

BSPC Committee Reports for April 2025

Bureau of Customer and Community Blind Services: Bureau Chief, BSPC Report for April 2025

Staffing: Due to personnel changes within BEPB, I have assumed the role of BEPB Program Administrator on top of my existing duties as BCCBS Bureau Chief. I am pleased to report that we have recently learned that Ms. Morgan Manning has been hired as the new Program Administrator; Morgan is scheduled to start in the position on April 16. In the meantime, beyond my ongoing study of relevant statutes, administrative regulations and BEPB program policies, I am now generally responsible for BEPB functions including personnel matters, responses to grievances as well as quality assurance, goal setting and performance monitoring.

Updates to rules and policies: We have a long-ongoing effort to update BEPB's state administrative regulations (i.e., the "650 rules") as well as BEPB's Policy and Procedures Manual. In 2024 DRS retained a consultant who is a long-time vendor to review and draft proposed updates on both our administrative rules and manual, which input he did recently provide us. On January 16 we held a meeting jointly with the consultant and ICBV to discuss the proposed updates, and shortly after that we forwarded our proposals on to the federal Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) for an additional level of review and suggestions. Once we have thoroughly discussed the proposals and finalized our drafts (a process which RSA has advised us may take several months), we will submit our draft rule updates to the Illinois Joint Committee on Administrative Regulations (JCAR) for public review and comment prior to adoption.

ICBV elections: In February I collaborated extensively with the Illinois Committee of Blind Vendors in reviewing and revising its written rules for ICBV elections. After

multiple rounds of editing and of meetings with ICBV members, we finalized a draft of revised rules which was unanimously approved by ICBV on 2/28/25. These rules as well as nomination forms have since been distributed to all blind vendors statewide in advance of the ICBV elections scheduled for May 2025. The revised rules are written in a more straightforward manner, will facilitate an orderly election process for many years to come, and will help ensure fair access for all vendors interested in running for seats on ICBV.

ICBV quarterly meeting: On March 7, Director Patrick, and I, along with BEPB staff, represented the program at the quarterly meeting of the Illinois Committee of Blind Vendors held in Naperville.

State Rehabilitation Council: On March 19, I represented BCCBS at the quarterly meeting of the State Rehabilitation Council which took place at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield.

Braille printing: We have resumed past efforts within the agency to implement printing of documents in Braille for the benefit of customers who need or would like them for accessibility and effective communication.

After much discussion and consideration, we have decided to do an initial small rollout at our ICRE-Wood offices, to monitor the feasibility of and perform troubleshooting on Braille printing on a small scale. We have been coordinating on getting an embosser and updated software in place, as well as on training designated ICRE-Wood staff on proper operation of the equipment. Once in place, we plan to assess results at ICRE-Wood to decide on the feasibility of a wider rollout in offices statewide.

Though our rollout at ICRE-Wood is a relatively small step, it will finally after several years restore to BCCBS some ability to print Braille documents. It is a major concern that our agency presently has no ready means to issue

documents in Braille to our customers who need or would like them; this runs counter to our mandate and mission to be an inclusive agency which makes its services and materials accessible to all regardless of disability status or communication needs. We will continue to work on this until we are able to furnish our documents in Braille wherever needed.

Intra-agency collaboration: I have continued to speak and collaborate with certain front line staff members in addressing particular BCCBS issues and customer cases.

On January 22, I joined the virtual meeting of all BCCBS staff, at which I was able to introduce myself to any staff members within the Bureau with whom I had not already had contact, as well as join discussions of certain issues pertinent to BCCBS.

On February 19, I visited the DRS field office and Jacksonville and met with BCCBS staff in that office; this was a great opportunity for us to get personally acquainted and to discuss ongoing work and challenges in serving customers of that area of the state.

On February 20, I joined the quarterly virtual meeting of all BCCBS Rehabilitation Instructors statewide, at which I was able to join discussions of certain issues pertinent to the RIs and could address questions from RIs regarding staff training, hiring for open positions, general uncertainties about the future of VR structure and funding in light of the recent change of federal administration, and more.

On March 14, I visited the DRS field office in Champaign, where I spent the day working and meeting with BCCBS staff in that office, as well as virtually with other BCCBS staff elsewhere in region 3.

