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July 21, 2016

VIA EMAIL AND U.S. MAIL

James Kirby, Commissioner
SC Commission for the Blind
1430 Confederate Avenue
Columbia, South Carolina 29202

Dear Commissioner Kirby:

On behalf of the Healthcare Subcommittee, thank you and your staff for sharing your time and knowledge with the Subcommittee. Following the July 19, 2016 meeting, subcommittee members requested the agency respond to the following:

- Are there currently unfunded or unauthorized activities that the agency would like to engage in to better reach and serve the state's visually impaired? If so, what are they?
- Please have agency staff and legal counsel review "A Better Bottom Line: Employing People with Disabilities," and highlight programming that staff believes would improve the employment environment for disabled workers seeking employment and employers seeking to employ disabled workers. Provide specific suggestions for amendments to the S.C. Code of Laws.

We would appreciate a response by August 3, 2016. Please contact Committee staff if you have any questions about this inquiry.

Sincerely,

Signature Redacted

Nathan Ballentine
Healthcare Subcommittee Chair



Commissioner
James M. Kirby

South Carolina Commission for the Blind
1430 CONFEDERATE AVENUE * PO Box 2467 COLUMBIA, SC 29202

PHONE (803) 898-7356 * FAX (803) 898-8662

July 29, 2016

The Honorable Nathan Ballentine
The Honorable Mia S. McLeod
The Honorable Walton J. McLeod
The Honorable Bill Taylor

SC House Legislative Oversight Committee
228 Blatt Building
Columbia, SC 29201

Dear Members,

The agency appreciates that the committee recognizes our efforts to utilize current resources to provide a wide array of services to the greatest number of Blind or Visually Impaired South Carolinians. In response to your question concerning unfunded activities that the agency believes would allow us to better serve this population the management team presents their "wish list" as follows;

- **The ability to increase staffing in several programs including Older Blind, Training & Employment, Finance, Business Enterprise Program, I.T. and Human Resources. Adding additional staff in each of these areas would offer SCCB the opportunity to:**
 - Expand Employment Consultant services to underserved counties.
 - Offer training on technology such as iPads/iPhones and reduce expenditures on bulky assistive items that can be replaced with applications. (i.e.: money/color/object identifiers; talking timers; talking health monitors such as glucose and blood pressure)
 - Fully utilize the Career Exploration Lab and the new partnership with NASA.
 - Reduce or eliminate the waiting list for the Older Blind program which was 186 referrals as of 7/29/16.
 - Bring staffing back to pre-recession levels.
 - Reduce workloads on staff that are wearing many hats and allow them to focus on the duties of their position.
 - Reduce turnover by changing several support positions to FTE's instead of temporary.
 - Build a SharePoint environment to improve communication throughout all of the offices.

- **Funding that will promote staff morale and satisfaction by;**
 - Increasing counselor salaries to be competitive with comparable positions.
 - Provide a fund that allows for distribution of merit and/or longevity awards to deserving staff.

- Replace the training grant that RSA eliminated so our staff can stay abreast of best practices in the field.
- Customizing our case management software and interfacing with SCIES to reduce workload and make it more user friendly.
- Equipment for services providers, (i.e.: laptops, portable printers, hotspots), to allow them to enter information while in the field instead of taking handwritten notes to enter later.
- **Other activities that are currently unfunded:**
 - A mobile unit to cover the state for vision screenings/testing/prevention/awareness.
 - The ability to utilize staff at EBMRC for training any South Carolinian with a severe visual impairment regardless of their ability to work.

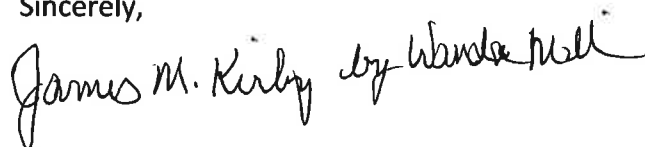
The second area you asked us to address was suggestions for amendments to the S.C. Code of Laws. The report, "A Better Bottom Line: Employing People with Disabilities" offers suggestions for all states and gives examples of what other states have done to increase employment for individuals with disabilities. The Business Enterprise Program also has a suggestion for this topic.

- Create legislation that directs state policies and investments to prioritize employment for people with disabilities. Direct state agencies to align disability programs with workforce and economic development programs, track disability employment outcomes, and make sure they are included with current workforce data collection.
- Increase the number of people with disabilities working in state government by creating a program similar to the Federal Schedule A program that gives priority hiring preferences to qualified candidates with disabilities.
- Extend the hiring preference for veterans to include persons with disabilities.
- Implement career readiness activities beginning with K through 12 and provide continued support at the college level as students' transition to work.

This agency appreciates the time the committee has invested in learning about what we provide for the Blind and Visually Impaired citizens of this state. We also greatly appreciate the recognition of all that our dedicated staff does on a daily basis with the resources we currently have and the realization that even though our budget appears to be close to pre-recession amounts, with inflation factored in we are not able to reinstate many of the lost positions or programs.

Thank you for your time and consideration of our "wish list". We look forward to our final meeting in August to hear the feedback and recommendations from the committee.

Sincerely,



James M. Kirby
Commissioner

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The mission of the South Carolina Commission for the Blind is to provide quality, individualized vocational rehabilitation services, independent living services, and prevention of blindness services to blind and visually impaired consumers leading to competitive employment and social and economic independence.