DRS Liaisons Reporting to BSPC

Bureau or Partner Organization:	Director, DRS
Presented by:	Rahnee Patrick
Date: 6/26/26	June 26, 2026

Highlights and summary of accomplishments from the past quarter:

Over the past quarter, Illinois Division of Rehabilitation Services continued to advance statutory responsibilities in advising on policy, budget priorities, federal compliance, consumer-facing programming, and interagency coordination across the state's VR and Blind Services system.

Engagement with the Illinois General Assembly featured prominently as preparation for FY27 funding continued. The Director participated in the Senate Appropriations Hearing on April 1 and the House Appropriations Hearing on April 23, ensuring that Blind Services' needs, including BEPB operations and VR program infrastructure, were represented. A follow-up meeting with Blind Services Bureau Chief Andrew Webb on April 28 further clarified BEPB funding priorities and federal compliance considerations.

Federal compliance and oversight work progressed through participation in VRTAC-IL's April 8 contract meeting and two SF-429 Real Property Reporting webinars (April 9 and May 14). These efforts supported preparations for the RSA Corrective Action Plan update due July 31.

Planning continued for competitive integrated employment initiatives, including preparation for the SWTCIE Illinois Annual Meeting ("Building Bridges to Integrated Work") on April 10. On April 17, an address to the Illinois Committee of Blind Vendors (ICBV) provided opportunities for direct engagement with the vendor community and insight into BEPB program needs.

The quarter also included significant interagency engagement across DRS, Healthcare and Family Services (HFS), Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT), the Attorney General's Office, workforce partners, and interpreter service stakeholders which allowed DRS to monitor policy alignment and identify systemic issues affecting consumer access and service delivery.

Community engagement remained strong through attendance at the Illinois School for the Visually Impaired (ISVI) and the Illinois School for the Deaf (ISD) graduations on May 22. I joined Secretary Quintero in a June 11 site visit to The Chicago Lighthouse. My attendance at the Statewide Rehabilitation Council (SRC) Summer Meeting on June 17.

In addition, major federal policy developments emerged. On June 16, the U.S. Department of Education announced a realignment of oversight responsibilities, with the Office of Special

Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) partnering with U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to administer VR and special education; and Office of Civil Rights (OCR) partnering with the Department of Justice (DOJ) to strengthen civil rights enforcement. This federal shift emphasizes improved alignment and reduces federal micromanagement while maintaining rigorous oversight. As the Department of Education's Secretary McMahon noted, "We will scale back micromanagement where it hinders success, but the Department is committed to bolstering efficacy of federal oversight where it is essential."

Finally, national policy analysis became a significant focus following the release of federal Office of Management and Budget's (OMB)'s proposed revisions to the Uniform Guidance, now envisioned as the Uniform Grants Regulation (UGR). Ropes & Gray summarized the changes which was subsequently shared through the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB). The NCSAB began reviewing the extensive proposed changes and the Ropes & Gray summary to prepare feedback for NCSAB, which requested member comments by July 2. Key proposed changes include the shift from guidance to binding regulation, new nondiscrimination and DEI restrictions, political appointee review of discretionary awards, expanded termination and suspension authority, new foreign collaboration restrictions, and major changes to allowable costs and subrecipient monitoring. The proposal is at (https://www.regulations.gov/document/OMB-2026-0034-0001).

Open issues:

Ongoing issues this quarter centered on interagency coordination, legal matters, program modernization, and newly emerging federal regulatory questions.

Work continued with the Illinois Attorney General's Office regarding BEPB arbitration (April 13). Multiple meetings addressed the implementation of the state's Dignity in Pay initiative (April 15, April 30, June 3). Additional efforts involved disability benefits alignment with HHS (May 6), workforce system planning (May 7 and May 12), interpreter workforce development (May 15 and June 1), and improvements to VR referral and contracting processes (May 19 and 29). Mobility coordination discussions with IDOT on June 10 reinforced the need for cross-agency alignment around transportation barriers for blind consumers.

