

BSPC Committee Reports for December 2024

Bureau of Customer and Community Blind Services: Bureau Chief, BSPC Report for December 2024

Andrew Webb has been hired as the new Chief of the Bureau of Customer and Community Blind Services (BCCBS) and began in that role on November 1, 2024. As a person with an adult-onset visual disability and a past BCCBS customer, Andrew is passionate about the need for good services for people with disabilities. He was previously an attorney at Equip for Equality, the designated Protection and Advocacy organization for Illinois, where he advocated for the opportunities and legal rights of Illinois residents with disabilities, often engaging with DRS in his work. He also had the privilege to serve for several years as a member of BSPC, for much of which time he served as Chair. By helping to lead BSPC in those years, he grew better acquainted not only with the work of DRS and BCCBS, but with associated entities including the Business Enterprise Program for the Blind, the Talking Books and Braille Service of the State Library, the Illinois School for the Visually Impaired and the State Rehabilitation Council. He has remained interested in BCCBS's work ever since and is delighted to have started in his new position.

We thank Erik Hanson for serving as Acting Bureau Chief from the departure of Kim Borowicz at end of June until Andrew's start on November 1; Erik was simultaneously serving as Acting Chief of DRS Field Services. On November 18, Erik transitioned to a new position within the DRS Home Services Program.

On November 8, Andrew attended the Illinois Committee of Blind Vendors (ICBV) Annual Meeting at the Crowne Plaza West Loop in Chicago. This gave Andrew an opportunity to introduce himself as Chief of BCCBS to the ICBV as well as to other vendors, and also to personally meet with all BEPB staff present.

This was a good opportunity to discuss some of the active and ongoing issues and concerns of vendors.

On November 13, Andrew participated in the quarterly meeting of the State Rehabilitation Council in Bloomington, IL.

By way of ongoing projects and initiatives, the Bureau has revived past efforts to implement printing of documents in Braille for the benefit of customers who need or would like them for accessibility and effective communication. DRS/BCCBS is coordinating with the Department on Innovation and Technology (DoIT) in this effort. We are presently taking inventory of our available Braille embossers, surveying ICRE-Wood and the DRS field offices statewide as to what are the anticipated nature of volume of Braille printing requests once implemented, and likewise surveying to determine which field staff could be responsible for overseeing and quality-checking our printing in Braille. In parallel, we are researching the logistics of outsourcing individual Braille printing requests to third-party vendors using service plan dollars for individual customers. 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.

Bureau Customer and Community Blind Services: Assistant Bureau Chief, BSPC
Report for December 2024

- Region 1- Added a rehabilitation case coordinator. Fully staffed other than one RI and one OMI.
- Region 2 - In need of OMI.
- Region 3 - Added two rehabilitation instructors since last meeting.
- Region 4 - One Rehabilitation Case Coordinator Vacancy and one Rehabilitation Counselor vacancy. Added two Rehabilitation Instructors since last meeting.
- Region 5 - One Rehabilitation Case Coordinator Vacancy and one Rehabilitation Counselor vacancy, and one Orientation and Mobility Instructor, as well as two rehabilitation instructor positions. Added RCC since last meeting.
- ICRE Wood-added an instructor starting the 19th.

Initiatives

- CCBS staff attended and participated in NFB statewide meeting in Naperville, IL. Working on handbook for CCBS VR customers so that they can make informed choices.
- Held statewide meeting updating staff on ICRE-Wood services and procedures as well as referrals.
- Statewide meeting held to update staff on BEPB referral process, as well as to train more counselors for selection committee, increased collaborative efforts.

FY Year to date:

- Currently serving 1,335 customers.
- 56 competitive integrated employment closures year to date.
- Serving 148 customers in university, and another 81 community college customers.
- Average wage at closure for CCBS customers is \$25.08, working an average of 30.88 hours per week.

ICRE-Wood, BSPC Report for December 2024

End of Term

The current term will end on Wednesday, December 18, 2024.

Graduation

Thursday, December 19th the graduation will begin at 10:30 am.

Holiday Schedule

Christmas holiday for customers will begin on December 20th and will continue until January 3, 2025.

Next Term

The next term will begin on Tuesday, January 7th.

Waiting List

Currently, there are 18 eager individuals on the waiting list.

Tours

Gina Shanks schedules and conducts the tours of the ICRE-Wood facility. She has conducted 14 tours, with potential clients, since the last report.

Staff Updates & Shortages

The Residential Care Worker position has been filled. The new staff member arrived on Friday, November 1st.

The Rehabilitation Mobility (Health & Wellness) Instructor vacancy has also been filled. The new hire will begin on Monday, December 16th.

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 in the near future.

Highlights

On October 29th, ICRE-Wood participated in the Blind Service Expo as an exhibitor. It was also an outing for the customers. We received positive feedback from the staff, customers and attendees.

Bureau of Customer Community Blind Services: Business Enterprise Program for the Blind, BSPC Report for December 2024

Personnel/Training Update

- The training unit has finalized the training curriculum for Vocational Rehabilitation counselors interested in serving on selection panels during Bidding processes. The first in person classroom session is being held today, December 6, 2024.
- In an effort to ensure all licensed and certified vendor files are current and up to date, The personnel unit has begun its massive undertaking of auditing files for
- 2025 distribution of vendor licenses and certificates.
- Updated vendor seniority list
- Completed background checks
- Updating policy and procedures in unison with ICBV to address necessary vendor disciplinary processes.
- New Inventoried In managers- 4

- Our next Class begins- January 6, 2025.

