry and they didn't

14 mean to forget it. And the intent was always for

15 it to carry forward, but the language was just a

16 little too vague for MMB.

17 MR. MIHELICH: Thank you.

18 MS. JERDE: Sam, did you want to pause

19 for a break before I keep going?

20 MS. FLAX: Yeah, you are the one

21 talking so I think we should. Yeah, I think people

22 might need a quick break.

23 MS. JERDE: There will be a lot more

24 discussion after the next one, so.

25 MS. FLAX: Yeah, let's do it. So we

63

1 will take a ten minute break, is that what we

2 usually do? So we will do that and what time is it

3 right now, 55, all right, we will come back at 7:05

4 everyone. I look forward to lots of discussion.

5 (Break taken from 6:55 to 7:07 p.m.)

6 MS. FLAX: All right everyone, I know

7 we are having fun, but I also know everyone wants

8 to have this discussion and talk about our budget

9 and we have so many exciting things.

10 All right. So I'm going to hand it

11 back over to Natasha for the rest of her report.

12 MS. JERDE: Thank you, Sam, and I

13 apologize, this is probably even less positive than

14 my previous part, but let's talk about policy.

15 And in addition to the budget there

16 some significant federal policy changes that have

17 happened in July and, in fact, a whole bunch just

18 dropped when I was on vacation, as it does.

19 So as a result of some of the

20 significant federal policy changes it will result

21 in SSB needing to make one other policy change with

22 Council input, which I will explain when we get to

23 that.

24 So the First Federal policy change

25 No. 1 is around subminimum wage. The Biden

64

1 Administration had issued a rulemaking effectively

2 eliminating the use of 14C special wage

3 certificates, thus basically sunsetting minimum

4 wage across the country.

5 The current administration received

6 significant advocacy from Congress, including the

7 chair of the House Education and Workforce

8 Committee asking for the rule to be rescinded,

9 which they have since done. So federal policy

10 change 1 is there is no ending of subminimum wage

11 nationally.

12 Federal policy change 2 has to do with

13 Section 503 of the Rehab Act. There is a lot to

14 this, but in essence Rehab Act prohibits federal

15 contractors from discriminating against individuals

16 with disabilities.

17 The Department of Labor released new

18 regulatory changes, one of which proposes to remove

19 the requirement for contractors to ask individuals

20 to self-affirm if they have a disability sighting

21 that they feel it is in conflict with the ADA.

22 And the proposed regulation removes

23 the requirement for federal contractors to set a

24 7 percent goal of hiring people with disabilities

25 as the DOL's belief is that it sets quotas which

65

1 are impermissible. So 503 is removing the --

2 really the incentive for contractors to consider

3 and hire people with disabilities.

4 Federal policy change 3 has to do with

5 gender reporting, so I copy and pasted this one.

6 So RSA issued the following: In alignment with the

7 President's Executive Order 14168 defending women

8 from gender ideology extremism and restoring

9 biological truth to the federal government.

10 RSA indicated for our federal reports

11 for the Voc Rehab and Older Blind programs that our

12 gender collection options have changed. Before the

13 options --

14 THE INTERPRETER: This is Patrick.

15 MS. JERDE: Oh, I'll pause.

16 MS. VELLIA: Patrick speaking. Does

17 that mean they got rid of Schedule A as well?

18 MS. JERDE: This is Natasha. I have

19 not heard anything about Schedule A, but that's

20 something we have been following as well.

21 And for those who may not know what

22 Schedule A is, Schedule A is more like -- it's not

23 really preferential, but it gives priority to

24 people with disabilities in federal government jobs

25 to be considered. So nothing on that front, I have

66

1 no news on that.

2 MS. FLAX: Patrick.

3 MS. VELLIA: The way I see it, the

4 state Connect 700 is the same as the federal

5 Schedule A.

6 MS. JERDE: This is Natasha. Yeah,

7 it's very similar, it's a similar concept, yeah.

8 All right. Gender reporting. So up

9 until now our options, this impacts people who are

10 coming in the doors for services and when you ask

11 questions and get demographic information. So in

12 the past our reporting options were male, female,

13 nonbinary or another and then prefer not to answer.

14 Now the options are female, male, unknown, so that

15 is a change.

16 Federal policy change 4 and one that I

17 need to talk about has to do with work

18 authorization. And I'm not talking about

19 authorizations for services, I'm talking about the

20 ability to work legally in this country.

21 So on February 19 President Trump

22 issued Executive Order 14218 which was ending

23 taxpayer subsidization of open borders, directing

24 agencies, among other actions, to ensure that

25 federally-funded programs are operating in

67

1 compliance with the Personal Responsibility and

2 Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of '96 or

3 PRWORA.

4 So in response to that Executive Order

5 several departments, including the Education

6 Department, issued their interpretations and

7 guidance in July while I was on vacation. I should

8 never go on vacation, I'm just gonna saying.

9 So first the U.S. Department of Labor,

10 and I will say we have several Department of Labor

11 programs at DEED, we are a labor department. The

12 Department of Labor issued new guidance requiring

13 all federally-funded workforce development programs

14 to verify work authorization before providing

15 services, effectively barring illegal immigrants

16 from accessing these resources.

17 The directive, which aligned with that

18 Executive Order, aimed to, and this is a copy and

19 paste, aimed to prioritize American workers and

20 ensure compliance with federal law. It reverses

21 previous Biden era guidance and applies across a

22 range of programs including WIOA and others serving

23 youth, dislocated workers and migrant and seasonal

24 farm workers.

25 Around the same time Health & Human

68

1 Services issued a press release that bans illegal

2 aliens from accessing its taxpayer-funded programs.

3 Some of these include Community Behavioral Health,

4 Community Health Services, Head Start, Mental

5 Health and Substance Use Disorder Treatment and the

6 list continues.

7 The Education Department has concluded

8 that federal programs administered by the

9 department that provide post-secondary education

10 and other similar benefits, including adult

11 education and career and technical education

12 programs, are federal public benefits and are

13 subject to the citizenship and immigration

14 verification requirements of PRWORA unless they are

15 not protected under Plyler versus Doe.

16 So that was, I think, July 19 or so

17 all of these started to be issued. I will say that

18 VR is not specifically called out, and then in

19 parenthesis I have yet, nor has RSA issued much

20 written -- actually no written guidance on this.

21 The ED guidance was a Notice of Interpretation

22 published in the revisor's office.

23 While they haven't issued anything, we

24 know that we have to prepare for this change. So

25 as of right now our eligibility does not require

69

1 work authorization or work legality to engage in

2 our program. Instead, our policy allows for

3 individuals to work with us as long as they are

4 pursuing that during their journey. The end result

5 is you do need to be able to work because we are a

6 work program, but we allow them time to do that

7 while they are receiving services.