At the federal level, the proposed Uniform Grants Regulation raised significant new questions regarding compliance burden, award risk, allowable costs, subrecipient monitoring, and administrative structure. Key Ropes & Gray findings indicate major implications for state agencies and partner organizations, including:

- Elevation of 2 CFR 200 to binding regulation.
- New restrictions on disparate-impact analysis and DEI-related program activities.
- Political appointee pre-issuance review of discretionary awards.
- Substantially expanded federal termination/suspension authority.
- New "domestic-first" and foreign collaboration prohibitions.

- Elimination of fixed-amount subawards.
- Increased reporting and English-language requirements; and
- Stricter cost principles for publications, conferences, advertising, and other common activities.

These issues will require careful internal review and may warrant formal BSPC input to NCSAB.

Priorities for next quarter:

Key priorities for the upcoming quarter include:

- Completion and submission of the RSA Corrective Action Plan update (due July 31, 2026).
- Preparation for consumer engagement and public outreach at the Illinois State Fair (August 13–23, 2026).
- Participation in the ICRE-Wood Summer Graduation on August 27, 2026.
- Preparation and dissemination of the Comprehensive Needs Assessment for vocational rehabilitation
- Implementation of Dignity in Pay Act
- Continued analysis of the proposed Uniform Grants Regulation and preparation of feedback through NCSAB.
- Monitoring federal policy shifts as ED, HHS, OCR, and DOJ begin operationalizing their new partnership structures.

Opportunities for improvement or "pain points":

Several challenges surfaced this quarter that present opportunities for BSPC guidance or long-term improvement:

- Pre-planning meetings with the Neurodiversity Caucus (June 12 and 22) highlighted ongoing system modernization needs, gaps in VR performance infrastructure, and the need for greater transparency in program metrics.
- The proposed federal Uniform Grants Regulation may introduce significant administrative burden, greater risk of award termination, heightened scrutiny of subrecipient activities, and increased documentation/approval requirements for commonplace costs, requiring proactive systemwide preparation.
- Interpreter workforce shortages, transportation access barriers, and cross-system coordination challenges continue to affect service delivery.

BEPB arbitration and contract/referral process issues underscore the ongoing need for clearer guidance, stronger interagency coordination, and improved dispute resolution pathways

Questions or areas of input from the BSPC:

Liaisons Reporting to BSPC

Bureau or Partner Organization:	Bur of Cust & Community Services
Presented by (name and title):	Andrew Webb, Bureau Chief
Date:	June 26, 2026

Highlights and summary of accomplishments from the past quarter:

- We have been making a major push to attract interested candidates to fill open Rehabilitation and Mobility Instructor positions throughout the state. These positions have historically been challenging for us to fill; however we posted several field positions in May, and look to post more in the near future. We are excited to interview candidates and to fill these positions in the coming months.
- On April 23-24, BCCBS attended the Illinois Council of the Blind's annual State Convention in Springfield. Along with ABC Heather Speth and BEPB Administrator Morgan Manning, I addressed the convention to give an overview and updates regarding the work of BCCBS. We also staffed an exhibit table at the convention in order to provide further information to attendees.
- On May 22, along with numerous other DRS leaders and DHS Secretary Quintero, I was honored to attend the graduation ceremonies of the Illinois School for the Visually Impaired and the Illinois School for the Deaf, both in Jacksonville, IL.
- On June 3, I returned to the Illinois School for the Visually Impaired to give the keynote presentation at ISVI's Opening Doors Parent Infant Program. This was an opportunity for me to share with parents of very young children with visual disabilities an overview of VR services and how DRS stands ready to support them as their children reach transition age and begin to focus more closely on their employment and career paths. I also shared reflections on my own disability journey and my experiences as a past DRS customer. My address was warmly welcomed by the parents, and I am grateful to ISVI for inviting me to be a part of this wonderful program.
- On June 17, I represented BCCBS at the quarterly meeting of the State Rehabilitation Council which took place at UIC School of Law in Downtown Chicago.

