

BSPC Committee Reports for October 2024

ICRE – Wood, BSPC Report for October 2024

Previous term

Our previous graduation was rescheduled to Thursday, August 15th due to the Democratic National Convention. Fourteen (14) graduates completed the program.

Census

There is a total of 31 customers in the program: 10 residents, 19 commuters and 2 remote. The total count includes 1 deafblind customer.

Waiting list

Currently, there are 6 eager individuals on the waiting list.

Staff shortage

There is a need for a Program Director, 4 Rehabilitation Mobility Instructors, 2 Mobility Orientation Instructors, 1 Health & Wellness Instructor, and Office Coordinator/Receptionist.

Recently, the positions of Residential Care Worker, Residential Care Worker Trainee and 1 Rehabilitation Mobility (Health & Wellness) Instructor were posted on the Central Management Services (CMS) website. We hope to have the vacant positions filled in the near future.

End of term

The current term will end December 18, 2024.

Graduation

Thursday, December 19th is the anticipated graduation date.

Holiday schedule

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

Division of Rehabilitation Services: Bureau Customer and Community Blind Services Field Service Report, BSPC Report for October 2024

Since starting this position as the acting bureau chief for BCCBS in July of this year, I've learned so much about the great work that Blind Services is doing. Being the bureau chief for Field Services, I was familiar with the work our BCCBS field supervisors, counselors, coordinators and instructors were doing out of our field offices throughout the state. And, I had a great working relationship with Assistant Bureau Chief Ingrid Halvorsen. I've also enjoyed getting to work with Heather Speth, our new BCCBS ABC, in her new role since she started September 1st. Ingrid has agreed to stick around under

a personal services contract for the next several months as we continue to onboard Heather. And, has agreed to assist in onboarding the new BCCBS bureau chief, once identified. Thanks Ingrid! And congrats, Heather!

I've also had the opportunity to spend some time at ICRE-Wood, getting to know Superintendent Latisha Houston and her staff, and marveling at the outstanding and extensive array of services they provide their student customers; all in just a short period of time. I was able to attend their last graduation on August 15th; held a week early so as not to conflict with the Democratic National Convention at the United Center the following week. It was a terrific event. The joy and sense of accomplishment shared by each graduate through their speeches as well as just through their faces was very moving.

I've also had the opportunity to work closely with Raven Pulliam, who has been gracious in agreeing to stay on temporarily as the BEPB assistant bureau chief until his successor was named and onboarded. As you know, Calvette Brown, just started as the new BEPB ABC as of October 1st. I look forward continuing to work with her in her new role. I've learned a lot from Raven and his staff about blind vending services, and all of the effort involved in training customers to become successful, licensed vendors. I was also able to attend the Illinois Committee of Blind Vendors meeting in Springfield on September 27th, getting to meet several committee members and BEPB staffers, and hear of all of the activity happening around the state.

I've also been able to work with Holly Cunningham, who does a great job managing our OIB grants. And, to work with our outstanding administrative assistants: Jasmine Gonzales, Erin Carver, and Dawn Moushon. I always say, in a new job, the first person to get to know is the AA because AAs make your life so much easier!

I want to thank the Council for this opportunity to share my observations and experiences. I'll look to our Assistant Bureau Chiefs and our Superintendent to report out specific BCCBS activities in their respective areas; sharing about the exceptional work they and their teams do. In my brief tenure with BCCBS, I look to continue to support and encourage our staff and work to ensure a smooth transition awaits the new bureau chief.

Illinois Council of the Blind, BSPC Report for October 2024

Several members of ICB attended the national American Council of the Blind (ACB) convention in Jacksonville, FL, in July. This was a hybrid convention with a number of virtual meetings taking place in June and other hybrid meetings taking place during the in-person part of the convention. The next ACB convention will be held in Dallas in July 2025.

Various committees of ICB have met in recent weeks. These included the education and welfare committee, which continues to express concern about vacancies within the Bureau of Blind Services, not the least of which is the position of bureau chief.

Electronic voting is an ongoing issue with doubt that resolution will take place any time soon; this would allow not only electronic voting but also electronic submission of an individual's vote. This would give a blind or visually impaired individual the complete ability to vote and send his/her vote independently. Current electronic voting requires that the envelope be signed and mailed or dropped at a secure voting box. ICB is working with other organizations, including NFBI, Equip for Equality, and Access Living, on this endeavor.

The fundraising committee of the ACB of Metro Chicago has a new fundraiser for dessert mixes; orders need to be placed by the October 12 ACBMC meeting. ICB is holding its first auction on October 20 at 6 PM. Anyone interested needs to request the Zoom link, and the list of items to be auctioned can be requested after October 8; Sharon has more details, which can be provided upon request.

The members of the ICB board met on September 21. The most notable result of this meeting was, for a variety of reasons, to change the previously planned hybrid state convention scheduled for April 2025 to a virtual convention.

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

NFB of Illinois State Convention

The 2024 NFB of Illinois State Convention will occur on October 18th - 20th at the Naperville Marriott Hotel in Naperville, Illinois. For those who are planning on attending, you can make your reservation by calling (630) 505-4900.

Room rates per night are \$140 for a King Executive Room and \$150 for a Double Queen Room.

[2024 NFB of Illinois State Convention Registration](#) (opens in a new tab)

NFBI Bell Academy 2025

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!

Planning for the 2025 BELL Academy will be happening soon. Keep an eye out for more information.

Voting Rights

The NFB of Illinois, Access Living Chicago, Equip for Equality, Illinois Council of the Blind, Tusk Philanthropies, Secure Family Initiative, and Reform for Illinois have begun meeting since August on efforts regarding voting rights for blind people in Illinois.

At this time of writing, there have been no significant updates on this matter.

For more information, please contact Denise Avant at davant1958@gmail.com

Washington Seminar

The National Federation of the Blind of Illinois is excited to participate once again in the National Federation of the Blind's annual legislative advocacy event, the 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 begin accepting applications soon. Stay tuned for updates!

NFB Rideshare Protest

Members of the NFBI will be joining members from all over the country to protest rideshare discrimination against blind people using guide dogs and white canes. Uber and Lyft have not met their obligations to ensure that blind individuals are not discriminated against. The National Federation of the Blind, in partnership with the San Francisco Lighthouse, is organizing a rally in San Francisco on October 15 from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Pacific Time.

If you would like to share your experience with rideshare denials, please use #RightToRide.

If you are interested in attending the demonstration, please complete the [Rideshare Rally Interest Form](#) (opens in a new tab).

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