8 However, we have been having many,

9 many conversations with our General Counsel's

10 office well before this has been released, because

11 we read the news. And we have been advised that we

12 will need to adjust our language to be in alignment

13 with the current administration's priorities.

14 And yeah, compliance with law, yep,

15 it's important, but frankly what we are most

16 concerned about is that providing VR services,

17 federally-funded services, to individuals who do

18 not have work authorization puts them at an

19 extraordinary risk. And I won't go into detail on

20 that.

21 I will note that our sister agency,

22 Voc Rehab Services, they do require this and have

23 required it for a few years. So we have been

24 advised and we agree that we would just have the

25 same language so that in Minnesota we have a

70

1 consistent message.

2 Most state agencies won't really talk

3 about it, but most state agencies also have this

4 requirement but there are a few who do not,

5 California for one. We were one of the few who did

6 not have the work authorization requirement.

7 So we are currently working with our

8 General Counsel's office on what that proposed

9 change to our policy would read. And that policy

10 would require work authorization to receive our

11 services and we plan to present the proposed

12 language during the next council meeting for input

13 as well.

14 I have one more policy change, but I

15 feel this is worth a pause.

16 MS. O'CONNOR: O'Connor.

17 MS. FLAX: Before we go to you,

18 Briley, I'm wondering if we can just really recap

19 in like one sentence what each one is before we

20 discuss the ones we have so far and then we will go

21 to Briley.

22 MS. JERDE: Sure. Policy change 1,

23 subminimum wage still exists; policy change 2, the

24 federal contractors really no longer have that

25 7 percent piece for hiring people with

71

1 disabilities; policy change 3 is we have changes to

2 how we report gender; policy change 4 is around

3 work authorization and work legality.

4 MS. FLAX: All right, thank you for

5 that concise and sad list.

6 Briley.

7 MS. O'CONNOR: Right. So my question

8 is around -- I'm trying to figure out a way to be

9 concise which is not always my ministry -- around

10 particularly the gender and the work legality, work

11 requirements piece for customers.

12 I know Minnesota, our Attorney General

13 and as a state we have been willing on a state

14 level to push back on certain policies,

15 particularly LGBTQ policies and DEI specific pieces

16 of things. Before changing our policy is this

17 something we would want to approach them about and

18 go how do we fight this as a state? Because the

19 subminimum wage one, it's a bummer, right,

20 federally, but that doesn't preclude, as I

21 understand it, states from making their own law,

22 right, to say hey, we won't accept subminimum wages

23 in our state, but these other policies would impact

24 programs here.

25 I don't know, does that question make

72

1 sense the way I phrased it?

2 MS. JERDE: This is Natasha. It

3 absolutely does and unfortunately I don't have

4 really any authority to make the determination if

5 the AG's office would pursue it. And really that

6 would be coming from our Commissioner's office on

7 if they would take that to them.

8 I do know there are things happening

9 at, you know, the AG's office in relation to the

10 policies and there has been pushback, we won't know

11 the resolution for those things for quite some time

12 and our grant is in jeopardy so there's a, I guess,

13 a time sensitive piece to this.

14 MS. O'CONNOR: Sure. This is Briley.

15 So is this thing -- well, I guess consumer

16 organizations can obviously advocate things that we

17 think are pertinent. But so you are saying that

18 the Commissioner would be the one to bring this to

19 the AG?

20 MS. JERDE: This is Natasha. It would

21 have to be at that level that it would have to come

22 from, that's not something I could pursue or it

23 would have to come at a different angle than from

24 me.

25 MR. O'CONNOR: Because it seems like,

73

1 particularly the work requirement piece, would

2 significantly impact services to our population,

3 who receive like ELL services.

4 MS. JERDE: This is Natasha. Yes.

5 Unfortunately I have to be careful with how I talk

6 about this, I just want to be very transparent. So

7 there are some things I can't share and I just want

8 to be honest with you all. This is the direction

9 we have been advised to go.

10 MS. FLAX: Sam.

11 MR. O'CONNOR: Corbb.

12 MS. FLAX: Corbb, go ahead.

13 MR. O'CONNOR: I think it's

14 interesting the Chair called for the floor.

15 One of the concerns that I have that I

16 am more saying for the record than for you directly

17 is that there are enough barriers in the country as

18 an immigrant, more when you add disability, more

19 when you add language. And the idea that somebody

20 who is wanting to pursue legal citizenship or a

21 pathway or a work authorization who does not have

22 Blindness skills or lost the ability to do that

23 because of a change in their vision, we are

24 effectively putting a barrier in that process by

25 not serving them and giving them those skills so

74

1 that they can independently have the ability to

2 understand what's happening and also how they can

3 interact with those documents with the KLAS

4 materials and with their assessments as a Blind

5 person.

6 And so to me it is another way that we

7 are excluding a very vibrant group from employment,

8 rather than any attempt to protect our country, as

9 it's been called.

10 So I just want to say I oppose this

11 change and I would encourage from you all the way

12 up to the Governor to find a way to fight this

13 change, even if that means that we lose these

14 federal dollars. We believe in this so strongly as

15 Minnesota that we will supplement the dollars we

16 lose with state dollars.

17 MR. SALISBURY: Salisbury.

18 MS. FLAX: I was going to say one more

19 quick thing and then I will go to you, Justin.

20 The thing I was going to say is sort

21 of related to Corbb's, it's that, you know, we

22 advise SSB as a Council and we can say we oppose

23 this and I am wondering, just asking other

24 councilmembers, what could we do as a Council since

25 we do have a different budget, we do have, you

75

1 know, a bit of separation that SSB doesn't have.

2 So I'm wondering as we discuss this if we could be

3 brainstorming things that the Council could do to

4 say, you know, if people want to oppose this, which

5 I certainly do, and just another way to think about

6 that as well, that way people don't lose as much

7 access.

8 Because I don't want SSB to lose

9 federal money for customers because that's who we

10 are ultimately trying to help. And so what I am

11 thinking is what can the Council take on in this

12 way and I think that's worth thinking about.

13 Justin, I will turn it over to you.

14 MR. SALISBURY: Yes, this is Justin.

15 I love the comments from Councilmember O'Connor and

16 also wanted to add that in the process of getting

17 work authorization, as well as international

18 student F-1 visas, there are a lot of ableist

19 hurdles that people have to go through.