Open issues:

- As the Randolph-Sheppard state licensing agency, we have been working to clarify and revise our policies and procedures regarding VR funding to support managers during their initial period after inventorying into new facilities. Our goal is to clarify criteria per which VR may fund managers, to help ensure mutual understanding among managers, VR andstaff, as well as to ensure judicious use of VR resources. We have undertaken this project in conjunction with the Illinois Committee of Blind Vendors, which is actively participating in developing specific proposals. We plan to issue a new administrative policy directive along these lines shortly

Priorities for next quarter:

- Conduct interviews of applicants for our recently posted Rehabilitation and Mobility Instructor positions and continue outreach and recruiting efforts as more positions are posted.
- Continue our collaboration with the Illinois Assistive Technology Program, in part to expand training for Rehabilitation Instructors on Assistive Technology that can benefit our customers. We are looking to schedule additional staff training sessions with IATP.
- Revamp and update existing onboarding and training materials for Rehabilitation Instructors; this is a particular focus currently as we hope to hire several new Ris over the coming months.

Opportunities for improvement or “pain points”:

Questions or areas of input from the BSPC:

Liaisons Reporting to BSPC

Bureau or Partner Organization:	Policy and Legislation
Presented by (name and title):	Karie Krolak, Sr. Policy Advisor
Date:	June 26, 2026

Highlights and summary of accomplishments from the past quarter:

- Job Retention Summary revision went live in WebCM 5/22/26

Open issues:

- Self-Employment pilot
- Adm Code 650 Vending Facility Program for the Blind – completed internal Executive Review
- Post-Employment RSA FAQ – review of current admin rules and procedures, including WebCM processes
- 562.30 Financial Analysis Completion

Priorities for next quarter:

- Updating IPE signature procedures to align with federal regulations.
- Continue review of Adm Rule 590 and all its subparts (Qualification of Training Facilities, Bidding Rules, Increased Cost/Private Certified Housing, Comp benefits, Transition, Functional Limitations, Transportation)
- Formalizing MSG procedures
- RSA Corrective Action: Policy and Procedure Manual, continue to update VR Manual
- Continue to provide support to Field staff on all policy matters.

Opportunities for improvement or "pain points":

- Completing annual IPE reviews and amendments for plans with no significant changs creates administrative burden for counselors and customers. DRS is exploring extended IPE's so that formal amendments are completed only when needed.

Questions or areas of input from the BSPC:

Liaisons Reporting to BSPC

Bureau or Partner Organization:	Customer & Community Blind Services
Presented by (name and title):	Heather Speth, Assist. Bureau Chief
Date:	June 26, 2026

Highlights and summary of accomplishments from the past quarter:

- Current customer count is 1,362, which is a little less than a 1% decrease in customer count from the previous quarter.
- Average wage per hour for those listing Blindness or visual impairment as primary disability has gone down slightly to $24.78 per hour, while average hours worked per week is 30.68 hours which represents a slight since increase last quarter.
- Karol Nova joined the CCBS team as the Region 3 Rehabilitation Services Supervisor.
- Emily Haapala joined CCBS Region 1 team in Chicago Heights office as a Rehabilitation Instructor Trainee.
- Thomas Robinson joined CCBS Region 1 team in Emerald City office as a Rehabilitation Case Coordinator.
- Amy Holland joined CCBS Region 5 team in the Murphysboro office as a Rehabilitation Case Coordinator.
- CCBS Region 4 Supervisor Robert Heape recently represented us at the Juneteenth Celebration Downtown Jacksonville on June 20th. The event was sponsored by NAACP Jacksonville and Jacksonville African American History Museum. Information was made available to the community regarding DRS/CCBS services.

Open issues:

- Ensuring that the VR handbook resource is put online. It is currently completed in print, and we are working on making it an available web resource to share with customers etc.

- We will have ICRE-Wood staff and CCBS Field staff attending the Blind Service Chicago Vision Expo 2026 on October 27. They will have the ability to take referrals onsite from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. at Venue West, 221 N. Paulina St., CHICAGO, IL 60612

Priorities for next quarter:

- Continued integration of VR and BEPB through the RSA-TAC and self-employment planning. Create an environment where staff are more comfortable and confident starting self-employment cases for BEPB customers. This will aid in cases moving more quickly in early stages.

