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June 30, 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 June 27, 2016 meeting, subcommittee members requested the agency respond to the following questions:

- What is the average caseload for counselors and caseworkers? If appropriate, please delineate by type of counselor or caseworker.
- Is there a national benchmark for caseload? If so, what is it?
- What is your job placement rate? Specifically, what is the agency's rate of placing unemployed or underemployed people seeking services into appropriate positions?
- Other than funding, are there reasons for not including certain assistive technology training in the Older Blind Program? Is there flexibility in expanding services to people in the Older Blind program?

We would appreciate a response by July 12, 2016. Please contact Committee staff if you have any questions about this inquiry.

Sincerely,

Signature Redacted

Nathan Ballentine
Healthcare Subcommittee Chair



South Carolina Commission for the Blind

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Commissioner
James M. Kirby

July 7, 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,

We would like to thank you for the opportunity to share information about our agency and the services we provide to the Blind and Visually Impaired citizens of South Carolina. This letter is in response to your request for more information on June 30, 2016.

1. What is the average caseload for counselors and caseworkers? If appropriate, please delineate by type of counselor or caseworker.

At this time the average caseload sizes at SCCB are:

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor—45

Transition Counselor—22

Older Blind Counselor—67

Children's Counselor—41

Independent Living—37

Prevention of Blindness—14

Caseload sizes vary based on counties served, ages served, and counselor experience. As counselors gain training and experience their caseloads grow over time. Also counselors in more rural settings have smaller caseloads due to lower population, transportation issues for consumers, and the need for more travel for counselors.

2. Is there a national benchmark for caseload? If so, what is it?

There is no national benchmark for caseload size. At this time there are 24 states who have a similar size agency serving the Blind and Visually Impaired. The national average for number of eligible consumers is 617 per agency, SCCB currently serves 681 consumers.

3. What is your job placement rate? Specifically, what is the agency's rate of placing unemployed or underemployed people seeking services into appropriate positions?

In 2014, the last year official numbers were calculated by the RSA, SCCB had a rehabilitation rate of 56%. The average wage was \$10.62 per hour and 64% of these consumers were working 35 hours per week or more. SCCB spent an average of \$1,479 on each rehabilitated case.

4. Other than funding, are there reasons for not including certain assistive technology training in the Older Blind Program? Is there flexibility in expanding services to people in the Older Blind program?

Prior to 2010 the Older Blind Program participated in many training programs in the Ellen Beach Mack Rehabilitation Center and with our community partners. It was at this time that the RSA (Rehabilitation Services Administration) chose to conduct monitoring of several state agencies and how grant funds were being utilized. During the monitoring the RSA divided all of the grant monies received at the state agencies and mandated that each program could only utilize funds from their specific fund to provide services to their consumers. This meant that staff paid under the VR grant could no longer provide services to Older Blind, Children's, or Independent Living consumers. The grants for these programs were extremely limited and there was an adjustment period as program directors were required to reallocate their resources to prioritize services based on consumer need. A.T. was not as advanced as it is today and fewer older consumers were interested in computers.

Over the past 6 years the Older Blind program has formed community partnerships that assist in providing for our consumer's needs. The staff in this program has also seen a growth in community offerings concerning technology. At this time the Older Blind program is collaborating with Senior Centers across the state and in the fall of 2016 plans to implement a technology training program. They also have researched and have access to several free trainings available to teach assistive technology. Utilizing these community resources will also help stretch the limited budget of this program to provide assistive technology devices to our Older Blind consumers.

I hope we have answered your questions completely but if you do have any further questions or concerns please feel free to contact me. Again, thank you for your thorough study of SCCB and we look forward to hearing your recommendations and comments.

Sincerely,

Signature Redacted

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.