20 And so it could be that services like

21 the ones provided by SSB actually help someone to

22 get over those hurdles, which is exactly what I

23 think he is saying there, and I think that could be

24 really powerful.

25 One thing that I am wondering about is

76

1 if we look at the specific subgroup of

2 international students on F-1 visas who technically

3 under an F-1 visa you can work, you are authorized

4 to work on the campus of the institution that is

5 sponsoring you or within the institution that is

6 sponsoring you.

7 So that's kind of a work authorization

8 but it is also, you know, it seems quite logical

9 that there could be international students at a

10 university here in Minnesota that might be Blind

11 and might need, you know, an orientation and

12 mobility lesson or something like that and, you

13 know, they may want to reach out to us for some

14 support.

15 So I'm curious if you have any

16 particular directives on how this would apply to

17 those international students on F-1 visas.

18 MS. JERDE: This is Natasha. Based on

19 the language of what competitive integrated

20 employment is and the requirements to participate

21 in the VR program, an F-1 student visa holder would

22 not meet the criteria for that because it's time

23 limited and the employment outcome is restricted.

24 And so that actually was our first

25 kind of situation around work authorization we

77

1 encountered a few months ago that has started a

2 long, much larger conversation with the General

3 Counsel's office around all of this. And then all

4 of the guidance hit in July that I think has

5 expedited the conversation.

6 And I will say there is a great deal

7 of moral and philosophical challenges occurring

8 within me and I just want to be vulnerable and say

9 that. And this is a really unprecedented time and

10 I need as much help as I can get from as many

11 people as possible to help navigate this because --

12 yeah.

13 MR. VELLIA: This is Patrick Vellia.

14 MS. GLEASON: This is Deborah.

15 MR. SALISBURY: Justin with one more

16 question.

17 MS. FLAX: I think I heard Patrick and

18 then Justin.

19 MS. GLEASON: You also heard Deborah.

20 MS. FLAX: Who?

21 MS. GLEASON: Deborah.

22 MS. FLAX: Oh, I am so sorry, Deborah,

23 you are so muffled, you will go after Justin.

24 MS. GLEASON: Okay.

25 MS. VELLIA: Patrick speaking. Since

78

1 we took DEI off to prevent the federal from taking

2 the funding, how does that impact our DEI

3 Committee?

4 MS. FLAX: We will be discussing that,

5 so that's a great question, hold, we will have this

6 discussion and we will definitely be talking about

7 that.

8 MS. VELLIA: Okay.

9 MS. FLAX: Justin, go ahead and then

10 Deborah.

11 MR. SALISBURY: Yes, this is Justin

12 Salisbury. About subminimum wages, I have been

13 studying this topic quite intensely, publishing

14 academic material about it. I have not heard of an

15 occurrence by the Biden Administration that would

16 be as broad as I think what you might be

17 describing.

18 I wonder if there is some kind of more

19 narrow qualifier about the phasing out of the use

20 of the 14C certificates? Because I feel like I

21 would have been attending, literally, I am not

22 being sarcastic, I would have been attending a lot

23 of celebratory parties if he had done that, like

24 literally full on parties, because we would have

25 been so thrilled if it had been like a full blanket

79

1 one.

2 And so I suspect, I mean I recognize

3 that you could just be repeating things that people

4 are telling you, right, but it might be that it was

5 a more narrow phaseout that he was talking about

6 maybe on federal contracts or something else which

7 I think the Obama Administration had actually made

8 some changes on that too.

9 So could you talk a little bit more,

10 if you know any more, about the perhaps narrowness

11 of that Biden era piece that has been now

12 overturned?

13 MS. JERDE: Sure. This is Natasha.

14 So it was a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking so I

15 don't even know if it got to the request for

16 comments period. And the Notice for Proposed

17 Rulemaking was to eliminate the issuance of 14Cs.

18 So it did not take away from the others, but part

19 of that Notice of Proposed Rulemaking was

20 considering sunsetting and what that looked like.

21 So it didn't completely say nope, it's

22 done tomorrow, but rather we are not issuing

23 anymore and we need to talk about sunsetting across

24 the country, which probably would have taken

25 several years. But I think it got to the first

80

1 comment period and that's where it was last seen.

2 MS. FLAX: Thank you, Justin.

3 Deborah, go for it.

4 MS. GLEASON: I just wanted to

5 confirm, this is already passed or is this the

6 proposed change?

7 MS. FLAX: So Deborah asked whether

8 this was already passed or whether it was just

9 proposed. Deborah, which one are you referring to

10 or are you referring to all four of them?

11 MS. GLEASON: The 503 changes.

12 MS. FLAX: The 503 changes, perfect.

13 MS. GLEASON: Which is all of these,

14 yes.

15 MS. JERDE: This is Natasha. It is

16 currently under the new regulations proposed, so

17 there is going through the whole, I believe it's

18 going to be a rule, I think this is under

19 rulemaking. I can never tell which branch it's

20 under, but I think this is a proposed regulation so

21 I don't know if it will end up passing or not.

22 MS. GLEASON: Okay. That is a good

23 thing and I'm wondering if that means I need to

24 work with some of my other orgs to mobilize some

25 messaging.

81

1 And then would the work authorization,

2 I'm trying to be creative here, would that apply to

3 training classes?

4 MS. JERDE: This is Natasha. Can you

5 expand on training classes?

6 MS GLEASON: Let's say you set up a

7 training class for the people in the -- could you

8 set aside a certain amount of budget monies for

9 training classes and create a class for individuals

10 without work authorization to learn what they need

11 to learn so it's not technically services, it's

12 just a class? I'm just trying to be a little

13 creative.

14 MS. FLAX: A class for people who

15 aren't SSB customers who could just show up, is

16 that where you are going with that?

17 MS. GLEASON: Yeah, that's kind of

18 where I am going with that.

19 MS. JERDE: This is Natasha. It

20 actually is possible. So services to groups is

21 what we are using for Braille, I would have to look

22 through the law, but services to groups is just

23 very broad in general and you don't track at the

24 person level.

25 But services to groups is a way to

82

1 provide services to a large group of people that

2 could benefit from services without being a part of

3 the VR program. So I'm not saying that it could

4 work, but I would look into that more.

5 MS. FLAX: Deborah, I admire your

6 creativity and your desire to mobilize, love it

7 just on a personal level. And I think that's

8 something for us all to think about, like what is

9 our personal, you know, just on a personal thing

10 here, like what can we do personally I think is

11 really important.

12 What other questions or comments on

13 these issues do people have? I just want to, if

14 you can confirm, Natasha, this is a change that all

15 of the following, all four of these policies, are

16 these things that SSB is thinking about doing or

17 have there already been some definite decisions

18 about what's going to happen?