Opportunities for improvement or “pain points”:

- Changes to travel practices have presented challenges to our field-based staff. We have done our best to make sure that they have access to the latest and most accurate information, have been vocal about sharing training dates, and provided support when able.

Questions or areas of input from the BSPC:

Liaisons Reporting to BSPC

Bureau or Partner Organization:	BCCBS / BEPB
Presented by (name and title):	Morgan Manning
Date:	June 26, 2026

Highlights and summary of accomplishments from the past quarter:

Brewz Brother Café, a blind vending project that has been in the works since 2019, celebrated it's grand opening of a Proudly Brewing Starbucks coffee cart in the lobby of the Leighton Criminal Courthouse on June 8, 2026.

The BEPB and the Illinois Committee of Blind Vendors (ICBV) worked together to put on a successful Spring training conference in April 2026 which included many exciting presenters and informative break-out sessions.

All Illinois correction facilities with vending have been changed over to the new cashless payment system.

Open issues:

The BEPB training team is working to re-write the training curriculum to reflect current process and align with the new 650 Rules. Input was also gathered from former BEPB trainees and from our vending partners.

Priorities for next quarter:

We are actively working to prepare facility bid announcements and business income opportunities to release providing new, profitable sites for blind vendors to bid on for award.

Opportunities for improvement or "pain points":

Questions or areas of input from the BSPC:

Liaisons Reporting to BSPC

Bureau or Partner Organization:	ICRE-Wood
Presented by (name and title):	Latisha Houston, Superintendent
Date:	June 26, 2026

Highlights and summary of accomplishments from the past quarter:

-On April 23, 2026, ICRE-Wood celebrated fourteen graduates from the program.
-The Spring term began May 2, 2026.
-Three Rehabilitation Mobility Instructor positions (including 1 trainee) were posted on May 11, 2026.
-Two Orientation and Mobility Instructor positions (including 1 trainee) were posted on May 19, 2026.
-Zakeithiea Johnson was promoted to Facility Coordinator and began working in her new role on June 16, 2026.
-Ivan De Souza joined the ICRE-Wood team on June 16, 2026. He is the new Accountant Supervisor.
-Nine potential customers have toured the ICRE-Wood facility since the last report.

Open issues:

Priorities for next quarter:

-We will continue to provide quality services for the customers in the program to assist them with achieving their vocational goals.
-Empower and inspire staff to engage in professional and well-being training that enhances their knowledge and job-related skills, while promoting a healthy balance between their work and personal lives.

Opportunities for improvement or “pain points”:

We will continue to make upgrades around the facility to create a comfortable and enjoyable environment for both customers and staff. Additionally, we are working to install interior and exterior cameras to ensure added security.

Questions or areas of input from the BSPC:

Sharon Howerton
BSPC Chair
June 26, 2026

NFB of Illinois State Convention

The National Federation of the Blind of Illinois will hold its 2026 State Convention from **October 23–25, 2026**, at the **Hyatt Regency Lisle in Lisle, Illinois**. As the largest gathering of blind people in the state, the convention serves as the premier event for training, support, information, and fellowship within the blind community. It also functions as the affiliate's governing body, where members democratically establish organizational priorities and elect leadership.

Throughout the weekend, attendees will participate in general sessions and workshops covering issues of national and state importance, including advocacy, employment, technology, Braille literacy, senior concerns, students, guide dog users, parents, and membership development. Participants will have the opportunity to learn more about the programs and goals of both the National Federation of the Blind and the National Federation of the Blind of Illinois, while engaging in meaningful discussions about what it means to live the lives we want.

Attendees will also have the opportunity to meet the Scholarship Class of 2026 and connect with members and supporters from across the state.