Budget Update

- All Vendor Contract Renewals have been uploaded to bid-buy
- The proposed budget increase has been approved for the purchase/procurement of outdated coin sorters and bill counters.

Equipment

- We are in the process of updating cash to card machines in all correctional centers. Due to the lack of support for the Debittek payment system, we were forced to adopt the Microtronics payment system. Currently we have changed several over the past few months the most recent being Dixon.
- The Illinois Department of Corrections Memorandum of understanding has been finalized and sent to legal for approval.
- The following blind vendor locations have been assessed by the equipment unit for restructuring and execution is predicated on approval from the ICBV.
- The university of Illinois at Chicago micro market
- The gift shop in the Kluzinski building is transitioning from a gift shop to a vending location.
- The cook county gift shop is being converted to a vending location.

Marketing New Locations

- Our marketing unit has negotiated with the following establishments for business opportunities for the blind-
- Foglia Residences at the lighthouse as they have proposed and opportunity for a franchise or mega market opportunity for a blind vendor to operate.

- State of Illinois building at 555 West Monroe, Chicago, Illinois
- State locations without a blind vendor
- County locations without a blind vendor.
- The following MOU's have been sent to legal for execution approval-
 - The State Retirement Systems
 - Cook County
 - Ottawa YMCA
 - Illinois Department of Corrections

Research Workgroups

- Recruitment for the following workgroups are being accepted-
- RSA Technical Assistance Circular on providing vocational rehabilitation supports to blind vendors.
- RSA Technical Assistance Circular in the differences in reasonable accommodations vs Reasonable modifications and how to implement rules governing the process.
- Identifying types, platforms and processes for training to execute new policies and procedures for vendors and staff.
- Update: In response to Mr. Ray Campbell's question regarding the potential closure of Statesville and Logan correctional facilities.
- Business Enterprise Program for the Blind has received No official notification or information regarding these two centers' closing has been relayed to the department.

Highlight: The BEPB has gained traction since arbitration and are back in communications with Fermilab again. They are aware of our interest to establish a partnership with our blind vendor.

Illinois Council of the Blind (ICB), BSPC Report for December 2024

We would first like to congratulate Andrew Webb on his appointment as bureau chief of the Bureau of Customer and Community Blind Services for the State of Illinois Department of Human Services.

With post-election changes pending, there has been little if any legislative activity though there continues to be concern for things like voting and other issues. Once the new Congress is in place, legislative and other related activities will resume.

Also after the first of the year, planning for the virtual ICB convention scheduled to take place in April, 2025 will begin.

National Federation of the Blind of Illinois, BSPC Report for December 2024

The National Federation of the Blind of Illinois (NFBI) sponsors its 2025 BELL (Braille Enrichment for Literacy & 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 will be accepting applications for BELL Academy for both Chicago and Springfield here soon. Keep a look out for future updates soon.

NFB State and National Scholarships

The National Federation of the Blind believes in investing in the future by supporting the college education of deserving legally blind students. We urge you to apply to both our national and our state scholarship programs. Every year, the National Federation of the Blind awards more than \$240,000 to blind scholars across the fifty states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico in recognition of their achievements and professional aspirations. The scholarship program is our commitment to academic excellence and leadership among blind students, and each winner is awarded on the basis of academic excellence, community service, and leadership. The national scholarship application is due on March 31 at midnight eastern time and the Illinois state scholarship is due on April 30 at midnight central time. Review the national [scholarship application checklist](#) and the [scholarship program FAQs](#). Share this opportunity that invests in the future of blind people.

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 2024 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 both the state and national scholarship program will be released soon. Please keep an eye out for future updates.

Braille Readers are Leaders

Braille reading students, adults, and teachers of the blind across the U.S. compete against other participants in similar contest categories for seven weeks! Sponsored by the American Action Fund in partnership with the National Federation of the Blind, the contest begins December 2, 2024, and will run through January 17, 2025. We are using the platform, Beanstack, to register and to log your minutes of reading. There are badges to earn, prizes to win, and lots of Braille to read!

Click [here](#) to learn more.

NFB Letters to Santa

The National Federation of the Blind works to get more Braille into the hands of blind and low-vision children. We are excited to provide Braille letters and activities to celebrate the holiday and winter season in December. Each letter is part of a fun celebration packet of activities. The celebration packet is accompanied by a print copy for the whole family to participate.

Click [here](#) to learn more!

Washington Seminar.

Washington Seminar will be 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 will be selected soon and start interval training before heading out to our nation's capital to advocate for legislative issues facing the blind community.

Federal Legislation

There are currently bills on the floor of Congress that the NFB of Illinois is asking for co-sponsorship from our members.

- Medical Device Nonvisual Accessibility Act H.R. 1328:
- Transformation to Competitive and Integrated Employment Act H.R. 1263:
- Transformation to Competitive and Integrated Employment Act S. 533:
- Access Technology Affordability Act H.R. 3702:
- Access Technology Affordability Act S. 1467:
- AV Accessibility Act: H.R.7126

- Blind Americans Return to Work Act H.R.8878

Accessible Vote-by-Mail

The National Federation of the Blind of Illinois continues to advocate for accessible vote by mail for the blind community and people with print disabilities. Please contact Denise Avant, davant1958@gmail.com to learn more about our efforts to make independent and private voting a reality in Illinois.