19 I don't know if that was clear to

20 everyone.

21 MS. JERDE: This is Natasha. So the

22 subminimum wage and the 503 are more awareness

23 pieces, there is nothing that -- I mean, it impacts

24 us but not that we have to change anything.

25 Gender reporting, we still will

83

1 collect the same information that we always have,

2 but how we send it to the feds is going to look

3 different. So really our staff won't notice any

4 change and our customers who interact with us

5 won't, but what we tell the feds, it's gonna look

6 different.

7 The work authorization I -- that is

8 what it is, that is the policy that would need to

9 be put in place, unless someone with great

10 authority says otherwise. But what we don't know

11 yet is what does that transition plan look like,

12 how do we ensure that the person behind the policy

13 is not forgotten because there are people behind

14 this decision and that cannot be forgotten. But

15 that is the change that we would have to work

16 through at the September 25 council meeting.

17 MS. FLAX: Okay. So this one, this is

18 basically we are just letting people know and then

19 we are going to have a further discussion on this

20 one at our September 25 meeting?

21 MS. JERDE: Yes, with language and

22 public hearing opportunity so the public has an

23 opportunity to weight in.

24 MS. FLAX: Okay. In that case what I

25 would propose is, unless someone has a really

84

1 burning comment they want to share right now, let's

2 save that conversation for the 25th so people can

3 have time to think about it, decide what we can do,

4 things like that.

5 Does anyone want to briefly share

6 anything you want people to be thinking about over

7 that month and a half before we have that

8 discussion?

9 MR. SAWCZYN: Steve.

10 MS. FLAX: Steve.

11 MR. SAWCZYN: Just really briefly. As

12 a new person I just want to say Natasha, I

13 appreciate the incredibly difficult position you

14 are in and I realize it's challenging to say what

15 you can, not say what you can't and to still be

16 brave and transparent. So I just really, really

17 appreciate that and want to thank you for what you

18 are doing and just for being you in this space.

19 MS. FLAX: I second that. It's not a

20 motion, but I second it.

21 (Clapping.)

22 MS. JERDE: I was trying not to cry at

23 this meeting. This has been a really, I don't

24 know, I think I cried during April too, my goodness

25 what is going on with me.

85

1 MS. FLAX: If you start I will start.

2 MS. JERDE: Thank you, Steve.

3 MR. SAWCZYN: I also would like to get

4 some vacation planning tips from you.

5 MS. JERDE: I am actually basically

6 the travel agent for my family. I don't think they

7 like it, but they are stuck with me.

8 MR. HART: Rocky Hart.

9 MS. FLAX: Was that Rocky?

10 MR. HART: Yes.

11 MS. FLAX: Go ahead, Rocky.

12 MR. HART: So this is a question I

13 probably should have asked earlier when we were

14 talking about the budget, but I just want to

15 clarify. I know that SSB is currently providing

16 interpreters and things like that for anyone who,

17 you know, Deafblind clients who might need

18 additional support. With the budget cuts are there

19 going to be any changes to that as far as you can

20 tell?

21 MS. JERDE: This is Natasha. Heck no.

22 MR. HART: Okay, good.

23 MS. JERDE: Short answer. Also my

24 long answer.

25 MS. FLAX: I love short, easy ones

86

1 like that. All right.

2 MR. HART: I didn't think so but I

3 figured I'd check.

4 MS. FLAX: Natasha, you said you had

5 one more policy to share with us?

6 MS. JERDE: Yes, this is Natasha. One

7 more and actually Sam probably will get to do more

8 talking than me after this.

9 So federal policy change 5. Really

10 not a new thing, but we did recently get some

11 further guidance. So changes within Diversity,

12 Equity and Inclusion. So finally on July 29 we

13 actually got guidance from the Rehabilitation

14 Services Administration, up until now they have

15 remained silent.

16 So on July 29 the U.S. Attorney

17 General issued guidance to federal agencies,

18 including RSA, that emphasizes the significant

19 legal risks of initiatives that involve

20 discrimination based on protected characteristics

21 and provides nonbinding best practices to help

22 entities avoid the risk of violations. Copy and

23 paste from the email I got.

24 And then in that attachment I think it

25 is important to note the attachment was the

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1 guidance from the Attorney General's office, it was

2 scanned in as an image, was crooked and going off

3 the page. So I don't know is that considered

4 irony, I don't know what the word is, but I did not

5 distribute it out to staff for that very reason

6 because it is completely inaccessible.

7 The SSB management team received a

8 copy but we do need to transcribe it so that it's

9 readable. In addition, our Attorney General's

10 office is reviewing this, so just heads up.

11 But, you know, this probably isn't a

12 surprise to us because we know a lot has been

13 happening in the space of DEI&A, however, RSA had

14 remained silent.

15 Right before I went on vacation, I

16 think it was maybe two days before vacation or

17 right before I got a call, a call from our federal

18 partners around our Combined State Plan. Now, our

19 Combined State Plan is our application for our Voc

20 Rehab grant, so the Combined State Plan is the

21 vehicle to apply for our funding. And they

22 informed us that our Combined State Plan has many

23 references to DEI and DEI&A that are contradictory

24 to the federal priorities. As such they have

25 indicated we do need to modify our Combined State

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1 Plan, to remove references to DEI&A so as to not

2 jeopardize our funding.

3 DEI&A is most heavily referenced in

4 our goals and priorities section, though it is

5 infused throughout. I have a draft with all of the

6 highlighted potential words, I had folks kind of

7 look through and highlight what words may be

8 causing this call so that we can make sure that the

9 various Council and committee members have access

10 to that as we work through this.

11 So our two year State Plan

12 modification is due this coming spring, so we would

13 need to begin discussions now with the Council and

14 associated task forces and committees on what these

15 modifications should look like. The big question

16 is how do we reframe the language while keeping our

17 intent of keeping overlooked and underserved people

18 the same.

19 And I believe for consistency and,

20 Deborah, you may recall the Governor's Workforce

21 Development Board is using the term activating

22 overlooked workers, I think, is their phrasing. I

23 don't know if that has been vetted and approved by

24 all, but because they are coordinating the Combined

25 State Plan and it's not just us who contribute.

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1 So with that I will actually turn it

2 over to our Chair for that conversation, unless you

3 have any questions.

4 MS. FLAX: Okay. I am going to take a

5 bit of a Chair's privilege for a second and just

6 give some thoughts and ideas really quick and then

7 I would love to hear everyone's thoughts.

8 My thought at this time is that

9 English is a beautiful, confusing, wonderful, very

10 strange language. And I think there isn't

11 necessarily anything wrong with using it to our

12 advantage to still get what we need.