In addition to providing valuable information and training, the convention offers rich opportunities for networking, leadership development, and community building. Whether attending for the first time or returning as a longtime member, participants will leave empowered to continue advancing equality, opportunity, and independence for blind people throughout Illinois. Everyone is welcome to attend and take part in the work of creating a brighter future for blind Illinoisans.
To learn more about the National Federation of the Blind of Illinois State Convention, go to https://nfbofillinois.org/convention!

NFB BELL Academy

The National Federation of the Blind of Illinois (NFBI) sponsors the BELL Academy — Braille Enrichment for Literacy and Learning — a hands-on summer program for blind and low-vision children ages 4 through 12. Designed to build essential literacy and independence skills, BELL offers Braille instruction, activities of daily living, orientation and mobility training, and fun field trips. Children also have the opportunity to connect with blind mentors and peers who serve as inspiring role models. Each participant receives a free white cane and a slate and stylus.

Chicago — The Chicago BELL Academy is held at The Chicago Lighthouse, 1850 W. Roosevelt Road. The program runs July 20 through August 1, Monday through Friday, from 8:30 AM to 3:30 PM. The registration fee is $50 per child. Parents are responsible for daily drop-off and pick-up, though transportation is provided for field trips, which take place twice per week. Lunch is included.

Springfield — The Springfield BELL Academy runs July 13 through July 17, Monday through Friday, from 8:30 AM to 3:30 PM. The registration fee is $50 per child. This session is offered as a residential program for families traveling from outside the Springfield area — NFBI will cover hotel accommodations at a

nearby hotel for parents and their children. While children participate in the academy each day. Lunches are provided.

For more information or to register, contact BELL coordinator Deborah Stein at dkent5817@att.net or 773-203-1394, or visit www.nfb.org/bell.

NFB National Convention 2026

The 2026 NFB National Convention will be held at the JW Marriott Austin in Austin, Texas, from Friday, July 3 through Wednesday, July 8. The National Convention is the largest gathering of blind people in the world and serves as the premier event for training, support, and information for the blind community.

The week will kick off with a wide range of seminars for parents of blind children, technology enthusiasts, job seekers, and other groups on Friday, July 3. Attendees can expect hundreds of sessions, dynamic presentations, an extensive exhibit hall, and countless opportunities to connect with blind peers and advocates from across the country.

For more information, visit nfb.org/get-involved/national-convention.

NFBI STEM2U

The National Federation of the Blind of Illinois is bringing hands-on, fully accessible STEM learning to blind and low-vision students through NFB STEM2U. Part of a national program, NFB STEM2U pairs students with blind mentors and expert instructors to make science, technology, engineering, and math engaging and approachable—proving that STEM is for everyone.

This year's program centers on forensics. Please visit nfb.org/stem2u for full details on this year's activities.

STEM2U is recommended for blind and low-vision students ages 8 to 13—whether they already love STEM, are curious but unsure, or simply want hands-on, nonvisual skills training alongside blind role models.

When & Where: Saturday, August 15, at the Hyatt Regency near Lisle, IL.
Register: nfb.org/stem2u
Questions? Contact Illinois co-coordinators Debbie Stein (dkent5817@att.net, 773-203-1394) or Alaula Sprecher (amsprecher@att.net).

Liaisons Reporting to BSPC

Bureau or Partner Organization:	Illinois Council of the Blind
Presented by (name and title):	Karyn Campbell, ICB Rep to BSPC
Date:	June 26, 2026

Highlights and summary of accomplishments from the past quarter:

1. Successful ICB convention in hybrid fashion at the Abraham Lincoln Hotel from April 24 thru 26. Thank you to Andrew Webb, BCCBS Director and Morgan Manning, BEPB Administrator, for their presentations.
2. A resolution passed at our convention opposing the name change for the school.
3. ACB preparing for convention at the end of July with the hybrid dates being July 24 thru 31 in St. Louis.
4. Related to the ACB convention, STEP 26, Supporting Teens Elevating Potential which is the ACB youth track to take place from July 26 through July 29. Open to 20 students this year. We at ICB were pleased when we learned that this program was approved for Pre-ETS funding.
5. ICB held its Board meeting on May 30 with no major issues. We will have an exhibit booth in St. Louis barring any complications that prevent our Office Manager from attending.
6. ACB has filed comments regarding the Interim Final Rule (IFR) dealing with a delay in implementation of the Title II regulations for state and local government websites and mobile apps.
7. The Cogswell-Macy Act was reintroduced since the last meeting of the BSPC. This is Special Education legislation that will make sure students who are blind or visually impaired, deaf or hard of hearing, DeafBlind or have multiple disabilities are identified and properly served.
8. Elections were held at the ICB convention with the following results:

