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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,

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 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.

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 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

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 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

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 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

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 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.

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 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.

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 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

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 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

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 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

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 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

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 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

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 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?

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 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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 6

 7 REPORTER'S CERTIFICATE

 8

 9 I, Kimberly K. Evavold, do hereby

 10 certify that the above and foregoing transcript,

 11 consisting of the preceding 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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