13 So changing the words, even though we

14 shouldn't have to, I think, will protect customers,

15 it will allow us to get the money because what I

16 don't want to do is while we are fighting this, and

17 I just as a person and as Chair of the Council have

18 every intention of making sure that we are still

19 supporting DEI, but I think while we do that we

20 should make sure that people still have services.

21 So therefore, I am in favor of

22 switching the language, even though I don't love

23 it, in the Combined State Plan. When I talk about

24 it I'm still gonna use the words that it actually

25 is and I think that we as a Council, because we are

90

1 not subject to those federal dollars, there is

2 nothing stopping us from among ourselves using the

3 name of the committee.

4 When we give that committee report

5 into the State Plan we can adapt it so that it's

6 usable, but I just want to say that I think it is

7 extraordinarily important that we not give up on

8 this work, but we find a way to do it in such a way

9 that people who are receiving services do not lose

10 any services, that we know what's going on with the

11 SSB budget, so we don't want to lose any of that.

12 So I what I would say is we are not

13 going to stop working on DEI, at least I'm not, but

14 we can work within what we have to do that. So

15 that is what I will say about that and I have a

16 strong commitment that we will continue to work on

17 these issues because it impacts everyone.

18 I would love to hear people's thoughts

19 about, you know, questions, ideas and I think we

20 will also continue, of course, to have this

21 discussion at our September 25 meeting. So I don't

22 know how much of a long discussion we should have

23 about it tonight, but any initial thoughts, ideas,

24 disagreements, questions, concerns, comments, I

25 will open it up to that now.

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1 MS. O'CONNOR: Briley.

2 MS. FLAX: Briley.

3 MS. O'CONNOR: I recognize I have been

4 on my app a lot, but on this particular issue, so I

5 hear you about we don't want quibbling over what

6 words we are using to get in the way of funding and

7 actually providing services, right, but language

8 also serves as a signal to people that we see them

9 and that they are acknowledged, right.

10 And it's not just about doing some

11 gymnastics. The words, for example, referring to

12 people by the pronouns that they need surfacing

13 openly, that we serve trans people and queer people

14 and that we value equity and inclusion, I think

15 that that does matter.

16 I hear you and I understand that it is

17 a difficult tension to walk in, but as of right now

18 in this country people are still protected classes.

19 The law hasn't changed. They can erase all the

20 language they want to on their website, so does it

21 change that people are still protected?

22 That may not always be the case, I

23 know there is a lot going on in the courts right

24 now that could change tomorrow, right. But I don't

25 know, that's just a thing that I felt like I wanted

92

1 to put out there that it's not only about -- it's

2 like when I -- for example, when I introduce myself

3 and use -- when I say my pronouns are she/her,

4 right, which I sometimes forget to do, but when I

5 do that often that signals to people who may need

6 support or help that I am a safe person, right,

7 because I know to do that.

8 And I value disclosing that, not that

9 other people have to, but that is a -- there is a

10 term for it but I don't remember the term, but it

11 signals to people that we value them and we are

12 safe people and we will value their needs. So I

13 just want us to remember that, that's all.

14 MS. FLAX: Oh no, and I just want to

15 say, I do 100 percent agree with you and that's why

16 what I propose is if we do decide to change any

17 language in any official documentation I would

18 propose that as a Council we make a commitment to

19 always use our pronouns when we introduce ourselves

20 at a meeting, that we use the word DEI freely and

21 proudly during our Council meetings and that when

22 we are doing business of the Council that we

23 absolutely call things like they are because

24 language is important.

25 I think the thing that I am struggling

93

1 with is do we agree to change the language in the

2 report? Which to me might be something that we can

3 do, but I think as a Council we should

4 absolutely -- I think you are absolutely right and

5 do I think we should continue with those words.

6 And I'd love for us to all start using

7 pronouns and even just things like that I think are

8 super important and I think that's a personal thing

9 we can all do as well and as a Council. And I have

10 no intention of changing the name of our DEI

11 Committee because we are not technically SSB, so I

12 don't see any reason why we can't keep that name.

13 What do others think, any other

14 thoughts?

15 MR VELLIA: This is Patrick.

16 MR. ELLER: Frank Eller.

17 MS. FLAX: Patrick and then Frank.

18 MS. VELLIA: I have two things. First

19 for Natasha -- well, let me do the first one for

20 Sam first. Yeah, I agree with you and I think we

21 can get a little -- speaking about the vocabulary,

22 we can keep the DEI. I keep thinking of how we use

23 it because like for my own business I use DEI in

24 the culinary arts, so diversity in the foods.

25 Like you said, you introduce yourself

94

1 like she/her. On Monday I was at the middle school

2 Blind camp in District 917 teaching them about

3 tacos. Anyway, I asked them, the students, to use

4 their pronouns so I don't accidentally misgender

5 because you know like somebody could be named Ryan

6 and it could be a girl or a boy, I don't which, I

7 can't see them, so if you use your pronouns so I

8 know which one you are and they have to let me

9 know.

10 MS. FLAX: Good.

11 MS. VELLIA: The other one for

12 Natasha. If we really have to go that far you said

13 DEI includes the IPOC, does that mean we have to be

14 careful with the ethnic questions on the forms?

15 Because like when employers are Equal Opportunity

16 Employers they have the form where you have to put

17 your race which is white for me and not Hispanic

18 and then yes, I have a disability.

19 MS. JERDE: This is Natasha. We are

20 still collecting that information, like the

21 demographic information. The thing that changes is

22 how we report gender, I don't know if more changes

23 will come. We had been advised for our Disability

24 Innovation Fund Grant to no longer report

25 demographic information in our performance and to

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1 remove that. So we are no longer reporting it.

2 We are still collecting it, but we

3 don't report it. But we need to know if we are

4 reaching underserved communities for our own

5 purposes, that's the purpose of the grant, but we

6 are not going to tell the feds that information.

7 MS. FLAX: Frank, I think you had a

8 quick comment.

9 MR. ELLER: Hi there. Sorry, can you

10 hear me?

11 MS. FLAX: Yes.

12 MR. ELLER: First of all to Director

13 Natasha, I would also thank you, Director, for

14 being brave and courageous and standing firm and

15 walking tall and being transparent, you know. I'm

16 sorry for the difficulty you have to face daily, it

17 must be real hard on your mind, but thank you for

18 walking tall for all of us and standing firm in

19 your position.