Ray Campbell, President; Bryan Dufelmeier, First Vice President; Rachel Schroeder, Second Vice President; Karyn Campbell, secretary; Renee Zelickson, Treasurer; Jenny Emery, Board member Class of 2030; Terry Heltsley, Board Member class of 2030; Tom Jones, Board member Class of 2030. We had a two-year term available due to a resignation and that was filled by Albert Anderson, Board Member class of 2028.

Open issues:

1. We still need to see where AVBM coalition goes. Some of this will depend on what happens at the national level.

2. See what happens with parts of the Dept. of Education that are slated to move; with these being OSERS to HHS, Office of Civil Rights to the Dept. of Justice and RSA to HHS.
3. Get co-sponsors for the Cogswell-Macy Act. ACB has a Speak For campaign up for this one.
4. Preparations continue for the ACB national convention which takes place in hybrid fashion in St. Louis from July 24 thru 31 and virtually from July 13-18.

Priorities for next quarter:

1. National convention in St. Louis will be a top priority to start this quarter
2. Keep an eye on any national legislation such as the Medical Device Nonvisual Access Act, the Websites and Software Applications Accessibility Act as well as other pieces of legislation. Many affiliates and partner organizations will have exhibits or presentations at the ACB convention.
3. ICB summer raffle fundraiser which ends in September.

Opportunities for improvement or “pain points”:

1. Delays in implementation of regulations for Title II and HHS accessibility to websites and applications.
2. Hollowing out of the Dept. of Education.

Questions or areas of input from the BSPC:

Dan Tevelde
National Federation of the Blind
June 26, 2026

The second quarter SRC meeting took place on June 17th at the School of Law on the Chicago campus of the University of Illinois. The meeting began at 9:30 AM and adjourned at 1:00 PM. There were several action items of particular interest to members of the BSPC. There was a discussion about the reassignment of special education services from the Department of Education to the Department of Human Services. Several people noted that staff at the Department of Human Services are not aware of or equipped to provide education or employment transition services for people with disabilities need. What role can the SRC play to ensure these services remain available?

Someone did a PowerPoint presentation about the SRC bylaws. I do not recall seeing it in the attachments I received before the meeting from SRC. I do not yet know how the bylaws are relevant to the issues the BSPC addresses.

Andrew Webb was not present at the meeting, and I was not asked to do a verbal report on behalf of BSPC.

The meeting concluded with a discussion of a customer survey for prospective and current DRS clients. The meeting chair divided attendees into focus groups to discuss the survey. I was in a focus group with the meeting chair, Antonio Gomez, Andy Losasso, and other people I did not know. I asked about including blind people in the design and testing of the surveys and Andy indicated that blind people participate in the process. Brittany Boston will be talking about the survey at the next BSPC meeting on June 26th. I got the overall impression from meeting attendees that they are interested in developing a customer feedback loop so they can capture customer experience. Someone asked me if a DRS staff person had presented at ACB or NFB conventions. I pointed out that Andrew Webb gave a presentation at last year's NFB state convention in October but that we did not receive reports from other DRS staff people. Andy Losasso asked me about the next NFB state convention, and I directed him to the Illinois National Federation of the Blind website. I did not mention the ACB convention only because this year's convention is over. ACB members might want to reach out to DRS staff.

I got the overall impression that DRS is trying to do the right thing. They want to form sub-committees within the SRC to address specific issues, but I was not clear about how that structure would work. One SRC member said she will be resigning at the end of the year. My concerns were taken seriously. It remains to be seen how much progress we can expect from state agencies.