On March 20, I attended an in-person workday at ICRE-Wood in Chicago for all BCCBS Region 1 staff.

These have all been wonderful opportunities for me to get personally acquainted with front line staff and regional administrators, as well as to discuss ongoing work and challenges in serving customers of the various regions of Illinois. I will continue looking for opportunities to connect with BCCBS field staff statewide, both virtually and in-person.

Illinois School for the Visually Impaired: On February 19 I had my first visit to ISVI, where I had a wonderful tour, got to meet many staff and students, and joined in the excitement of ISVI's annual Braille Challenge reading event.

I have also continued to discuss with ISVI Superintendent Aimee Veidt various issues including funding and arrangements for ISVI students to travel to training and networking events statewide.

We are also in discussion about my returning to make a presentation to parents of ISVI students regarding VR services available through BCCBS.

Community outreach: On February 4, we met with representatives of the Chicago Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities (including with MOPD Commissioner Rachel Arfa) to discuss the services on offer from our respective agencies as well as potential opportunities for collaboration and joint community outreach. We will continue monitoring for outreach opportunities.

Coordinating services for customers who are deaf or Deafblind: We have surveyed Regional Supervisors in BCCBS as well as in Field Services to verify existing practices in flagging customers with hearing disabilities for

appropriate involvement with Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf (RCDs). Having this information should help us assess how case assignments and transitions might be enhanced for deaf customers.

We have also reviewed our policy manual regarding existing practices for referring transition-age customers who are deaf or Deafblind, and are currently drafting new manual language for the purpose of bolstering these transition services.

We are currently identifying programs and providers for pre-ETS services for transition-age student customers with sensory disabilities, particularly for those with hearing disabilities.

Updates to CARS assessment tool: BCCBS is in the process of updating the Comprehensive Assessment for Rehabilitation Services (CARS), the assessment tool that our Rehabilitation Instructors use when meeting with and evaluating the needs of customers. We are modifying many of the CARS questions and modules, as well as streamlining the tool so that RIs can work more efficiently by being able to electronically upload their notes in live time to our case management system. Updates to the CARS are already being entered in beta form. In the near future, we expect the updated CARS to be launched and we will implement staff training to ensure that all RIs are familiar and equipped to use it.

Bureau of Customer and Community Blind Services: Assistant Bureau Chief, BSPC
Report for April 2025

Staffing

- Region 2-Has added Spanish Speaking Rehabilitation Counselor Trainee, as well as a Rehabilitation Instructor.
- Region 4-Has added a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor.
- Region 5-Has added a Rehabilitation Case Coordinator and a Rehabilitation Instructor.

Initiatives

- JAWS training held for all staff using JAWS for reasonable accommodation.
- Continued work on handbook for CCBS VR customers to allow for informed choice; project expanded to work group for general VR handbook for all customers.
- Statewide meeting scheduled for April to discuss working with DeafBlind customers, collaboration with RCDs, and hearing aid purchase.
- CARS assessment added to WebCM for electronic entry and tracking.

FY Year to date:

- Currently serving 1,487 customers, up 152 over last report.
- 90 competitive integrated employment closures year to date.
- Average wage at closure for CCBS customers is \$24.50, working an average of 30.93 hours per week.

ICRE-Wood, BSPC Report for April 2025

Census

There is a total of 31 customers in the program, 5 residents and 25 commuters (this includes 1 deaf blind customer)

End of Term

The current term will end Wednesday, April 23, 2025.

Graduation

Thursday, April 24th the graduation will begin at 10:30am.

Next Term

The next term will begin on Tuesday, May 6th.

Waiting List

Currently, there are 19 eager customers on the waiting list.

Tours

Gina Shanks schedules and conducts tours of the ICRE-Wood facility. She has conducted 22 tours since the last report.

Staff Updates and Shortages

There is still a need for a Program Director, 3 Rehabilitation Mobility Instructors, 2 Mobility Orientation Instructors, and Office Coordinator/Receptionist. We hope to have the vacant positions filled soon.

Highlights

We are diligently working toward adding an additional class to the program, Braille electronics.

ICRE-Wood customers received tickets to a Chicago Bulls game. The upcoming game will be held on April 9th, and the Bulls will be playing against the Miami Heat.