20 And to what Samantha said, yes, about

21 maybe change the language, but I still -- as

22 someone said, the laws haven't been changed yet so

23 I think we still have time, even if we don't have

24 time, something could still happen. I still feel

25 the diversity and the pronouns should be for

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1 everyone to feel safe, to be included, inclusivity,

2 they and them, she and they, he and his, et cetera.

3 Because the last thing I want to say

4 is a quick little quote that I got from a movie,

5 The Green Book. Genius is not enough, it takes

6 courage to change people's hearts. Thank you.

7 MR. O'CONNOR: Corbb.

8 MS. FLAX: Corbb.

9 MR. O'CONNOR: So the one piece that's

10 coming to mind is right now we know that the feds

11 are using AI and find, like, just brute force

12 control F find for DEI and associated words. So I

13 think it's only a matter of time before their

14 dictionary of find words increases. And so while

15 it pains me, I do wonder about in our reporting we

16 talk about overlooked workers as a section. I

17 think they are gonna know that it is what they

18 think it is soon enough, even if it's not

19 immediately control F DEI findable.

20 And so I wonder if we want to move

21 that -- take this a step further and take the great

22 work that's being done by staff, by partners, by

23 ourselves and weave that into the report, to me

24 that's an even greater signal of inclusion.

25 When I read a report from work and

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1 it's, you know, if it were to call out our Blind

2 employees in a section or just weave me in with

3 still referencing me as a person, but it's part of

4 a general narrative, to me that feels more

5 inclusive.

6 MR. SALISBURY: Salisbury.

7 MS. FLAX: Justin.

8 MS. GLEASON: Deborah.

9 MS. FLAX: Justin and then Deborah.

10 MR. SALISBURY: Yeah, I think there

11 are a lot of words, basically since the murder of

12 George Floyd and the summer of reckoning, have

13 increased in their usage so much and so widely that

14 now a lot of people aren't really sure what other

15 people mean when they say those words anymore,

16 because there isn't really common agreement because

17 now the words are just getting thrown around here,

18 there and everywhere. And the people who were

19 doing that work before the murder of George Floyd

20 are not necessarily represented by a lot of the

21 people that joined in afterward.

22 There is a ton of classism in the

23 framing and structuring of a lot of DEI work that

24 we see today and that is a big part of why there

25 was so much political pushback against DEI, because

98

1 of the potent classism baked into the construction

2 of a lot of DEI programming. And so there are a

3 lot of people who have come to have really

4 difficult relationships with the term DEI and with

5 a lot of other types of programming related to it.

6 And so we may become even more

7 effective at the kind of work that we want to do if

8 we do come up with ways to describe what we are

9 trying to do without necessarily using the buzz

10 words and catch phrases, but by really taking the

11 time to talk about what it is that we want to do,

12 right.

13 And so being more literal and direct

14 we could -- sometimes evasiveness may be useful

15 too, but sometimes there are other ways of

16 communicating what it is that we are really trying

17 to accomplish because sometimes the buzz words

18 aren't going to actually help us get a bigger

19 audience because they get you so much that people

20 are not all on the same page about it.

21 So I think that if we do take the time

22 to update the language and we make sure that we are

23 still talking about what we want to be doing and we

24 are not using as many of those catch phrases and

25 buzz words, I think we can still be going forward

99

1 with what we want but we might even get a broader

2 audience to support it because we might then be

3 communicating in a way where people can see

4 themselves in it, where they were supposed to be in

5 it before but they didn't see themselves in it

6 because of those buzz words. So I think this can

7 be a productive exercise and I'm looking forward to

8 trying it.

9 MS. FLAX: I love the optimistic way

10 of looking at that, I think we all need that right

11 now.

12 Deborah, go for it.

13 MS. GLEASON: Okay. A couple of

14 things. Natasha Jerde, an answer to why you are

15 crying is you are a human being and you are allowed

16 to cry, so that's one.

17 MR. O'CONNOR: Sorry, quick point of

18 order, this is Corbb. Deborah, I'm so sorry but

19 I'm having trouble understanding you.

20 MS. GLEASON: I don't know what is

21 going on, hang on a second, let me try something.

22 MR. O'CONNOR: Thanks.

23 MS. GLEASON: All right. I don't know

24 if that's going to help at all, but is this any

25 better?

100

1 MR. O'CONNOR: Not much, but if you

2 speak slower I think we can probably manage.

3 MS. FLAX: And I'm happy to repeat

4 anything.

5 MS. GLEASON: Sorry, I'm an East

6 Coaster, so I talk really fast.

7 I was just saying that Director Jerde

8 that the reason she cried is she is a human being

9 and that's perfectly fine.

10 MS. FLAX: I second that.

11 MS. JERDE: Thank you.

12 MS. GLEASON: You are welcome.

13 The concern I think we are facing is

14 just making sure in our direct reporting that's

15 going to go to someone who is going to review it, I

16 don't think anyone is asking to change our

17 behaviors. So, you know, I say play around with

18 things like universal participation or something

19 along those lines.

20 And then a quick question regarding

21 pronouns. I live in this fantasy world that some

22 day gender, disability, race, creed, none of that

23 will matter, all that will matter is what you are

24 able to do and who you are as a person. I know

25 it's a big old dream, but I dream it. But is

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1 telling people they have to give their pronouns

2 just as discriminatory as not letting people give

3 pronouns? That's just a question. Thank you.

4 MS. FLAX: That's a great point.

5 Well, I want to live in a world where people can

6 choose to give them if they want and I hope a lot

7 of people do and if they are uncomfortable for any

8 reason I think that's okay too.

9 MR. ELLER: I second that.

10 MS. FLAX: All right. So Justin was

11 optimistic, Deborah was even more optimistic, who

12 can top it, because I know I can't.

13 MR. SAWCZYN: I could try, this is

14 Steve.

15 MS. FLAX: All right, Steve, go for

16 it.

17 MR. SAWCZYN: I've had to do this at

18 work recently and it's been kind of interesting and

19 at first it was really painful to remove references

20 to DEI, to accessibility and disability. I mean

21 literally I'm on a team called the digital

22 accessibility team so taking accessibility out of

23 that name makes it really confusing about what I

24 actually do. But it has been a really interesting

25 thing.

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1 I've gotten a lot of positive response

2 because I think oftentimes the terms get in the way

3 that I don't think we always appreciate. And I'm

4 not saying that they always get in the way by any

5 means, but like I think when those words are

6 removed from the conversation, the conversation has

7 to focus on the person and what the person is doing

8 or the challenge the person is facing.

9 And it's shaping up in a very

10 unexpected way to be an interesting conversation

11 that would be less interesting when the words

12 accessibility, disability are used and others

13 immediately go to a default, whatever they

14 associate those words with, whether it's a type of

15 person or abilities of a person or whatever thing,

16 you know, they stigmatize the words with.

17 So it's been a very interesting thing.

18 I know we are not talking about those particular

19 words, but we have to do this in addition to our

20 DEI colleagues and I, you know, still call them

21 that even though they can't call themselves that.

22 And I think it's important work but it

23 is kind of an interesting opportunity to reshape

24 the conversation in ways that I have seen great

25 connections that haven't been there before, so.

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1 MS. FLAX: Great, thank you, Steve.

2 So here is what I am going to propose

3 as I look at the time and also wonder how much more

4 of this cheerfulness we can all take, is that I

5 would propose that the DEI Committee, our

6 committee, as I finish out my chairship and hand it

7 over to Justin, will meet before our September 25

8 meeting and come with some ideas to that meeting

9 for the Council. If anyone wants to be part of

10 that, you know, committees are open meetings so if

11 anyone wants to join that totally fine, we will be

12 ironing out times and such for that.

13 So I would propose that that's how we

14 go about it. I encourage everyone to be thinking

15 about this as we move forward, but I think we

16 should rely heavily on our DEI Committee, while we

17 are still calling it that, and if we ever decide to

18 call it something else, you know, we will talk

19 about that too.

20 But that would be my proposal is to

21 have that committee do a report at our next Council

22 meeting about ideas, questions, things like that.

23 Does that work for everyone?

24 MR. O'CONNOR: Yes, Chair.

25 MS. FLAX: All right. If no one is

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1 vehemently opposed, Natasha, was there anything

2 else that you were going to share with us or was

3 that the last thing?

4 MS. JERDE: This is Natasha. More

5 good news, that was the last you will hear from me.

6 MR. O'CONNOR: In this meeting.

7 MS. FLAX: Thank you so much for that,

8 Natasha, I want to echo what everyone said and

9 thank you for your work and your support and

10 everything and your transparency.

11 So what I would want to just propose

12 next is talking about the rest of our meeting is,

13 as I said it's getting late, we will have our

14 budget report. What I would like to entertain is a

15 motion that we skip committee reports this evening,

16 that everyone will submit a written report that

17 will be included in the entirety of the minutes for

18 our next meeting. That way we can get out of here

19 before breakfast tomorrow.

20 And so is there a motion to do written

21 committee reports?

22 MR. SALISBURY: Salisbury, quick

23 question. Happy to move, but what was the deadline

24 for submitting the committee reports in writing?

25 MS. FLAX: That's a great question.

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1 Why don't we say, Nyia, when do you need them by?

2 MR. SALISBURY: October 15.

3 MS. FLAX: I'm talking about for the

4 September meeting. Do we want to say September --

5 MS. SANDERS: We are talking about the

6 minutes.

7 MR. VANG: Oh, the minutes. Can I

8 have them like in a week or two weeks?

9 MS. FLAX: I think that's completely

10 reasonable. What is two weeks from today?

11 All right. Let's do one week, that

12 way if I have to chase any of you down next Friday

13 I can.

14 MS. JERDE: August 15.

15 MS. FLAX: Yeah, August 15, I like

16 that nice, you know, round number.

17 All right. August 15 please send

18 to -- I'm gonna say send to me and Nyia your

19 reports for your committees, that includes myself,

20 self remember to do that.

21 And Justin, you said you are willing

22 to move?

23 MR. SALISBURY: Yes, moved by Justin.

24 MS. FLAX: Excellent. Do we have a

25 second?

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1 MR. O'CONNOR: This is Corbb, I will

2 second. And in the process, is it your intention

3 that the Budget Task Force would still report

4 tonight?

5 MS. FLAX: Justin, do you want to

6 amend your motion to be either way?

7 MR. HOBSON: Can I throw something in?

8 MR. SALISBURY: A note of

9 clarification, this was a motion about committees,

10 not task forces.

11 MR. O'CONNOR: Perfect.

12 MS. FLAX: Rob.

13 MR. HOBSON: I have to go.

14 MS. FLAX: Okay. How about we say we

15 will have committee and -- Justin, would you be

16 willing to amend your motion to be committees and

17 task forces?

18 MR. SALISBURY: Before I amend my

19 motion, Councilmember O'Connor, how do you feel

20 about this with your Budget Task Force?

21 MR. O'CONNOR: That's good.

22 MR. SALISBURY: Okay, then yes.

23 MR. O'CONNOR: Rob is the Chair, I'm

24 merely a member.

25 MR. SALISBURY: Okay, okay. Yes,

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1 Salisbury's motion amended now to include task

2 forces as well.

3 SILAS O'CONNOR: Second.

4 MS. FLAX: Wonderful, wonderful, I

5 love when we all can agree.

6 All right. I heard second I think

7 from Silas, but he, unfortunately is not on the

8 Council, so that actually leads me to another

9 announcement. Pat McGee has resigned from the

10 Council.

11 Connie is not here.

12 Corbb.

13 MR. O'CONNOR: Yes. Corbb, yes.

14 MS. FLAX: Let's see. Diane.

15 MS. DOHNALIK: Yes.

16 MS. FLAX: Deborah.

17 MS. GLEASON: Yes.

18 MS. FLAX: Frank.

19 MR. ELLER: Yes.

20 MS. FLAX: Jennifer is not here.

21 Jeff.

22 MR. MIHELICH: Yes.

23 MS. FLAX: Justin.

24 MR. SALISBURY: Salisbury, yes.

25 MS. FLAX: Kelly.

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1 MS. LEMKE: Yes.

2 MS. FLAX: Okay. Pat, Patrick.

3 MS. VELLIA: Yes.

4 MS. FLAX: Paulo.

5 MR. CASTRO: Yes.

6 MS. FLAX: Rob. Come on, Rob, vote,

7 vote, vote.

8 (No response.)

9 MS. FLAX: He might have actually had

10 to leave, he really had to go.

11 All right. Steve.

12 MR. SAWCZYN: Yes.

13 MS. FLAX: Sue.

14 MS. FAGER: Yes.

15 MS. FLAX: Thea.

16 MS. KRAMER: Yes.

17 MS. FLAX: I think I forgot someone.

18 Tom.

19 MR. HEINL: Yes.

20 MS. FLAX: All right, anyone else?

21 (No response.)

22 Okay. And I will vote yes, okay,

23 perfect.

24 A quick note before we go to public

25 comment, that Pat McGee has resigned from the

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1 Council so we do have an opening. So Silas if you

2 want to continue to vote we will check the rules

3 about 18, but if anyone else wants to join the

4 Council there is an open spot, if anyone knows of

5 any good people.