Illinois Council of the Blind (ICB), BSPC Report for April 2025

There certainly have been things happening at the Illinois Council of the blind, hereinafter ICB. The ICB Board decided to make this year's convention a full

virtual convention. This decision was made during the September 2024 Board meeting. That is probably the most notable decision from that Board meeting.

In January 2025, the ICB Board voted to move their Post Office Box to Riverton, IL. From Springfield. This will be done as soon as possible, and publicity will be going out on this matter.

The ICB continues to be involved in the Accessible Vote by Mail (AVBM) coalition along with NFBI, Equip for Equality, Reform for Illinois and others. Right now, the Secure Vote by Mail Task Force is meeting and the coalition is meeting right after these meetings. Recommendations from this Task Force are due by June of this year.

As previously mentioned, the ICB convention will be a fully virtual convention this year. The dates are April 24-26. Some speakers will include Andrew Web from BBS, Stephen McMinn from the State Library, Cheryl Jansen from Equip for Equality and Scott Thornhill, Executive Director of the American Council of the Blind (ACB) which is the national organization to which ICB is affiliated with. There are more activities and there will be internal elections and other business conducted.

The ACB conference and convention will be held hybrid from July 4 through July 11 in Dallas TX. The program is being finalized as we speak. The ACB scholarship deadline has passed.

National Federation of the Blind of Illinois, BSPC Report for April 2025

NFB BELL Academy

The National Federation of the Blind of Illinois (NFBI) sponsors its 2025 BELL

(Braille Enrichment for Literacy and Learning®) Academies. The NFB BELL Academy—which stands for National Federation of the Blind Braille Enrichment for Literacy and Learning®—helps blind and low-vision children, ages four through twelve, develop the literacy skills that will empower them to achieve their academic goals and live the lives they want. Receive Braille instruction and other nonvisual blindness skills through fun, hands-on learning. Take advantage of this opportunity for your child to connect with blind role models, students, and more!

We are accepting applications for NFB BELL Academy for Chicago and Springfield. Please find the link [here](#) to apply.

NFB STEM2U

The National Federation of the Blind of Illinois is excited to host an NFB STEM2U program on Saturday, August 23, at the Chicago Marriott Naperville hotel.

Blind youth are invited to embark on a transformative day of discovery and innovation as we dive into the fascinating world of the scientific method! Engage in hands-on, accessible experiments that harness observation, prediction, and testing to solve real-world challenges. From physics and technology to chemistry and engineering, this year's activities promise to inspire curiosity and exploration. Don't miss this unforgettable opportunity to ignite your passion for STEM!

To register, please [complete the NFB STEM2U registration form](#).

NFB National Convention

The National Federation of the Blind National Convention is the largest gathering of blind people in the world. It is the premier event for training, support, and information for the blind community. Although the convention is open to all, our constitution states that only members of the NFB have the right to participate

in decision making when it comes to organizational policy. If you are not already a member, join the NFB today. The National Convention offers hundreds of sessions, dynamic presentations, and countless opportunities. Click [here](#) to learn more.

NFB of Illinois State Convention

The National Federation of the Blind of Illinois State Convention is the largest gathering of blind people in the state. It is the premier event for training, support, and information for the blind community. It also serves as a governing body, democratically electing our leadership and establishing each year's organizational priorities.

The 2025 NFB of Illinois State Convention will take place from Friday October 17th - October 19th at the Marriott Naperville Hotel. Keep an eye out for more details soon.

NFB State Scholarships

Each year the National Federation of the Blind of Illinois (NFBI) awards scholarships to qualified blind students. The scholarships are awarded at the annual convention of the NFBI. In 2025 the NFBI will award at least one scholarship in the amount of \$5,000. All blind high school seniors and college students are encouraged to apply! Applications for the state scholarship program is open. The deadline to apply is April 30. Click [here](#) to apply today!

Washington Seminar

Washington Seminar was held in Washington, D.C., from Monday, February 3, to Thursday, February 6, 2025, at the Holiday Inn Washington Capitol – National Mall, located at 550 C Street, SW, Washington, DC 20024.

The Illinois delegation met with representatives in our nation's capital to advocate for legislative issues facing the blind community. The four day event was an overall success, and our team is currently working to continue to build upon our progress to generate support.