6 Was there any other business to bring

7 before the Council this meeting?

8 MR. SALISBURY: Salisbury.

9 MS. FLAX: Justin.

10 MR. SALISBURY: Yes. Based on some

11 email correspondence that you and I recently had,

12 Chair, did you want to -- and I understand that at

13 some soon point I am no longer continuing as Chair

14 of the Needs Assessment Task Force, but did you

15 want to tell us who the new person is and what's

16 going on with that?

17 MS. FLAX: I will announce that at our

18 September meeting, how's that?

19 MR. SALISBURY: So then just to try to

20 understand, I know there are things that need to be

21 submitted for October and all of that, so at what

22 point does the hand-off happen? There is a lot of

23 kind of things up in the air now for that task

24 force and probably some time pressure, so I just

25 want to get some direction from you on what to do

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1 about all of that.

2 MS. FLAX: What I will say is I will

3 be in touch with you as the current chair within

4 the next couple of days and we will get that all

5 ironed out to figure out what the plan is going to

6 be.

7 MR. HART: Rocky Hart.

8 MS. FLAX: Rocky.

9 MR. HART: I am also on that task

10 force and I was also going to ask a similar

11 question because between Justin and I we are

12 working on various aspects of it. We actually have

13 still some work to do as far as the CS&A. So if

14 you are able to communicate that information as

15 soon as you have it, that would be ideal.

16 MS. FLAX: Absolutely. All right. I

17 will be in touch with that task force and we will

18 be working that out. I apologize for not having a

19 better answer at this moment, but I don't want to

20 get ahead of myself.

21 Any other questions, comments,

22 concern, worries, hopes, fears?

23 MR. O'CONNOR: Corbb with a public

24 comment.

25 MS. FLAX: All right. Are we good for

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1 public comment? All right, let's do it, go ahead

2 Corbb.

3 MR. O'CONNOR: As I announced at our

4 last meeting and you read in the minutes, the

5 National Federation of the Blind of Minnesota's

6 annual convention is November 14, 15 and 16 in

7 Rochester. You can now make your room reservations

8 at the Best Western and we are optimistic that many

9 of you will join us.

10 We have a programing starting Friday

11 morning and a slough of exhibitors that we are

12 excited to have with us. And we will also be

13 bringing in some guests to that -- to the

14 programming, so really excited to have you all

15 there. More details, feel free to reach out to me

16 or visit our website. The actual registration form

17 coming very shortly.

18 MS. FLAX: Perfect. Thank you, Corbb.

19 Anyone else public comment?

20 MS. O'CONNOR: Briley.

21 MS. FLAX: Briley.

22 MS. O'CONNOR: I just want to announce

23 that the Minnesota Center for the Blind, which is

24 still doing business as BLIND, Incorporated to be

25 clear, our tba, but we are able to offer, thanks to

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1 a generous grant from the American Action Fund for

2 Blind Children & Adults, a seniors program, our

3 Empower Seniors Program, which is at two days a

4 week for ten weeks, Adjustment to Blindness Program

5 for any seniors experiencing vision loss. This is

6 free of charge to the program participants, to

7 State Services, no charge at all. We also are

8 able, due to this grant, to help provide

9 transportation to people who may need it to

10 participate.

11 So please have anybody get in touch

12 with me or Tristan Ratliff who is our program and

13 operations coordinator, he is doing intake for that

14 so tratliff@blindinc.org or call us (612)872-0100.

15 MS. FLAX: That was some great news.

16 MS. O'CONNOR: Very exciting.

17 MR. SALISBURY: Salisbury.

18 MS. FLAX: Justin, was that you?

19 MR. SALISBURY: Yes. So floating an

20 idea to all the community partners who can hear me

21 right now. You know, SSB may have its hands tied a

22 little bit on serving people that don't have work

23 authorizations and things like that, but I didn't

24 hear that our community partners have their hands

25 tied that way. Now I understand that that wouldn't

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1 involve getting reimbursements from SSB, however,

2 sometimes there are other sources of funding that

3 community partners might find that might enable

4 them to serve these folks that currently SSB is

5 prevented from serving.

6 So if you know any rich people that

7 want to invest in something like that, just know

8 that that's a possibility.

9 MS. FLAX: You read my mind, Justin, I

10 was thinking about that all day.

11 All right. Who else has a comment and

12 if your comment is secretly to be a rich person and

13 you are going to fund everything, great, but if

14 not, no pressure.

15 MR. O'CONNOR: Corbb moves to adjourn.

16 MS. FLAX: Okay, love it. Who wants

17 to second?

18 MR. MIHELICH: This is Jeff, second.

19 MS. FLAX: Jeff is second.

20 All right. Let's see. I keep not

21 pulling up my list in time.

22 Okay. Connie is not here.

23 Corbb.

24 MR. O'CONNOR: Corbb, yes.

25 MS. FLAX: Deborah.

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1 MS. GLEASON: Deborah, yes.

2 MS. FLAX: Diane.

3 MS. DOHNALIK: Diane, yes.

4 MS. FLAX: Frank.

5 MR. ELLER: Frank, yes.

6 MS. FLAX: Jeff.

7 MR. MIHELICH: Yes.

8 MS. FLAX: Justin.

9 MR. SALISBURY: Salisbury, yes.

10 MS. FLAX: Kelly.

11 MS. LEMKE: Kelly, yes.

12 MS. FLAX: Patrick.

13 MS. VELLIA: Yes.

14 MS. FLAX: Okay. Paulo.

15 MR. CASTRO: Yes.

16 MS. FLAX: Rob. Did Rob leave?

17 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yes.

18 MS. FLAX: Okay, Rob left.

19 Steve.

20 MR. SAWCZYN: Yes.

21 MS. FLAX: Sue.

22 MS. FAGER: Yes.

23 MS. FLAX: Thea.

24 MS. KRAMER: Yes.

25 MS. FLAX: Tom.

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1 MR. HEINL: Yes.

2 MS. FLAX: I think that's everyone.

3 And I vote yes. And thank you all so much, thank

4 you all for your participation tonight and for your

5 discussion of difficult topics. Everyone go eat a

6 cookie or something, I don't know.

7 See you all in September. Oh, just s

8 reminder, that our meeting is September 25, not

9 October, whatever that day is, 2nd.

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

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1 STATE OF MINNESOTA)

2 ) ss.

3 COUNTY OF HENNEPIN)

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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 115 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: August 16, 2025

16

17 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

KIMBERLY K. EVAVOLD

18 Court Reporter

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